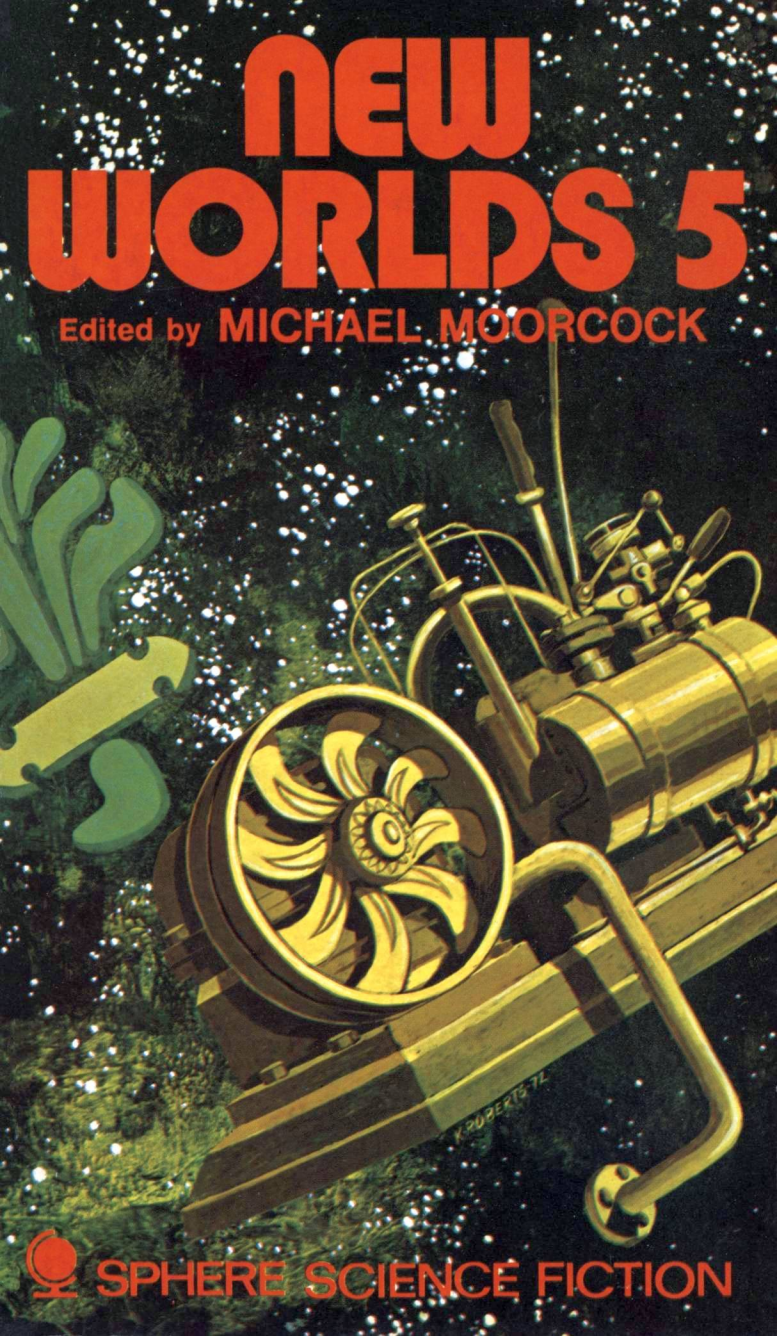
NEW WORLDS 5

Edited by MICHAEL MOORCOCK



SPHERE SCIENCE FICTION

NEW WORLDS 5

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 form.

The contributors to this issue are:

B. J. Bayley
Emma Tennant
Keith Roberts
Thomas M. Disch
John Clute
John Sladek
Robert Calvert
D. M. Thomas
Charles Platt
Jack M. Dawn

Also by Michael Moorcock and available in Sphere Books

THE ICE-SCHOONER

Edited by Michael Moorcock and available from Sphere Books

NEW WORLDS 1–4

NEW WORLDS QUARTERLY 5

EDITED BY
MICHAEL MOORCOCK

Associate Editor: LANGDON JONES
Art Editor: RICHARD GLYN JONES
Literary Editor: M. JOHN HARRISON

SPHERE BOOKS LIMITED
30/32 Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8JL

First published in Great Britain in 1973 by Sphere Books Ltd.

Set in Monotype Times Roman

Printed in Great Britain by
Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd,
Aylesbury, Bucks

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NUMBER 5

INTRODUCTION

In this issue of NEW WORLDS—an especially large one to make up for our present bi-quarterly schedule—we are pleased to introduce a good many new authors and to re-introduce a fair amount of poetry to our pages.

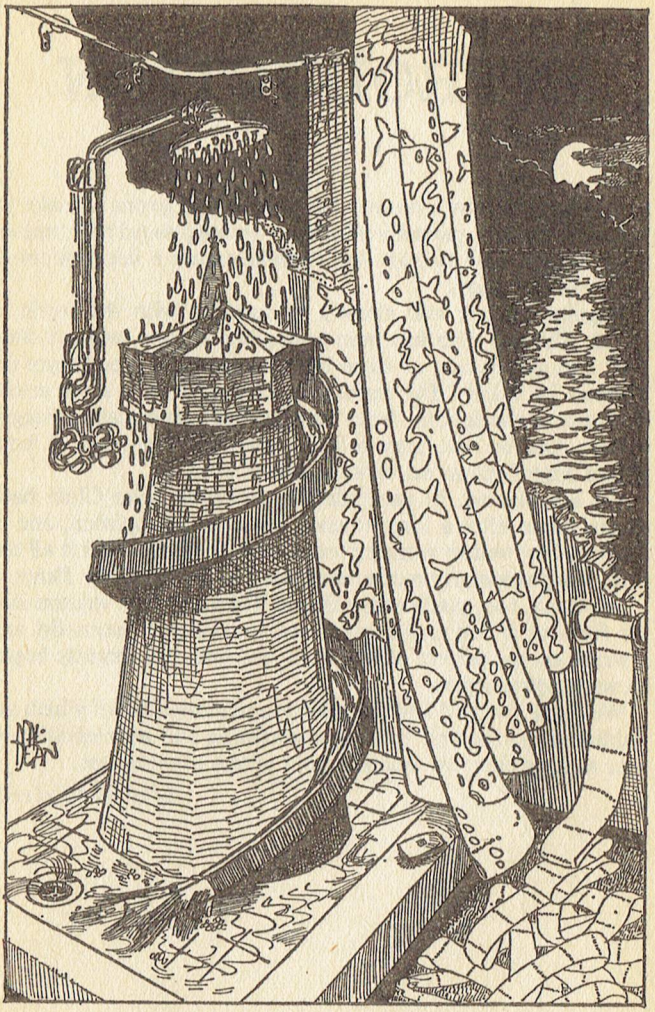
Regular readers will already be familiar with the work of D. M. Thomas who has been appearing in NEW WORLDS since 1967 and who is not, as some have suggested, a pseudonym for Thomas M. Disch! The range of poetry mirrors to some extent the range of the fiction—from "straight" sf to speculative/imagist fiction. And we also have a larger than usual number of non-fiction contributions on various aspects of sf.

We are pleased, in particular, to welcome John Clute back to our pages after a long absence. He is, in our opinion, one of the very best writers working today and his publication is all too rare. We particularly recommend his *The Disinheriting Party*.

We think, too, you'll enjoy Emma Tennant's first venture into the form of sf satire. Although well known as a journalist and a writer on the subject of feminism, she has only recently begun to write fiction again.

We think you will find this selection of stories (all of which are published for the first time) as stimulating and as interesting as ever and, as ever, we welcome your letters of comment.

Michael Moorcock



THE CRACK

EMMA TENNANT

ONE

A big funfair was in full swing in Hyde Park. Volleys of shots from the rifle range echoed down Park Lane and the screams from the big dipper made the patients in St George's Hospital restless.

Simon Mangrove rose from his sunken bath in the penthouse suite of the Hilton Hotel and strode over to the window to look out. A huge catherine wheel, each spoke carrying its little boxload of passengers, threw orange and green reflections against the plate glass—and for a moment his face, the image distorted by the curve of the window, looked back at him with the crude colours of a medieval devil. Somewhere far below the Dodgems crashed and reversed with a grating, metallic sound.

Simon Mangrove's watch announced that it was seven-thirty. He pulled off his bathrobe and changed with care into a vicuna suit and Turnbull & Asser shirt made up for him from specially woven Moroccan cotton. He had decided this evening, his last before flying back to the States, to visit the Playboy and make a night of it. His wife Rene—the third—would be waiting in New York full of reproaches and he might as well enjoy himself while he could. Why didn't you call me? Where were you last week-end? He could hear her voice, once so soft and tentative, assume its nagging, whining note. Idly, as he combed his glossy hair and stood back in front of the mirror, Simon Mangrove decided on another divorce.

Park Lane was full of curious people who were examining the funfair from outside and hadn't quite made up their minds to go in yet. Mangrove pushed through the crowd with an amused air: it seemed strange that grown men and women should obtain pleasure from such childish pursuits. Still, it was the Las Vegas of the poor, he supposed. The very thought of spinning through the air in a smelly little wagon made him feel sick. And the smell of the crowd! They were behaving just like a bunch of children, too, those who were inside the funfair, waving the bright sweet candyfloss like emblems of permanent immaturity. Mangrove

quickened his step and arrived under the illuminated bunny of the Playboy Club.

As he reached the step, a deafening sound—it was like the outsize rattles of a legion of giant babies—broke out in the street behind him. There was laughter from the crowd, and a derisive cheer. Four big black cars had drawn up outside the entrance to the funfair and men, bearded and in black gowns, were stepping from the cars and waving the rattles as they went in. Mangrove wondered if they were Arabs. Was this a trade fair of some description? He glanced up at the banner over the admission gate and then smiled to himself again.

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF PSYCHO ANALYSIS

The lettering was amateurishly done, as if a child had daubed on the paint. One of the gowned men turned and gave a mock salute to the crowd. More laughter. One of my countrymen, Mangrove thought bitterly. An American. And now the English were getting just as bad.

The weird, caftaned shapes disappeared into the funfair and Mangrove slid into the portals of the Playboy, relieved to see the friendly receptionist and his own image on the closed-circuit TV screen. Here all was as he wanted it—a couple of dry martinis smooth as polished glass, a glance at the tasselled menu which offered tonight a swordfish steak with Samoa sauce. He ordered it, leaning back on the banquette to enjoy the tinkling music from the piano.

And here was Baba. Her tail waggled as she brought him his second drink and slid onto the banquette beside him. Baba's father was a clergyman—or so she said—but Mangrove liked to imagine an austere English vicarage with an exotic flower like Baba growing amongst the dull weeds of mattins and vespers and collections for the poor. He gave her an affectionate pat and sipped at his drink.

"Baba, will you marry me?"

He was almost surprised himself to hear the words come out. But, after all, why not? Baba was friendly and gentle, and obviously very much impressed by Mangrove.

"Marry you?" Baba giggled. "I thought you were married already, Simon."

Mangrove burst out laughing. "What age are you living in, sweetie?"

Then he assumed a more serious expression. "That's what I like about the English, Baba. So old-fashioned. No—" as Baba pouted "—I really mean this. Rene—that's my wife—and me, we

haven't been getting along for months now. I shan't even see her when I arrive in New York. Promise!"

He really did mean it too, he thought with a surge of confidence. A new life with Baba—that was the thing.

"Would we live in America?" Baba asked.

But at that point the piano stopped playing and a soft pink light diffused the bar. As the floorshow started up, a waiter arrived with Mangrove's swordfish steak and Baba, with a little hushed scream, wriggled out of the banquette.

"I'm in the show tonight," she gasped. "And I'm late."

Her breasts hung for a moment over Mangrove's plate as she stooped to kiss him. The waiter deposited a little dollop of Samoa sauce by the side of the inanimate swordfish.

"I'll be waiting," Mangrove promised. "Shake it for me and me only, Baba."

TWO

Joseph Thirsk, analyst-in-chief of Regress Centre, boarded the big dipper with his crew of a hundred patients. They were all in a state of high excitement, shouting and gripping the sides of the little wagons and screaming in high-pitched voices as the climb to the dizzy summit began. Some of them had regressed beyond childhood and had arrived at the womb; and these Joseph Thirsk kept near him. They sat in coiled, foetal positions and looked out uncomprehendingly at the bright lights of the funfair. Thirsk hoped the shock of the big dipper would jolt them into the birth trauma, and watched them carefully in the few sickening moments of suspense before the great swooping fall down the track.

In a booth which bore the legend:

MEDEA. CLAIRVOYANT AND PALMIST
THE VOICE FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD

a veiled woman shuffled a deck of cards and dusted down the crystal globe. She had a good reputation, and a small queue waited outside for a consultation. But this evening several customers had left irritated and disappointed. Medea had only one message to give to women and men alike. And it wasn't enough.

"What does it mean, I'm going to cross the water?" one woman asked crossly as she pushed her way out of the booth. "That's what they used to say a hundred years ago. And she wouldn't tell me anything else either."

"Ask for your money back," suggested one of the strolling analysts, who was examining the reactions of the people to the various sideshows. "You shouldn't let yourself get taken for a ride like that."

"I think I will." The woman glanced at him gratefully. "I mean, I could set up myself and tell people that and make a packet out of it. Couldn't I?"

"You certainly could," the analyst reassured her, scribbling in his notebook. He wrote: Anal Retentive, Manic symptoms, and popped it back in his pocket. "Go in there now and confront her with her dishonesty," he went on with an encouraging smile.

The woman elbowed her way through the queue and pushed into the booth. "I've got something to tell you"—she began. Then stopped. Medea, no longer veiled, faced her across the narrow counter.

Terrified, the woman shrank back against the faded red plush curtains. Only a whimper escaped from her mouth as Medea spoke.

"Go. There is little time left to you. Cross the water."

Medea's eyes were black and her hair so white that the darkness of the booth was illumined on all sides, leaving only a pale gloom where the woman crouched.

"The water is sinking.

"The bridge is stretched to exhaustion.

"The dead earth drinks its last."

With these words, Medea turned and vanished through the curtain at the back. In the vacuum of her non-existence the booth was plunged into sudden night.

The woman screamed, and staggered out into the myriad and brightly coloured lights of the funfair. She collapsed at the feet of the analyst.

He picked her up, pausing first to jot the stage of her regression in his notebook. Rapid descent to Oral, he wrote. Occasioned by prediction. Then, helping to support her with his arm, he led her towards the big dipper. A large crowd of people, rounded up by the other strolling analysts, waited there for their turn.

By midnight the shrieks from the funfair were so loud that the visitors to the Playboy Club wandered out onto the steps and stood with amused expressions as they watched the child-like cavorting in the park. Amongst them were Mangrove and Baba, who had just celebrated their engagement with a bottle of champagne.

"Darling!" Baba tugged at Mangrove's arm. "Let's go in for a moment, shall we? Just for a little whirl."

"OK."

Baba sounded wifely and possessive already, Mangrove thought with gloom. And the last thing he felt like doing after sipping champagne in the Playboy was being thrown up in the air like a sack of potatoes. He nodded agreement, however, and they crossed into the park.

Several of the analysts looked curiously at Baba—she still had her ears and tail, had slipped on a wrap over her costume—but it was Mangrove who was stopped by one of the tall black-gowned brotherhood and questioned.

"I don't see why you want to talk to me," Mangrove said nervously. "I'm just a normal kind of person. What's the idea with all this funfair business anyway?"

"We're studying regression." The bearded man gave an earnest nod of the head. "Up there for instance, in the big dipper, multiple births are taking place. You could almost call that extraordinary machine a giant Fertility Drug. Feel like going on it yourself?"

"No thanks." Mangrove tried to edge away without the analyst noticing.

"The rifle range perhaps?"

"No—no."

"Bumper cars?"

"Bumper cars," Mangrove repeated with a laugh. "I think I might have grown out of them, you know."

"Oh do let's go on the bumper cars," Baba cried. "I used to *love* them when I was a kid. Simon?"

This was really too much, Simon thought. It turned out he'd become engaged to a child of five, not a grown woman. And the analyst was looking at her with keen interest now, seeing for the first time the tail that stuck out from under her coat and the waggling ears on her head.

"Very well, very well."

More to escape the man than to gratify Baba's whim, Simon took her arm and led her towards the bumper cars. They climbed into a miniature Bugatti, Baba squealing with delight.

No sooner was Simon behind the wheel than the old excitement of racing driving came back to him and he was bearing down aggressively on the other cars, grinding the gears as he rammed the bonnet into the already dented metal. Baba's ears flopped wildly from side to side as he accelerated at top speed into the centre of the course.

"Oh Simon!" she gasped. "Watch out!"

Coming towards them at full speed was a violent-looking boy

of about fifteen in the only other sports car—a yellow Porsche. In spite of the tiny dimensions of both cars, and the fact that the drivers' knees were practically under their chins, there was a genuine thrill in the confrontation and Simon found himself gritting his teeth and swearing under his breath. Ten feet—five feet—

"Stop!" Baba screamed.

Crash!

The cars met head on. The deafening sound of the colliding cars set up a chorus of oohs and ahs from the people on the ground. Then someone shrieked with real fear. Flames were springing up from the twisted bonnets and an acrid smell filled the air.

"Reverse!" Simon yelled at the boy. "My gears are stuck!"

Uselessly, he wrenched at the gear lever. The orange flames leapt high. An attendant ran forward, and strong arms pulled Baba out of the car. The flames licked contentedly at the boy in the yellow Porsche and then turned to run with sly speed in the direction of the Bugatti passenger seat. Both Simon and the occupant of the Porsche were jammed in their seats, the toy dashboards across their chests like steel bars. Silent now, the crowd formed a semi circle at a distance of ten feet from the conflagration.

Then all the lights went out. At first, there was no reaction from the crowd; like moths they were held entranced by the merry fire, the movement of the orange spikes as they shot as high as the roof of the course. Then every one realised at once. The whole funfair was fused. A gelatinous darkness made itself felt in every chest, a suffocating black blanket went down like a hangman's noose. From the stranded patients in the big dipper the first screams of terror came through the windless air.

"It's everywhere!"

The attendant holding Baba relaxed his grip as he scanned Park Lane and the Hilton and the distant swirl of Hyde Park Corner. No lights anywhere to be seen. Only the flames from the charred cars continued to eat their way busily through vicuna suit and levis, bumpers and imitation racing tyres.

"My god!" Baba hardly recognised her own voice, a low croaking sound. Released by the attendant, she found herself wandering, dazed, away from the flames and down a step onto the ground. Above her towered the big wheel, motionless, the passengers in the invisible boxes calling out for help and shouting conflicting suggestions. She stumbled on, her mind numb. Soon the light from the flames died down. People were bumped against —some of them as soft as bales of cloth and others sharp and

angular. Objects—flags probably or the coats of people who were trying to let themselves down from stranded wagons—brushed across her face. The funfair had become a gigantic ghost train.

And there was no moon! Even in her semi-conscious state, Baba realised that this total darkness was something she had never known before in her life. A sort of vertigo overtook her, and she put her hands out in front of her for support. Perhaps Simon would be there—perhaps it was all a bad dream and she would wake in his suite in the Hilton. Like last night. Only this was tonight. All the same, power cuts in London were common enough. How Simon would laugh at the British strikes—how he would—

But every moment it became clearer to Baba that Simon was dead. She stopped, looking down at where her feet presumably were. If only she could see her feet! It was such a simple thing to ask. And she had never wanted anything more.

She looked up again. A tiny flicker of hope flitted across her mind. Something white—strangely phosphorescent, like the light from a crowd of fireflies—was moving just ahead of her. She followed it, stretching out her hand. Her fingers met a substance that yielded and flew apart under her touch, then closed again round her hand and bathed her wrist with the same pale radiance.

It was hair. Medea Smith turned her head at Baba's touch. Her face, cavernous under the white curtain which fell to her shoulders, had three circles of black in the place of eyes and mouth. Then she turned again and the phantom head moved on through the unseen crowd.

Baba followed.

THREE

At Sir John Bowlby's house the ladies left the dining room at the end of dinner and the gentlemen were left to their port and cigars.

Bowlby, a property millionaire, had recently bought the house in Cheyne Walk and decorated it in the eastern style, with rich hangings from India and low tables inlaid with mother of pearl. Only his dining room was conventional: a long mahogany table, Old Masters on the walls, and a Waterford glass chandelier which gave out a million iridescent rays as the candles dimmed.

Because the dining room was lit only by candles, Sir John Bowlby and his friends were unaware that the lights had gone out all over London. They were discussing their property abroad, and Sir Max Jacobs was boasting that his private island in the

Caribbean was worth at least ten times more than he had paid for it.

"You still can't beat the Med," Sir John said comfortably. "I really cleaned up in Sardinia. And it's a lovely development, mind you." (He always felt constrained to remind people that there is beauty in money too.)

"What I say is," put in Mr Joshua McDougall, "that this holiday boom is all very well, but what happens when there's a depression? People don't take holidays. And what are people always looking for? Flats. Somewhere to live. And where?"

"London," Sir John said. "I agree, Joshua. But—"

"London Development Company will never fail," McDougall announced with solemnity. "The entire South East of England has become the greatest boom area in the history of property speculation."

At that moment, to Sir Max's slight alarm, the floor seemed to move under his chair. It was as if (the thought flashed through his mind) a large whale had surfaced somewhere under the floorboards and was now edging its way up through the carpet. Sir Max looked accusingly at Sir John's brandy.

But Sir John had felt it as well; and the rather weedy little husband of an heiress cousin of Sir John's gave a squeak of surprise and fear.

"Don't tell me Cheyne Walk is flooding," Sir John said sonorously, as if it would immediately stop flooding if he asked it to. "Did you feel anything, Max?"

Sir Max said he had. With expressions of protective concern, the gentlemen rose to go and find the ladies. Too bad if they were frightened in any way. Sir John threw open the door, and then stopped.

"That's funny." He frowned in the black passage. "All the lights seem to have gone out. Didn't realise there was a power cut this evening."

"There isn't," said the weedy husband.

"Your house doesn't seem to be in very good shape," laughed McDougall.

Lighting a match and paying no attention to this remark, Sir John went bravely out into the passage. At that moment the floor gave a distinctive heave and the mahogany table subsided slowly on it like a sheep lying down to die. Porcelain plates and cut glass goblets rolled onto the carpet and lay still.

"Good God," said McDougall. "Did you have the house surveyed properly, John?"

Bowlby, flickering match in hand, went grimly towards the

staircase. The banister jumped nervously back at his touch. As his foot went out to the first step, the entire staircase, with the slow grace of a Chinese paper decoration opening out, arched its back and became an interesting but useless accordion. Bowlby staggered back to be caught by Sir Max.

"This is preposterous," McDougall said. "In property and you can't keep your own house in order. What about my wife? She's up there—probably frightened to death. Where's the phone? We must rescue her at all costs."

It was well known that McDougall had married a famous model only a few weeks before. None of the other men expressed any concern for their wives, and it was McDougall, gold lighter in hand, who had to grope his way to the phone at the far end of the hall. Hummocks had risen in the passage and he scrambled from one to the other, not noticing that the walls, although still perfectly in line, were contracting quite fast and threatened to squeeze him to death before he attained his goal.

"The phone's dead," he shouted desperately from his imminent grave. "What's going on here for Christ's sake, Bowlby?"

Upstairs, as the walls of the downstairs hall embraced Joshua McDougall like the friendly white arms of a male hospital nurse, the women were staring with fascinated horror out of the window. Caught in the middle of powdering their noses by the blackout, they were more friendly towards each other than they would normally have been. Lady Bowlby had been rescued from the bathroom by the new Mrs McDougall, and the traces of animosity which had shown at dinner had now disappeared.

"I just can't believe it," the heiress married to the weedy husband said. "I'm so frightened—I—"

"Let's look at it rationally," suggested Lady Bowlby. "We can't go down the stairs because they've collapsed. We—"

"How can you be rational about something like this?" shuddered the new Mrs McDougall. "I mean, just look at it now."

There was silence as they gathered round the window again. Only an occasional sob from the heiress could be heard in the room.

Outside there was the river. But it was a river miles wide. In the light from the few stars the great stretches of mud could be seen; the broken bridges as they lay like snapped elastic on the swampy ooze. And—it was difficult to make out—it seemed the Embankment had cracked and fallen down onto the mud below. It was hard to tell if there was any water in the river at all.

"Suppose," said Mrs McDougall. "I mean, suppose it's a crack. In the earth's surface. Suppose . . ."

"We must wait for the police," said Lady Bowlby calmly. "Things are bound to be all right further inland."

With these comforting words, she stared out of the window again. With another heave, like a man trying to shrug off an overcoat, the house moved several more feet towards the banks of the exhausted river.

FOUR

In the dying flames from the burning bumper cars, some one had been clever enough to knot together various lengths of rope so that Thirsk's patients could be lowered from the highest cars of the big dipper to the ground. Subdued, they trotted obediently after him through the darkened funfair. "I don't know what we're going to do," Thirsk confided to a lay analyst who was accompanying him, anxious for instructions. "We can't go North, that's for certain."

The lay analyst—Harcourt was his name—nodded agreement. Behind them, the foothills extending as far as Marble Arch, towered the new mountain of North London. In the grey starlight which had succeeded the total blackness of the cataclysm, it was just possible to make out the jagged peaks and narrow ravines of what once had been Hampstead and Primrose Hill.

"God knows what's happened in Harley Street," Thirsk said. "And the Vale of Health!" He moaned faintly. "This is an earthquake, I suppose. But in London!"

"Certainly a disaster area," said Harcourt, who was not famed for his quickness of mind. "But when's the relief coming? And what is the Government doing about all this, I'd like to know?"

"We'll make for Westminster," Thirsk said firmly. He had already forgotten his virulent attack of the day before on the British Parliamentary system, and his oath to construct an Alternative Society through regression methods.

"A demonstration," Harcourt agreed warmly. "This neglect is monstrous!"

"We'll be getting help from the States by morning," Thirsk reminded him.

"They've cut down on Foreign Aid," Harcourt put in. "Suppose we get nothing?"

With this thought in mind, the two doctors walked slowly towards Hyde Park corner, each stooped over a pushchair. Behind, the older "children" squabbled and stumbled, some of them sitting down on the corruscated road to remove their shoes

and others crying loudly as they were bumped against in the dark. Of Thirsk and Harcourt's two "babies", Thirsk's was giving the most trouble. A man of thirty five, Jo-Jo by name, he had only half an hour before been born on the dipper, and his thin screams echoed through the cold night air. On top of that, his dummy kept slipping from his mouth onto the ruined tarmac and Thirsk had to bend for it, cursing every time as it disappeared under the folds of his black robe. Harcourt's baby, a middle-aged woman with an evil expression and a spiteful way of rocking in the pushchair so it nearly tilted over at every step, had taken an instant dislike to Jo-Jo—her hands came out like claws whenever she was in reach of him and she had already managed several times to poke him in the eye.

"Well," Thirsk said gloomily. "Here we are. What shall we do with them?"

Here was Hyde Park Corner. The fact that it had taken so long to guide the patients along Park Lane clearly showed their chances of reaching Westminster by morning were low. Thirsk and Harcourt looked at each other, and gravely inclined their heads.

"Yes," Harcourt said after a while. "I think they'll do better here."

"Some of the building remains," Thirsk justified the decision. "And with the help of the Government we can collect them in the morning."

"Exactly," said Harcourt.

Hyde Park Corner was, of course, unrecognisable. The twisted metal of crashed cars lay scattered at the base of the great earth mound that had gone up like a gigantic molehill. Picking their way carefully through the debris, the doctors led their charges to the roofless hospital that once had been St George's.

"Perfectly all right for a few hours," Thirsk said briskly. He shepherded his charges into the abandoned casualty ward, stepping with care over the stretchered bodies of recent car crash victims. "Pity we've got no toys for them though," he added looking round. "The fives and over aren't going to like it much here."

"We're in the middle of a disaster, man," Harcourt snapped. "Good for the creative process anyway to have a period without toys. I thought we'd been through that."

A man with a bandaged head stirred and groaned loudly at the disturbance. Thirsk went over and peered down at him.

"Look at this," he chortled. "The unsevered umbilical cord and its consequences, eh Harcourt?"

By the side of the patient lay a white gowned anaesthetist. His hand still firmly clasped the needle which protruded from the patient's arm.

Harcourt's worried expression vanished for a moment. "The death of non-separation," he agreed. "This will serve as a lesson to the children."

The analysts, tiptoeing like two Father Christmases departing the nursery, left the hospital and struck off in the direction of Westminster. Although some of the buildings seemed to have lost their roofs, the disaster had been less complete here and Piccadilly, if you didn't count the fallen trees in Green Park and the strange new elongated shape of the Ritz, was much as before.

Thirsk and Harcourt strode along at a good speed.

"We're in luck," Thirsk remarked, "if you look at the situation objectively. This is just the kind of traumatic shock this society needs to jolt it out of its complacency."

"Which stems from repressed violence," Harcourt put in almost before he had finished. "From the rebirth we should really have something to build on."

Piccadilly Circus, which had already been pulled down and was in the first stages of reconstruction, loomed before them. All of the roads out of it were blocked by accumulated rubble and Thirsk and Harcourt stood for a while, perplexed at which turn to take. Behind them, from a first floor window in the crushed Ritz, an American woman cried for help.

"The death rattle of capitalism," Thirsk commented as he pulled up his robes and clambered over the debris. "We'd better make for St James's, I suppose."

"If only it would get light," Harcourt complained. "My God, Joe, what's that?"

On the far side of the ruined circus, a procession advanced. It was led by what appeared, in the dank brown light of early dawn, to be a phantom—tall, evanescent, weightless. Hair as soft and white as a sheep's fleece flowed out over its shoulders and cast a pale glow on the crowd behind.

"Girls! Women!" Harcourt cried. "Where are they going? Who are they?"

The procession turned down St James's, moving at a stately speed. "We'll see," Thirsk muttered grimly. "Maybe they know something we don't."

"Oh they couldn't," Harcourt panted as he scrambled after Thirsk and slid down a splintery plank onto the ground. "What about Westminster, Joe? The Prime Minister? I mean."

"We follow," Thirsk barked. Keeping a discreet distance, the two men followed the ghostly parade. The brown of the sky deepened, and the few stars went out.

In the hospital, the children were having a thoroughly good time. The five-year-olds, led by Neddy and Mary, a brother and sister who were regressing together (and who before their rescue by Thirsk had been respectively at Wormwood Scrubs and Holloway) were playing doctors in the emergency wards. Neddy, brandishing his scalpel, was striding impatiently from bed to bed as Mary prepared the patients for their operations. He had decided to amputate a man with a serious heart condition, who was attached to various complicated-looking machines—and it seemed that someone in the latency period would have to be called in from the casualty ward downstairs to help dismantle it. Meanwhile, to the consternation of the new mothers in the maternity section, Jo-Jo and his evil contemporary, Mrs Withers, had had themselves carried along and placed in the cribs alongside the beds. Jo-Jo, determined to breast feed, had already half-suffocated two women in his attempt to subjugate them to his needs. Mrs Withers cried with a bitterness that was implacable.

Neddy made his incision and then sawed through the leg carefully. In the casualty ward, Tony, a ten-year-old schizophrenic to whom Thirsk had related with particular success, suddenly found his regression reversing. With a whoop of joy, he felt the onset of adolescence, the bristling of hairs on his chin, the unhealthy desire to rape a patient on an upper floor. His mind a jumble of poetic images, he ran for the stairs.

As Neddy handed the leg gravely to his sister, the screams of the geriatrics as they fell under Tony's wild embraces, rang through the hospital.

Meanwhile, Thirsk and Harcourt were losing heart as they followed the fluorescent banner of Medea Smith's hair in the direction of the river.

"They're probably just a crowd of crazies," Harcourt hissed. His legs were shorter than Thirsk's and his robe the same length. "Why don't we cut across to Westminster for Christ's sake?"

Thirsk simply shook his leonine head in reply. They had reached the Kings Road by now, and his white feet, unaccustomed to more than the cork floors of the Regression Centre, had developed

blisters. In spite of his hobbling gait, Harcourt reflected, he looked splendid, almost prophetic. Comparisons with Moses and Karl Marx flashed through the young lay-analyst's mind.

Medea and her followers turned down Flood Street. Eyes down, as if staring at the ground would make it go past quicker, the two men went after her. Then Thirsk glanced up and—a rare occasion for him—gave an involuntary gasp. Harcourt, stumbling over the hem of his robe, bumped into him. They both collapsed onto the pavement at the intersection of Flood Street and Cheyne Walk.

There was no embankment. The broken road, which looked as if a giant tractor, simply for amusement, had ploughed crooked furrows in it and then departed, fell steeply into the mud flats of the drained river bed. Leaning over it, like slender trees in a high wind, were the houses of Cheyne Walk. Above them towered Rossetti Gardens Mansions, at an angle of forty five degrees. Some upheaval in the ground had pushed the grim redbrick Mansion block on top of a row of bijou constructions and it brooded menacingly over Cheyne Walk like an elephant perched on a ball. Sounds of cracking and straining masonry filled the otherwise unnaturally silent dawn.

Thirsk wiped his spectacles impatiently on his robe. "I still can't see the other side of the river," he snorted. "What about you, Harcourt?"

Medea and her band made their way, without any change of pace, towards the shattered remains of Battersea Bridge. Thirsk and Harcourt, undecided, stood looking after them.

A split in the river, Thirsk mused as they picked their way across the road and stared at the almost invisible bank opposite. "A great Crack! D'you see it, Harcourt?"

Harcourt said that he did. Suddenly, after the exhaustion of the night, he longed to be back in the States. He felt afraid and lonely. He clasped at Thirsk's arm.

"A schizophrenic society indeed," Thirsk proclaimed.

Harcourt, bursting into tears, whined to be taken home.

Jeremy Waters, his second wife, his two stepchildren and three children, the New Zealand au pair girl and the family pets Adolf the spaniel and Ben the budgie were tipped out of their Hampstead home as the great new hill of North London was formed. They rolled down through the Village and ended up in the foothills, one of which was crowned triumphantly by Marble Arch.

Waters—a prominent ecologist and anti-pollutionist—opened

his eyes and found himself in what seemed to be a giant rubbish heap. The tiny moment of pleasure that came to him when he recognised the new scrumple-up disposable ICI beer can a few inches from his face was succeeded by terror when he realised that there were several thousand of them—and that they had been thrown up into a towering mountain over a hundred feet high. A thin trickle of lager ran like lava from the summit of the uncertain volcano.

A muffled scream showed the whereabouts of Waters' family. He picked himself up with care and edged round the face of the mountain. Beneath him, as his vision cleared, he was able to see in the brown light so reminiscent of his worst smog nightmares, a flattish terrain stretching out down Park Lane. What looked like a wrecked funfair stood forlornly amongst the fallen trees in Hyde Park.

Waters' foot stumbled against something hard and metallic.

Although not a mystical man, his heart missed a beat. Flying saucer? Spaceship? He tried to remember what his children believed in. What if they had been right all along? He stood staring down at it.

A big red circle. An O.

Dropped casually by the new invaders? He looked fearfully up at the sky. Like rolls of brown carpet, the clouds hung uneasily over the scene of destruction.

Waters' second stepson leapt towards him over the broken sewage pipes and fragmented pavement.

Chantilly Lace—
And a Pretty Face . . .
You *know* what I like.

Waters' hand swung out and knocked the transistor into silence. "Rubbishy music to serenade the end of mankind," he snapped bitterly. For a moment he saw the pop groups of the sixties, the art of Andy Warhol and the boutiques of Carnaby Street as directly responsible for the apocalypse—and anger flared up inside him. Then his shoulders sagged and he gave a sigh of resignation. He had known this was going to come. But not so soon.

"I'll change to Radio 3 if you like," Tommy the stepson offered. He was an obliging boy, and had had to put up with a lot since his mother's remarriage and the move to Hampstead.

"This is no time for Bach or Mozart," Waters said self-pityingly. "Where's your mother?"

When Greta, the second wife, and the other children had been

located, Waters suggested in as brisk a tone as possible that they move onto flat ground.

"Regent's Park is our best bet, he said, as if he had just received a radio message from that quarter. "Come on, off we go."

He walked forward purposefully, hoping that no one would notice the ominous red circle behind him. Whatever happened, they must get as far away from it as possible. If it was anything —if it was in fact the transmitting station of the new conquerors of the world—

"Hey, the budgie's dead," moaned Waters' youngest daughter. "Poor Ben! Oh, poor Ben."

"Come *on*," Waters cried in exasperation. "There may be more dead than the budgerigar, I fear."

We may be the only survivors, he thought to himself with a pang of fear. And hadn't he longed for the simple life, the camp fire and the homegrown, unsprayed potatoes? How often had he sat in the conservatory in Hampstead dreaming of the day when he and Greta would have a little farm of their own and be entirely self-supporting? After he had done his bit against pollution, of course. But now—if they were the only people left in the world—

"We've got to bury him," the girl cried. "Daddy—please!"

With a great effort of willpower, Waters turned back towards the scarlet O. It was in the centre of it, it went without saying, that she was digging a hole for the grave. Children always knew, he thought gloomily.

Then it occurred to him that if they were to be saved at all from extinction it would be through the children.

A strange selection of phrases came into his head. Suffer little children to come unto me. (Waters had had a very religious upbringing.) The Age of Aquarius. Generation Gap.

That red circle meant something to his daughter.

Visual imagination. Non-verbal communication. Thirsk's theories of regression!

Heart pounding, he watched the little girl lower the corpse of the bird into its last resting-place.

The budgerigar looked exotic now, its plumage bright and mysterious. A sacrifice to the new gods?

He glanced up at the spires of twisted rubble. With a reverence he had never felt even as a child at midnight mass, he gazed at the cathedral of the future. Pillars of broken concrete lamp posts, flying buttresses made of the half-buried bodies of London buses and cars. Why had he never seen how beautiful it all was?

And sunken too. Multi-level! Multi-media!

Waters turned to his wife with the gleaming eyes of the convert. Motioning her to be quiet, he tipoed to the scene of the burial The great red circle lay at his feet like a lake with a rim of blood.

When the interment was over, the family walked off in the direction of Regent's Park. Waters felt a strange exaltation at the sight of the cracked streets and collapsed, abandoned houses.

"This is indeed the beginning of a new life," he confided to Greta.

She nodded wearily. The deep brown of the sky was lifting to pale fawn, the colour of coffee ice-cream.

There were no people anywhere.

The first rays of a cool sun poured through banks of cloud as they reached Regent's Park. Waters, in spite of his conversion, gave a tut of dismay. Queen Mary's rose garden, where he and Greta had so often walked—where he had decided, in fact, to leave his cruel and materialistic wife—had disappeared under a great mound of dully gleaming metal. Not cars—so what? After the first shock, they ran towards it. A needle-thin shaft of sunlight danced over the acres of broken fuselage.

Crashed spacecraft? Waters' hand flew to his face in self-protection. Fall-out? A new interstellar virus escaping invisibly from the tortured cockpit? He walked cautiously towards it.

"A jumbo," Waters' third stepson announced in a matter-of-fact voice. "TWA."

Adolf trotted up into the wreck and sniffed about in the remains of the galley, returning with a chunk of tournedos steak in his mouth. A smell of airline food accompanied him.

"I'm hungry!" all the children shouted in unison. "Can we go up there, Daddy? Can we?"

Before Waters had time to answer, they were scambling into the stomach of the crashed plane. Adolf snapped ferociously as the first class passengers' larder was discovered, and its contents taken away from him. "It's not organic food," Greta cried. "Darling, stop them if you can!"

But Waters was puzzling on the same problem that had confronted him all the way from Marble Arch. No people. No passengers on the plane. No one anywhere. He thought once again of the red circle. Had it come to suck all humanity from the planet, and missed out, by some extraordinary chance, the Waters?

"Matter and energy," he muttered to himself. Then he decided to tell his secret to his wife.

"That big red O." He paused solemnly. "You saw it? In my belief—"

"That was the Odeon, Marble Arch, under there," Tommy pointed out. He turned up his transistor and prised open a tin of Persian caviar.

"O for Odeon," the youngest daughter trilled. "Ben's buried in a cinema."

She gave a high laugh and Waters turned away, his heel scraping the edge of the Jumbo's nose. A wave of sadness and despair filled him.

The Nash terraces along Regent's Park had been thrown several hundred feet in the air, so that they resembled a series of slides of the Acropolis in Athens.

With a low murmur of appreciation, Greta got out her camera and started snapping. Waters wandered dejectedly away, skirting the fallen chestnuts in the big Avenue.

In the distance, like the sound of tons of water being released from a pent-up dam, something was rushing closer.

At the foot of the splendid pillars of the ruin of Chester Terrace Waters fell to the ground in fear.

Another crashing Jumbo jet? A real spacecraft this time?

He closed his eyes and waited.

By the time Baba reached the river, her head and her feet were aching so much that she had completely forgotten the strange death of Simon Mangrove. Following Medea seemed the obvious, natural thing to do.

None of the women, who walked, Baba noticed, with an odd determination, as if their destination had been set for them centuries before and they had only just been enabled to reach it, paid any attention to the two robed analysts in their wake. Only one—a girl of about nineteen who told Baba she was called Noreen and worked as a waitress in the Hilton—burst out laughing when Thirsk and Harcourt subsided onto the ground at the corner of Flood Street and what had once been the Embankment.

"No place for them where we're going," she said with another giggle.

"Why?" Baba asked eagerly. "Where *are* we going anyway? I don't think I can walk much longer," she added, close to tears.

"Can't you *feel* where we're going?" Noreen said. She hugged her arms to her body in enthusiasm. "No more washing up. No more frilly aprons," she ran on in the quick trilling voice Baba found so attractive. "Same for you, Baba. No more serving drinks dressed as a rabbit. What do you think?"

Baba reached behind and felt for her furry tail. It was hard to understand Noreen when she talked like this.

"What about the other women?" she said. "What's in it for them where we're going?"

At this, a head-scarfed woman of about fifty turned round.

"Supper on the table at six when he gets home," she snapped out. "Wash it up. Darn the clothes. TV. Bed."

"No more of that," suddenly chorused a whole section of the procession.

"Up with the baby at six," a youngish woman just behind Baba crooned in her ear. "Cereals for the school-goers. Sausages too. Vacuum the sitting room."

"No more of that," came a strong gust of sturdy voices.

"Stop at the launderette on the way back from work," the older woman continued. "Stand in the queue for the food when the shop's closing anyway."

"No more of that," Baba muttered with the others. She felt it only polite to join in. But where could this place be that had no cereals or vacuums or TV?

She gazed anxiously at Noreen for the answer.

"Now you understand," Noreen laughed. "Look, Baba—why don't you do the same?"

There was a chorus of approval as Noreen tugged at her eyelids. A pair of what looked like dead black centipedes fluttered to the ground, and several of the women clapped.

"Do I have to get rid of mine too?" Baba asked miserably. Already she wished that she hadn't chosen to follow Medea to the river. But at the time there had seemed to be no alternative. Cautiously, she glanced either side of her. Whichever way she looked, it was a bad prospect.

The crack in the riverbed had widened even in the short time it took Medea's army to march along Cheyne Walk. It would now be almost impossible to jump across—and other cracks, small still and thin as spider webs, were breaking away from it like splintering ice. The opposite bank, only just becoming visible in the thinning brown light, looked ominous and uninviting.

As for the houses in Cheyne Walk, there was little hope of finding asylum there. Leaning drunkenly forward—even moving towards the river, Baba could have sworn—they looked like the exhausted guests at the end of a fancy-dress party. Pale pink façades and climbing clematis gave an air of tired gaiety. In several cases the front door had fallen off its hinges and black hallways gaped like missing teeth.

The only thing to do was to follow Medea.

At the end of Cheyne Walk, Medea turned inland. Silent once more, the women followed her. The fallen blocks of flats of the Worlds End council estate lay in columns on the ground, as if a giant child had put away his building bricks in orderly fashion.

Baba looked wonderingly about her. No one to be seen. And yet these flats had surely been inhabited at the time of the cataclysm?

Not a human voice, no sign of life anywhere. She pulled at her bunny ears in perplexity. Were these women the only people left on earth? Had Medea led only women to safety? And if so, why?

It seemed sad to Baba if all the men had disappeared. Stifling a sigh, she increased her step to match Noreen's and walked the last few steps with as cheerful an air as possible.

For they had reached their destination. Of one accord, all the women stopped. Before them—and clearly marked as an early victim of the bulldozer, for a crumpled bulldozer lay beside the building, stood an abandonded Church. Children had scrawled obscenities on its walls, and half the roof was missing. But, miraculously, it stood. All round it lay the ruins of Limerston Street and Lamont Road. Only Cheyne Walk, like an upended comb, was visible behind them.

Medea's voice reverberated in the thin, windless air. "Sisters, this is the Temple. Enter!"

The women went in two by two. Soon the church was filled to overflowing. As they went, although there was no wind outside and nothing stirred, a great rushing sound accompanied them.

It was stiflingly hot in the church, and the chanting voices of Medea and the other women soon sent Baba into a sort of trance. Snatches of the tunes she had danced to in the Playboy mingled with the sonorous wailing:

Our time is come
The River is broken
Tell Laura I love her, Our Oppression is Ended
Blue suede shoes.

The murky brown light of the now fully advanced morning turned the stained glass sombre. Medea's hair was the colour of weed at the bottom of a pond. Several of the women were smoking, and a thick smog hung in the condemned rafters—which had escaped the teeth of the bulldozer by barely a day.

With a sudden agonising feeling of constriction, Baba jerked herself upright.

"I want to get out of here," she said loudly and clearly.

"Sssh!" The woman on her left looked disapproving. "We're making preparations. Can't you see that?"

But Noreen, on Baba's other side, smiled in sympathy. It was clear that she too had no intention of staying in the church all day.

"Preparations for what?" Baba asked crossly. "Excuse me please." And she rose to her feet with a determined expression; Noreen would almost certainly follow.

"To get to the other side, of course," the woman hissed. "How do you think you're going to get there if Medea doesn't help you over?"

"The other side?" Baba yawned in spite of herself. "Why—what happens there?"

Before the woman could answer, a great hush that seemed louder than the singing and chanting which had preceded it, swept through the congregation. All the women fell to their knees. Baba was dragged down by Noreen. With a little moan of sadness, she watched a ladder in her tights run swiftly up past the knee.

"Sisters!"

Medea, so tall now in the pulpit that her head seemed to disappear in the swirling mists of brown smoke, had become more a voice than a presence: a black voice that filled the church and echoed in the organ pipes with a booming sound that was truly terrifying.

"Sisters, we are preparing ourselves to reach the other side.

"There will be tribulations, as our oppressors will try to prevent us.

"But now let me tell you what awaits us there.

"A matriarchal society. More than equal pay and educational opportunities.

"Liberation from childbirth and childcare."

That's odd, Baba thought sleepily. How can you have a matriarchal society, if it means the mothers running things, and not have children? But her brain hardly felt capable, in such conditions, of dealing with the problem. So far, she thought, it didn't sound particularly tempting on the other side.

"A chance to develop our personalities to the full," Medea chanted.

"Serious subject—not sex object.

"And abandonment of our sex roles."

At these words, Baba felt a sort of sadness creep over her. Surreptitiously she felt for her little bunny tail, which had become so ragged and forlorn now, and wondered if it would be possible to get back to the Playboy and ask for a replacement. And as for

her ears! They were flopping all over the place. She must look a real mess.

As if she had read her thoughts, Noreen placed an affectionate hand on Baba's knee. "It'll be all right," she whispered. "We'll get out of here."

It didn't take long for the opportunity to present itself. But it was hardly as Baba would have wished it. In the great silence, with the women on their knees, eyes closed and hardly breathing it seemed, and the soft rushing sound of Medea's voice playing over them like wind pumped from a bellows, footsteps could be heard coming closer and closer to the Church; and then stopping in the vestibule outside.

All the women opened their eyes and listened. There was something both strange and familiar about the footsteps. Something sinister, too: several of the women shifted uncomfortably, and for a time Medea's message was lost.

Baba glanced over her shoulder apprehensively. Noreen was frowning and chewing her finger.

"I know what that sound reminds me of," she hissed at Baba finally. "It's—it's stiletto *heels*!"

"Isn't it?" she added as half the congregation looked round and nodded agreement. "What's someone wearing stiletto heels doing *here*, for God's sake?"

Even Medea, at this point, was forced to break off and stare ahead of her at the church door, which was opening slowly. The rushing sound which accompanied her prophecies died away and an expectant silence, like the beginning of a play, filled the hall. Baba suspected that the women were relieved at the break.

What came round the ancient oak door was a head so apricot blonde, sheep's wool curly, heavily rouged, eye-lined and beauty-spotted, that a gasp came up from the audience at the sight. Memories of magazine covers before the Crack—that was, only a few days ago, but the event had made the past seem an eternity away—swam before the eyes of the astonished women. Hands dived into shoulder bags for forgotten powder compacts. Tiny tubes of eye shadow spilled out their iridescent contents on roughened palms. Noreen, with a sigh of envy, simply sat back and stared at the apparition.

Stiletto heels went clack-clack on the worn stone floor of the church. A tent coat in deep plum swung proudly out to either side so that the women felt the rich stuff brush their faces. A leather handbag, with its little lock and golden key, dangled provocatively from creamed, claw-stained hands.

"A real Fifties Woman," Noreen whispered piercingly in Baba's ear. "What d'you think can have happened?" Then her mouth fell open in a circle of disbelief and excitement. "Are we *time travellers*?" she gasped. "Are we back in the *fifties* now, d'you think?"

The strange woman walked with the same even, disturbing step up to the pulpit and stopped there. Separated by many thousands of years, by spinning galaxies of massage, Silkglo Foundation, nylon negligees—separated by a great rift on one side of which shimmered the prophetic hair and fighting muscle of Medea, and on the other the depilatories and electric dildoes of the decadent twentieth century—the two women faced each other.

Medea was the first to speak.

"Why do you desecrate our temple?"

Her voice, low as a subterranean stream before it bursts triumphantly out on the parched hillside, sent a shiver of fear down Baba's spine. She clung to Noreen for protection.

Then it was the turn of the visitor to answer. The women, ashamed now of their first instinctive dive in their bags for products forbidden by their priestess, looked on sternly.

"I have come in search of an adulteress," the shining apparition replied.

The leather bag, deftly opened with the cute key, disgorged papers. Medea, a terrible frown lying across her brow like the incision of a surgeon's knife, bent down from the pulpit and took them with a magisterial air. "There is an adulteress here," the stranger repeated.

From beneath the double trim-yourself eyelashes, a pair of artificially glistening eyes went slowly and suspiciously round the church. Baba felt herself beginning to squirm in her seat.

"What can she mean?" she whispered to Noreen. "What does that word mean?"

Medea handed down the papers. When she spoke, her voice had attained the majesty of a great river as it spills its heart and soul into the deep pool beneath the rocks. Rage as menacing as the promise of thunder lay under every word.

"Sisters! We have here a woman who proposes to waste our time by speaking of past relations between women and men!"

Contempt, too, was in Medea's voice; and the women cringed at the hard glister that fell on their shoulders from on high.

"We will ask this—this impostor—to leave the Temple immediately. And we will resume our preparations for the other side."

But the small eyes, blinking under their load of mascara and

paint, continued to move systematically round the hall. Then they stopped.

As if warned just a second too late, Baba dropped her head. Her ears flopped defensively over her face.

"You!"

The stiletto heels rang out like pistol shots on the floor. The women in Baba's pew backed nervously. A perfectly fashioned plastic arm, with freckles gaily painted on in charming little groups as far as the elbow, extended itself from the hidden hook under the permanently deodorised armpit and groped at Baba's breast. The women gave a moan of fear and disgust.

"A Bunny Girl!" said the scarlet mouth. "Baba the Bunny Girl!"

From close to it was possible to see the thin thread of metal that held the strange visitor's lips in place, and the minute, complicated mechanism, as fascinating as a Swiss watch, that operated just under the dimple on the chin and kept it winking merrily.

"You are the one I am looking for! Come out my dear."

Baba glanced up in terror. A smile, spreading at 1.5 millimetres a second, and accompanied by a brisk tickling from the lower jaws, opened to reveal a mouthful of blinding white teeth. On the flat shelf of pink gum the word Pepsodent advertised the product below in forceful frosted writing.

"Who—who are you?" Baba stammered.

Medea's words went unheard once more as the entire congregation craned towards the extraordinary mechanical woman.

"My name is Rene Mangrove," it said.

The papers were held aloft and Baba shrank back from them.

"Divorce," Simon Mangrove's wife intoned. "Sign the confession statement."

Clasped in the iron fingers which lay under the velvety skin of the A1 skin graft was a golden fountain pen. As Baba still cowered, two preplucked eyebrows rose in perplexity on the perfect Deep Peaches of the face. The bland brow, unaccustomed to expressions of wonderment or surprise, set itself into a sweet little pattern of wrinkles.

"Get out of here while you can!" Noreen hissed. "Go on! Now!"

Baba found herself on her hands and knees under the pew. Strong arms pushed her along the floor. She crawled, half conscious with fear, towards the shaft of soupy brown light that poured out from under the door.

"Alimony!" came the grating, toneless voice after her. "Sign here please. Sign the confession statement now please."

"Sisters!" Medea broke in with a great reproachful boom "I command you!"

But by this time Baba had reached the open air, and safety, and was running as fast as her legs would carry her in the direction of the river.

The first person to spy Baba running in panic down Cheyne Walk was Joshua McDougall, who had just a few hours before been rescued from his living tomb in the hall of Sir Max Bowlby's house. All Bowlby's guests—the ladies had jumped from the windows onto bedding—were now rehoused in the empty but stately mansion of Peter Cork—who was himself, an odd coincidence, Minister of Housing. Bowlby and McDougall had made an extensive tour of the lopsided but still elegant eighteenth century home, and were now resting in the front garden, which ran at a sharp angle down to the cracked road and evil fumes of the drained riverbed.

"Just look at that," McDougall said feebly. "A rabbit. Running past."

Bowlby was too inured to tragedy by now to feel sorry for his rival in the property field. He knew well that if his own front hall had not removed McDougall's reasoning powers, the shark-like creature would probably have been out and about by now, offering to buy up the ruins.

"A rabbit in some distress," McDougall went on. "Let's call it in."

"Or shoot it?" suggested Peter Cork from behind them. Only his strong sense of duty and determination to complete the new Rents Bill had kept him in London over the week-end. He thought sourly of his wife and children enjoying themselves in the country —quite unaware of what had happened to him here. Not for the first time, he cursed the fact that his country house was in Wiltshire, south of the river. Several times that morning he had dreamed it was all a terrible mistake and he really lived in Scotland.

"It *is* a rabbit," Bowlby said suddenly. It was a relief to be able to see something through Cork's binoculars instead of the maddening obscurity of the opposite bank. "Yes, Peter, why not get a bit of sport? Keep your gun here?"

Cork said he did. Impervious to the moans of displeasure from the ladies, he staggered out onto the falling garden with a Purdy twelve bore in hand and a deerstalker on his head. Carefully, he took aim.

"Funny thing," McDougall said in the thin, crushed voice Bowlby found so irritating." That chap Cork was still sweating over his Rents Bill this morning. You'd think all this would have rattled him a little. Besides—"

"The sign of a good politician," Bowlby snapped. "Imperturbable."

"Besides," McDougall went on. "Who's he going to charge the rents to? What?"

A blast from the gun set the drunken lamp posts in Cheyne Walk swaying. A pigeon, already killed by fallen masonry, exploded into a crashing meteor of feathers and blood.

"There's no one left to pay the rents," McDougall spelt it out. "You see what I mean?"

Baba, hearing the gunfire, dived under a newly formed hedge of tree-roots and turf and yellow bricks that once had been the Old Age People's Garden at the corner of Old Church Street. How sad! she thought, tears starting to her eyes as she saw the stiff paws of terriers and poodles sticking out from under the rubble. I don't mind anything so much as pets being badly treated, she told herself. What a beastly war this is!

Nevertheless, Baba was determined to get back to the Playboy Club and get fitted out again. It didn't matter how long it took—or how many miles of dangerous enemy territory she had to cross. She would wait for weeks if necessary, hoping to come across a buried food store or hamburger stall on her way. So when she heard firing, she settled herself in quite comfortably by the roots of a memorial cherry tree, closed her eyes, and tried to relax. So long as that terrifying woman didn't find her here—but after all she was well protected—Baba's ears fell forward and she slept.

"I can see the other side perfectly well," Lady Bowlby announced. She put down Cork's binoculars and assumed a smug expression. Cork, in a foolhardy but thrustful manner, was exploring the Crack itself, after his unsuccessful shooting expedition, and was shouting back inaudible reports to the house.

"I can hear messages too," Lady Bowlby added. She gazed mystically at her husband. "Aren't you interested in what's going on over there, Max?"

"Of course I am, darling." Bowlby was looking around him with fresh eyes. Like sodden banknotes, the crumpled houses of Chelsea and Knightsbridge lay before him. He glanced thoughtfully at McDougall's invalid form, wondering how much the man had worked out already.

"I can see cars," Lady Bowlby said portentously, taking up

the binoculars again. "Can you, my dear?" She handed the glasses to the heiress, who was still in a state of shock.

"Oh, yes." The heiress gave a little sigh of pleasure. She called for her weedy husband and pointed out the orderly stream of traffic that could be described on the opposite bank.

"Looks like the sort of simple but luxurious big car we've been looking for for years," the weedy husband said longingly. "Who can they belong to, I wonder?"

As the dim shapes of the cars (nothing else could be seen on the other side because of the wall of brown fog that came down as a backdrop behind them, giving them the air of slowly gliding grey fish in the muddy water of an aquarium) swam before the eyes of the heiress and her husband, Cork was wading farther and farther out towards the ever-widening Crack.

The mud, so far, was the consistency of chocolate mousse and came only up to the ankle. All the expected objects were lying in it, some looking pathetic and some disgusting, depending on the upbringing of the viewer. Cork trod carefully, aware that a slip and fall into this mire would mean instant death from typhoid. And the hospitals may not be in good shape, he reminded himself grimly. It was important to remember that this expedition—not dared yet by any of the survivors of the cataclysm—was more momentous even than Captain Scott's. With what tales would he return to his house, where Bowlby and McDougall relaxed indolently, drinking his sherry and planning, in all probability, a property coup to end them all! Or if he never did return? Cork searched in his pocket for pen and paper. The last diaries of Captain Cork—and in his mind's eye he saw a hardcover edition, leather of course, with a golden tassel for a marker.

But in this case the roles of explorer and explored were reversed. For as Cork put a foot forward, his heart thumping and his brain churning out the nineteenth century language needed to describe the exploit, the Crack visibly and horribly moved towards him.

Cork put his foot back where it had just come from. He had never known, even at the meetings where he had been impelled by the democratic procedure to explain his Rents Bill, such a sensation of impending danger and fear.

And the strangest thing about the movement of the Crack was that it appeared to be horizontal. He could see it split like the inane smile on the face of a baby all the way from Battersea Bridge, which lay helplessly across it now, to Southwark. As if a sheet of ruled paper had been torn in two. An unpleasant tearing sound that reminded Cork of the failed essays of his youth

filled the air. He looked nervously back at his house, which bowed deferentially still over the riverbed.

Baba was woken from a dream in which two giants, one of them with the sepulchral face of Medea Smith and the other made up of the component parts of Rene Mangrove, fought with each other to the death and finally succeeded in tearing each other apart.

She opened her eyes with a start, to find her legs dangling over the edge of a newly formed crater. A labyrinth of twisted sewage pipes lay below, and she could have sworn she heard the scuffle of rats. With a gasp of horror, she drew back from the jagged invitation to death. If she had slept on . . .

But the problem now was where to go. If she tried to cross the riverbed—no, the mud looked dangerous, vicious almost, as if hidden mouths would rise up from it and drag her down. If she ran to the houses in Cheyne Walk—then Rene Mangrove, hot in pursuit, would be more than likely to find her there. Yet she could hardly stay where she was. The thin sliver of abyss at her feet might at any moment yawn a little further, swallowing up the Old People's Garden and Baba with it in one easy gulp.

Lady Bowlby withdrew her chair from the chasm with an exclamation of disgust and moved higher up the slanting lawn with her paraphernalia of binoculars, handbag and chocolates stolen from Peter Cork's library. "I knew he shouldn't have gone out there," she said, angrily gesturing in the direction of Cork. "He's meddling. Upsetting the balance of nature. And now look what he's done." She peered out at the riverbed. "My God. What's that?" she went on. "Max! *Max*!"

As Lady Bowlby's tremulous voice rang out, Baba ran past and disappeared from sight amongst the boulders of the fallen Embankment. Scrambling down the slabs of torn concrete, she found herself on a primeval beach. Oil and soft mud the colour of French mustard covered her feet, and a strange chill ran up Baba's legs, causing her to tuck her tail between her legs for comfort. She looked desperately ahead. On the far bank, the large grey cars moved monotonously. By the edge of the Crack, a man was measuring the depth of the soil with what seemed to be an old chair leg. From time to time he straightened and made an entry in a small notebook. Grunts of satisfaction wafted back from him to where Baba stood.

An explorer! A real English gentleman explorer!

With a warm flood of relief, Baba waded out to meet Cork. He would look after her! She wondered, inspecting his keen backbone and square, eager shoulders if he might by some miraculous chance be an old client of hers at the Playboy.

Bowlby and McDougall had just finished their little talk in the study. Traversing the one-in-four gradient of the study floor with difficulty, Bowlby went out in answer to his wife's cries. But he paused at the doorless threshold of the room for one last reassuring word.

"That's a deal then, Joshua," he said.

"It is definitely in our interests to trade with the other side," McDougall concurred. "Our initial problem, of course, will be access."

"A bridge," Sir Max said impatiently.

McDougall gave a faint smile, but said nothing. From the expression on his face, Bowlby wondered if the crushing he had received the previous evening had really affected his brain. Yet his business acumen seemed as sharp as before.

"For a bridge," McDougall drawled, "you need workers. Isn't that right, Bowlby?"

"Max! Max!" came from the garden.

Bowlby shrugged irritably. Was McDougall anticipating trouble with the unions? And who said there were any unions left, after a disaster on this scale? Who could tell, for that matter, if there was anyone left except themselves and the owners of all those cars on the other side? For all one knew—

It only hit Bowlby, when he had slid on his stomach down the marble hall and out into the garden, that if there was no one left he was in trouble indeed. It was hard to envisage a world without workers. But surely, he thought with a spurt of confidence, there must be plenty of workers on the other side.

When Cork saw Baba, in spite of his geological investigations and the new spirit of adventure that was so like his happy days in the nursery, a blissful smile spread across his face.

A beautiful girl was coming towards him through the mud. The Venus of the drained riverbed, a nymph in fishnet tights with sweet little ears and tail that reminded Cork of his Beatrix Potter books.

Her hair was long and pale gold. Black lashes fluttered demurely on her cheeks. Cork forgot his wife and children and stepped backwards through the cloying detritus to meet her.

Baba and Peter Cork stood for a moment gazing at each other.

Then Cork reached out and put his arms round Baba's waist. They drew close together, their feet sinking gently into the soft mud. A half-submerged baby's rattle clung to Baba's leg. As they kissed, the bright ruins of Albert Bridge danced before their eyes.

For Cork, everything was forgotten in the ecstacy of the moment. The Housing Bill, with its ambitious scheme to empty the fashionable London boroughs of all but rich freeholders and rehouse millions elsewhere. His long-nosed wife, who had been such a help in his career. His Wiltshire estate, where he liked to survey the acres and feel at peace with himself. All was forgotten —for Baba.

And for her, the past melted and disappeared, a meaningless succession of disappointing romances. Simon Mangrove, whom she would have been foolish enough to marry if the bumper cars had not luckily intervened, meant no more to her now than her first fiancé, the idiot son of a supermarket millionaire who had spent all his money at the Playboy and was now incarcerated in an asylum somewhere in the north. In between was a row of faceless men who had wanted Baba for her tail and ears, and nothing else. And Baba could tell that Peter—explorer, romantic and protective father figure—loved her for herself. Life was beginning anew. For Baba, the Crack had brought happiness.

Cork's hand tenderly pulled at the Bunny outfit. It gave way easily and soon Baba was standing naked before him. In spite of the brown fog, which meant that without binoculars it would be almost impossible for the people on shore to see her, she blushed. These were unusual circumstances—but all the same Baba preferred to undress in the privacy of a bachelor flat.

Cork kissed the small white breast, which looked like water-lilies growing in a muddy pond.

"My beautiful Baba," he murmured. "The world comes to an end and you are born. My spotless virgin—my goddess."

Baba shivered slightly in the dank air. For a moment it crossed her mind that the river-bed might be infested with terrible and contagious diseases. Then she remembered that this, surely, was what an explorer's wife had to put up with all the time. She smiled bravely.

"Where did you come from and where will you leave me?" moaned Cork as he drew Baba closer into his arms. With his left hand he pulled at his trousers until they fell into the mire round his ankles.

Overhead a seagull screeched as it flapped its way across the strange new landscape.

SOME ROOMS

MERLE KESSLER

I. "This room," the Blind Man tells me, sipping his claret thoughtfully, his voice old as castles, "should be stripped bare, so that we can hear the echo of our own voices."

We are standing in the library, a room containing dusty space, the Blind Man, myself, and every book I hold dear (all bound in hand-crafted leather), including some I have yet to read. Who has the time in these troubled times to read?

There is a rare twinkle in the Blind Man's unseeing eyes; he taps my shoulder lightly with his cane.

"What," he asks me, "can be of more value than the sound of our own voices?"

"I don't know."

That Blind Man has vision that won't quit (and who needs sight with such a precious gift?).

In a flurry of obedience, I cast out all my books through the bay window, into the snow; out goes the furniture, the drapes, the fixtures, the panelling. I become so carried away in my attempt to please the Blind Man that the very walls disappear, the ceiling, the floor. . . .

The Blind Man and I resume our interrupted conversation perforce in empty space; our voices are, surprisingly, as soft and muffled as ever. A chill wind sweeps over our bodies.

"You are a very stupid young man," the Blind Man says, sighing, nodding his magnificent hoary head.

"What?" I reply. My breath escapes. A snowflake touches my lips.

II. "So this is your room," the Countess says flatly, casting her white fur coat disdainfully upon the spotless marble floor.

"Yes," I say casually, drawing deeply on my Russian cigarette.

She turns to me gracefully, pivoting on her well-turned heel. Riveting her eyes to mine, she reaches behind her shapely

head and lets her long silver hair fall to her naked shoulders.

I can read the challenge in her icy eyes; throwing my Russian cigarette to James, my valet, I leap for her with a cry.

The bed, which had been bare save for the black silk coverlet obtained on my last trip to the Coast, is now covered with our lithe bodies. Our handstitched clothing flies away in every direction.

"You may go James," I say to my valet.

"Very good, sir."

The heavy oaken door closes softly behind him.

The four walls that enclose us resound with squeals of delight. Nights are made for pleasure; winters are made for warmth.

Beyond my palace gates the Plague will soon run its course.

III. The room is cold. I have barricaded the windows and nailed shut the door. The wind howls all around me, and there is another sound beyond these walls that is far more eerie than the howling of the wind, far more terrifying than that: it is the click of claws on the other side of the door, the scraping of claws on the door.

And the third sound is the crackling of the dwindling fire, and the fourth is my heart, pounding in my chest, and the fifth is my own voice trying to sing.

My mother once sang lullabies to me; I can't remember any of them, and I am terrified of dying, here, alone.

IV. This particular room is small as rooms go. It is six feet deep by eight feet wide. The walls are grey and dull. The possibility that the walls may be made of steel or one of the newer alloys is not a pleasant thought, but small rooms in and of themselves are not necessarily pleasant.

There is, of course, a door leading into the room (the same door, incidentally, which leads out of the room). The door is ajar. When is a door nor a door? Haha. The door may lock behind you as you enter so please, be careful, please don't close the door.

Here is a window. Happily there are no bars on the window, but bars are not necessary here. It is a sheer one hundred feet to the ground. The view is dismal. A green lawn stretches out for miles and miles, all the way to the horizon, perhaps beyond.

It's too green to be real, that lawn, and nothing else. Just the lawn. Not a single fucking flower, even. It's enough to make you sick.

The man inside the room is, like the room itself, grey in appearance: grey skin, grey clothes. But the man counts his blessings. Haha. He is alive and it's not so bad here. Ha. Ha.

The man listens to his own heartbeat. Sometimes he even has an erection, but not as often as he once did. He is alone in the room. The door is closed. He may never escape.

V. I'm frightened and bored; for a laugh I go to church with some friends.

We are sitting in the sanctuary. On a dare from my friends, I approach the preacher, who blesses all those who come before him. My knees tremble. His rheumy eyes water at the sight of me. He takes my hand and leads me to a small room behind the sanctuary: the two of us and two chairs. We sit down and stare at each other.

"There's a little door in your heart," the preacher tells me. "When Jesus come a knock knock knockin' at that little door, you got to let him in. You got to let Jesus into your heart."

"Yes," I say. My mouth is dry.

Later I escape. My friends see me on the street and I must tell them what happened.

"Weird," one of them says.

"He scared me," I say. "I almost had a heart attack."

VI. There are four doors and six windows in the room, and four people: my mother, my father, my sister, myself. The landscape drifts slowly by and we are going home.

It is late at night. I find it hard to distinguish between the reflections of stars in the window, and the real stars glimpsed through the window. The motor makes a pleasant sound as I close my eyes and imagine still more stars: the real stars lost in time, the reflected stars lost in my vision, the invented stars—all are lovely, lovely illusions.

All the doors are locked, the windows shut tight. Our slow bodies are contained in the heart of America: speed and steel and power.

My father keeps the speed down to fifty: steel and power are matters of indifference to him. My mother and sister are sleeping. On the radio a man with a smooth voice is talking and playing smooth music. I think smooth thoughts of mist and darkness, moon and stars, my skin folding over my stargazing eyes.

O the soft secrets: we carry our air within these locked doors; we bear our love silently among us.

VII. The Blind Man belches and nods his head sagely, sipping his beer, eyeing me from across the room.

"Well," he tells me. "You're getting better. There's still a lot of room for improvement, however."

I blush, then wink at him, then leap away through the shattered window, returning to my search through the piles of fallen leaves, rummaging for my ruined books.

VIII. I am awake in my room, lying alone with two pillows, straining to hear a voice through the closed door; there is nothing, no sound save the slight rustle my body makes as I shift my weight in bed.

The room is dark, dark from the night, dark from my own pain: my lover has left me.

I roll over in the bed (even though I know my night will be sleepless) and over again. Now, at this moment, I am glad to be alone, I want to be alone; now, at *this* moment my heart grows in my chest: my fingers quiver, I flail my arms in the air, and I thrash the sheets, trying to fill up as much space by myself as I can. I am afraid to die here, alone, without having touched everything I could.

I jerk my head up and curse the black ceiling. If it weren't there I could see the stars above me.

IX. Here there is no door. There is only a jagged entrance, rocky and treacherous. Beyond the entrance, inside the cave, there is a man; he is in pain. He clutches his wound with one hand, his weapon in the other.

Men are clambering towards him on the rocky slope; they hide behind rocks and wait.

A snake is coiled on a scorched boulder; after the first shot is fired, it slithers out of sight.

X. Come away from the hum and the bustle, my friend, come, step into my room. Step out of yourself for a minute; come out of your shell and look at my gifts, all neatly arranged on the shelf.

There's not much time, but here's a small silver cup, a gold dragon, a pen set, a miniature television set, a harmonica, a mushroom-shaped candle, this clock, my wallet, the coffeemaker, the broom, my watch, this clock, *this* clock, oh my god look at the time!

And this rug here was given to me by a very close friend, a very dear friend, and it was hand-woven. By Indians. I'll bet it cost a lot.

You must come back some other time and I'll show you some more, but look at the time (how it does fly!)! You must leave now. I'm sorry. There are others coming, behind you.

And thanks for your time. Thanks for your attention. Thanks a lot.

XI. I've converted my heart into a library (which has bad aspects as well as good, but the conversion is complete), and there's someone knocking on the door (wanting to see what I've done with the old ticker, no doubt).

"Hi there," I say cheerfully, as I open the door, glad to have my reading interrupted (the library is a dark and musty place with more strange works than I can sometimes take).

"I'm Jesus," says the man at the door.

"I know," I say, recognizing him immediately.

He seems pleased.

"Say," he says, "Do you have a copy of the Bible here?"

"I think I've got every book in the world here," I reply proudly.

"Hm," says Jesus. "You must have a lot of space."

"Big as all outdoors," I tell him, trying to get on his good side.

"All versions!" he asks me.

"I would imagine," I say.

"Have you read any of them?"

"No," I say. "But I know what's here if I need it."

"Well," says Jesus. "That's something."

XII. The Blind Man and I share the train compartment. We speed through the night with comfort and ease, though he cannot see, as I can, that the walls of the compartment are a marvellous flushed pink, as though they might bleed if you scratched them. I speak rapidly to the Blind Man, describing the room to him with excitement, for everything about this journey startles me.

The Blind Man runs his fingers along my palm and says that the stars are not kind, that I will be lonely.

"I know that," I say impatiently. "I don't care (although, in my heart of hearts, I do, I do)."

He casts down runes, and says it is good and I will love.

The countryside slips by . . . Foolish augurer, I think, you know no more than I.

"Yes yes," I say.

And you will be loved, touching the knobs on my skull.

"Yes yes. Yes yes."

I don't need this hocus pocus. I have my own magic. Everything I touch is holy. The journey astounds me; I will not waste it talking to a Blind Man. I will bless his eyes and go to the window to watch the world slip by.

We enter a tunnel and my sight slips away. My other senses immediately become acute; my other senses grow: I see stars in my mind's eye! The night air clears and fills my thumping lungs. There is the taste of pennies in my astonished mouth, the sound of my jaws as my gleaming grin opens.

I know that we are leaving the ground far behind. We are hurtling through space at speed greater than light itself. My heart is swelling, bursting.

Will we never reach our destination?

Will this night never end?

NAME (PLEASE PRINT):

JOHN SLADEK

REMARKS: (*extra sheets may be attached*)
You, the expediter who deals with this, may find it ironic that I use a form on which to make my complaint, and the wrong form at that. But then, is there a correct form for a problem of this type? Or is my case unique?

My case.

Briefly, I have discovered that all written records pertaining to me have disappeared. I can think of no reason for this, and feel it is an unnecessary discrepancy which should be cleared up at the earliest opportunity.

I blame no one. I could blame it all on the "bureaucracy", but I have been too long on the other side of the counter. I know that bureaux are only groups of human clerks, like me. Like you.

I should say that I like forms. I like filling them out, printing clearly in ink only. I like stamping them, filing them, copying or checking them, even bringing in a fresh stack from the stockroom. But especially I like reading them. One of my favorite quotations is line 4 of *Computation of Social Security Self-Employment Tax:* "Net income (or loss) from excluded services or sources included on line 3". Smile at my enthusiasm, but consider for a moment the precision and balance of that line. *Income* vs. *loss*, *excluded* or *included*, *services* and *sources*. I'd like to shake the hand of the clerk who wrote that.

This form is also well set out, nicely planned, though possibly this Remarks section could be larger. I see I'm running out of space already, and my true remarks have not yet begun. Attaching extra sheets, then, let me begin:

At the beginning, I had a responsible job in a government documents office. Without becoming close friends with anyone in the office, I had managed to command some respect for my work and perhaps my person. No one seemed unduly envious

when Mr Boyle told me I was being promoted in grade. The promotion involved a transfer to another department, in which I would be working with classified documents.

"I should warn you," Mr Boyle said, "that you'll need a *SECRET* clearance for this job. If you know any reason you won't be able to get such a clearance, let me know now."

Naturally I knew of no such impediment. Mr Boyle gave me forms for my clearance application, to be submitted in triplicate with a set of my fingerprints and a copy of my birth certificate.

I applied in person to the state records office for the latter. After a wait of twenty minutes, jerked out on the wall clock, the trim young woman behind the counter explained that my birth record was not on file here. She suggested I try the county records office.

Next day the county records office clerk suggested I try the hospital. The clerk at the hospital had neither any record of my birth nor any suggestion.

Such mistakes will happen. Clerks are human. I'm willing to tolerate a few mistakes, a lot of mistakes, any finite number of mistakes, choose one. I returned to the state office and explained my predicament. The clerk, a young woman with short hair, seemed to sympathize. She suggested I try obtaining copies of other documents attesting to my birth and present those to the clearance people. She seemed about to make another suggestion, but I saw by the jerking clock that I was already late for another appointment, to have my fingerprints taken.

I submitted the fingerprints with the triplicate clearance application, attaching a letter of explanation in lieu of my birth certificate. Then I set about tracing my birth.

Several routes were already closed:

(a) My parents were dead, and everyone I could think of who might have known me as a child was either dead or untraceable.

(b) Tracing my school records was impossible, since the school had burned down.

(c) I telephoned county and state education departments, who refused to divulge any information whatsoever.

(d) I wrote to my old family doctor and dentist. The doctor's neice replied that he had died two years ago, and that she had no idea what had happened to his old files. The dentist did not reply.

(e) I wrote asking for a copy of my baptismal certificate. The minister who replied (not the one who had baptized me) said that he was very sorry, but his predecessor's files were in a chaotic state, and my certificate was not to be found. Perhaps out of

habit, he urged me not to give up hope of his finding it eventually.

It was depressing, but still only an odd set of circumstances, up to this point. Then my application for a *SECRET* clearance was rejected, for two reasons: "Fingerprints not clear" and "No birth certificate". My letter of explanation was not returned with the other documents.

Mr Boyle called me into his office next day. He explained that the department hadn't forseen this new difficulty. Now, since I wasn't cleared, he would have to give the promotion to someone else. I said I understood.

"I don't think you do," he said. "For one thing, when we created the position you were to fill, we also deleted your present position. Now there really is no room for you in our office. Naturally we can't *fire* you, but—we think it would be better for everyone if you resigned."

I agreed. For a moment I sat snapping a card between my front teeth—my rejected, blurry fingerprints—then I rose and shook hands with Mr Boyle. I hadn't spent ten years in his office to become a liability to it now. I walked with slow dignity to the door, then turned to look at Mr Boyle.

"Good luck," he said, and turned to drop some papers in the waste basket.

I spent the next few days wandering the streets, being "unemployed." For one entire day I stationed myself on a particular street corner and made a note of the serial number of every bus that passed. For an afternoon I sought out weighing machines of the fortune-telling type. I wasted perhaps too much of my diminishing resources on this, and on taking my own picture and recording my own voice, but it was a comfort.

One day at the dinner hour, the plangent dinner hour, I wandered alone in an unfamiliar part of the city, thinking and no doubt talking to myself. The loss of two or even three documents could be a coincidence. But a dozen? Surely the odds against this were astronomical.

I found myself standing before a large building that was made of, or at least covered with, cast iron. Fireproof. Enduring. The sun must have been setting, for great flocks of noisy birds began to wheel and wheel in the changing light. A foreign ecstasy began to fill me, drawing me on like a glove. How could mere cards and papers matter, when I was here, alive, myself, and full of ease?

I must have fallen face down; when I awoke, it was night, and my mouth was full of drying blood. A policeman prodded me

in the ribs, gently, with his stick. "You okay, fella?" I sat up and nodded. "I seen right away you wasn't just a drunk. What happened to you?"

"I don't know. Must have fainted."

He asked if I'd been rolled. It was then I discovered that my billfold was missing.

A policeful day. When I got home at last, two FBI agents were waiting for me: Agent Barkley, and another whose name escapes me. I didn't really realize how much of my official substance had eroded until our little, as they called it, chat. This took place in their small office—uncomfortably small, it seemed to me, for two large men and a tape-recorder and myself. After taking an oath, I was permitted to tell my story.

"You expect us to believe this?" asked agent Barkley. "That your high school burned down, and your doctor died, and you've lost your billfold with all your ID? And no one else has any records of you?"

"There must be something," the other agent put in. "Your college transcript. Your dental chart. Old tax returns."

"I've moved several times," I explained. "Certain papers have just disappeared in the shuffle. But surely the Internal Revenue Service has copies of my tax returns . . . ?"

The two agents looked at each other. Barkley asked about my college.

"Cypress University," I said. "School of Business Administration." Again they exchanged looks.

"Kind of a coincidence, isn't it?" asked Barkley. He showed me an evening paper, headlining a violent disturbance at Cypress University. Transcript files had been ransacked and many destroyed.

The FBI men told me I could go home, but not to try going anywhere else. They promised to contact me shortly.

That night I lay awake theorizing. Three theories might account for what has happened: coincidence, a prank, and a conspiracy.

(1) Coincidence. The girl in the state birth records office accidently put her cup of coffee on my certificate and spoiled it. Rather than tell her superior, she destroyed the copy. At the drivers' license bureau a man with a cut on his finger, a paper cut, goes awkwardly through the file with it, missing my form. I can see my draft board file accidently stored under my first name; my social security form crumpled down in the back of the drawer; other files fallen down behind file cabinets; still others

turned back to front; my insurance premium card is spindled by a stupid typist, so that it keeps fluttering through the computer, never to be retrieved . . .

A mouse nests in my baptismal certificate. The burnt school. The dead doctor. The trashed university files. My letters to my parents were bundled in the attic, and after their deaths, given to a neighbor who moved away, whose kids now play a game with them, "mailing" them through the slot of a cardboard grocery box, say. One letter to a friend was delivered to the wrong address, where an inquisitive person, having read it, burned the guilty evidence and mixed the ashes with the soil in her window box. Another letter was never mailed, but fell into the lining of a suit I gave away to the Salvation Army. Someday the derelict wearing it will die, and it will be found on him by someone feeling his clothes for thousand-dollar bills. Other letters were stolen by postal clerks, mutilated by experimental cancelling machines, somehow destroyed as pornography or Communist propaganda, none of the above . . .

Someone is gluing overdraft notices to account records at the bank, he spills a drop of glue and welds my record for ever to the one in front of it. A department store clerk only pretends to search for my charge account record—actually he's sneaking a smoke in the toilet. Who can blame him, he's young, plays with himself though believing it causes the pimples he also plays with. Say a file clerk at the Internal Revenue goes quietly crazy and—what file clerk has not had this dream?—selects one file and tears it up. Or his radium watch dial emits a stray gamma ray which obliterates the microfilm of me. Finally, my dentist, while examining my teeth card, feels suddenly tired. He closes the card in a telephone directory, puts his head down on his desk for a brief nap and dies.

(2) Pranks. No one knows me well enough to take the trouble.

(3) Conspiracy. Who, again, would bother? Why not simply kill me, instead of breaking into hundreds of offices (or infiltrating them), searching through tons of files and never overlooking a duplicate? They could spend man-years

erasing	expunging	blotting out	vanishing
removing	lifting	eradicating	cancelling
deleting	stealing	eliminating	purging
voiding	discarding	superseding	correcting

or expropriating my official self. Think of them, hiring hundreds of agents to infiltrate bureaux, present their qualifications, hope to get hired, wait in line, fill out applications, perhaps miss the

job after all, perhaps find out the bureau isn't hiring today, the budget has been cut . . . hoping all the while that I did not marry, have children, write letters to the editor, go to court, vote, sign petitions, buy something on credit, change dentists . . . a foreign conspiracy it cannot be, and an American conspiracy is too terrible to think of.

After a week of waiting, Agent Barkley phoned me to say they were still investigating, and would I please remain available? I saw my mistake at once. It is a kind of crime, after all, to be unidentified. So long as the FBI were on the track of my identity, I was a house prisoner. When they gave up, I would be too dangerous not to arrest.

I packed at once and moved out, walked into the factory district across the river, and registered in a cheap hotel as "A. Barkley". It is not necessary that a certain person exists. The mere use of a name, a fistful of cards of identity means nothing. I think of student pranks, of registering for classes fictitious persons: Mort Arthur, Phil Morris, Art Lesson and Mac Hines. These are figureless fields, I suppose, while I am a faceless, rather, fieldless figure. Gene DeFect.

Now I'm cut off. Even if some trace of me has now been found, I can't contact the appropriate agency or bureau without coming to the attention of Barkley and his friend. Before, I could have found my old copies of tax returns, rent receipts, bills, the ones I saved. If any. I could have taken a lie detector test, affidavits from acquaintances and co-workers, thrown myself on the mercy of the FBI, the agents are human, too, they sweat, they bleed, they do pee-pee, choose one.

Yesterday a new telephone book came out. My name was not in it. Was it in the old? I . . .

Things aren't too bad, really. I was unable to pay my bill for room and meals, so Mr Gurnt, the manager, arranged for me to mop the halls for my keep. Despite the beatings, I'm getting to feel at home here.

I'm keeping a journal, from which some of this is copied. Some of it is really written by me, the hall-mopper at this hotel. The person filling out this form is the same object of Mr Gurnt's kicks and punches. Here I am. Not the government clerk, perhaps, not even the man who signed the register, but here I am writing this, this sentence, and the period at its end. Is this not proof of my true, dense, solid material substance? Answer in full.

No one has seen the journal yet, but me. I hide it from Gurnt and the others. I stop writing and slip it into a drawer when the door opens, always. At night, I keep it in my underwear, in the front, and endeavour to remain on my stomach all night. If anyone had seen it, I'd have been visited by Agent Barkley by now.

The beatings come daily, along with threats to fire me. Empty threats, empty as many of my tooth sockets. The beatings come daily, regular as the meals of boiled cabbage and boiled potatoes, far more regular than my bowel movements. Things aren't too bad, really.

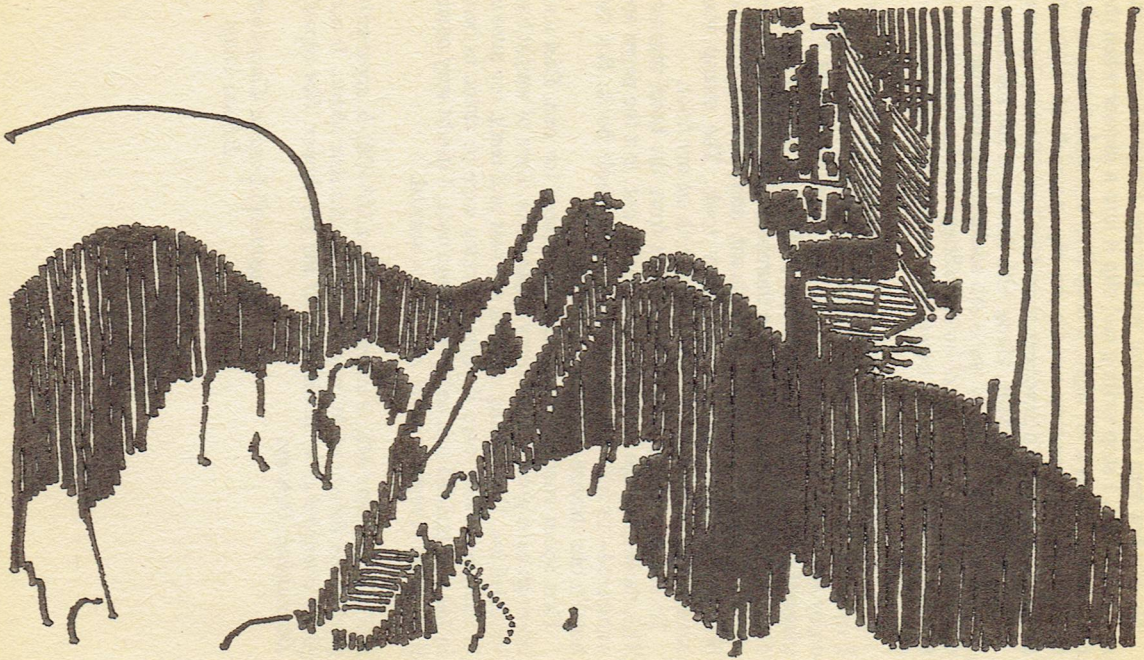
It is not necessary for a certain person to exist. I said that. Did I mention the telephone directory? Yes. It is beautiful, and I enjoy its beauty still, from outside the page. As a child I was plagued by beauty: rainbows in the puddles by the gas station, dead birds by the gas station, the thumbless attendant at the gas station (I heard he had lost his thumb and believed it to be literally misplaced among his greasy tools. The stump was streamlined and elegant). Now I find teeth on my floor.

To simplify things, I erased my alias from the hotel register. This made the page look odd, so I tore it out. But the pages are numbered—to hide the gap I burned the whole book. But the hotel looks strange without a register.

That about concludes my remarks, except for one. Diet and beatings have greatly altered my appearance. Loss of weight has wrinkled me, I'm missing most of my hair and teeth, my nose is broken, etc. Now, even if Agent Barkley were to stride in here in his well-padded suit and look things over, I doubt very much if he could recognize me as one of the wanted.

NOTE: The above MS. is attached to form MP-7881-b, apparently filed at the Bureau of Missing Persons on the date shown. It was found crumpled down in the back of the file drawer. Not signed. Disposition: Destroy.

(Approved) Lazarus Cameforth
Bureau Chief



SONORAN POEMS

D. M. THOMAS

I descend I enter you
a diplomat sick of negotiations
choosing to be hijacked
by a blue stewardess
with a gun instead of champagne

in the midst of a ghost-town
in the midst of a desert
to rest
to forget time and the six
directions to be forgotten

I have sheets of paper
a typewriter
the clean necessities

How peaceful to forget
all diplomacy all ruinous compromises
impossible settlements

warring ideologies
sitting down at table with me
children always the stumbling block
their hearts like ricebowls

I have seen secretaries
leave the too-crowded city streets
to enter the expensive clinic
passing foetuses in the revolving doors

I have stumbled over their parts

Give me the harsh command
be with me or die

Life is an aristocrat
the poor are crowding behind the stars
clutching roots under the desert
the remotest part of any verb is
if they should have been loved

This tarantula
came green and secret
in the great clusters of hot sunlight
survives the Sonoran cold
by inertia
its furred and muscletensioned legs contemplate
its brain serenely

I
in a strange heat
begin to move

How beautiful
the crackle of white sheets
in the desert

Yet fearful
to be in the hands of extremists
a mouth of pure dialectic
from which shit falls every ten seconds

In our first coming together
your finger probes my anus
is this love
or do you seek
my breaking-point and identity

Sonoran
let me first find myself
in the mid-cipher of your cloudless name

Are you my enemy
or my only friend fire-girl of Sonoran
unlike the Catalinas
death may be closer than I think

but I think in these four days
I have crossed the great waters
I have seen my father above the sun

I walk out of my life
as from a conference

Perhaps I shall root here like the saguaros
root with their long but shallow roots

Through the judas hole you have made me
october red stars move breathlessly close

Stand under the porch lantern-light
bringing as a love gift
in your long and straight hair
bewildering stars of the Sonoran
at the expiration of this spell
Like a kachina-mask
you wear your beauty like a kachina-mask
your beauty

the minute you are gone
desert rain
red
mariposa lilies
astonished
mariposa lilies

From desert scrub the lord's candles glimmer
a wind shivers and I am changed

without knowing it yet
without holding it yet
mistaking it for joy

I become good
I become loyal to myself

moment by moment
new stars made

O Mother of Tonantzin
O Our Lady of Guadalupe
You wake me like a ghost-town

In our smiles' poker-games
harlots disguised as hostesses

a posse of shutters watches
which breath will draw faster

even the sun instantly
has dipped from sight

I have never known
such silence
in this road between two intents

Pale paloverde trees
dig us the one grave

The bulblight flickers
figures are there searching
combing the ghost-town

You stand with blue lips
back to the door
alien and fanatic
covering me

But how can love recede
but how can love recede
those slit domes
through which the night keeps pouring
These are the five days
outside the calendar

The first is Hair
high noon and desert starlight convocate

The second is Eye
a day of mourning a quetzal-
plumed aztec chief vanishing into the sun's black target

The third is Hand
strangely small and muted and undramatic
mortised to my mood of observing things

The fourth is Soul
it is tomorrow

The fifth is Vagina
after the storm I go out into its silence
and find fresh paloverde trees and my dream-song
It is my kachina-mask
it is my kachina-mask
instead of patched jeans
you come to me dressed
as the traditional spy
and seducer quelling your nature
it is my birthday you say

long black gloves
garterbelt and stockings
tense as a strung bow

I fuck it as I pretend
it is you I fuck
it is the fetich I fuck
it is the god
the mountain around which
everything moves it is here
and here and here
in these fulcra of greatest anguish

I adore the oppugnant stresses
agent and double agent and triple agent

wearing my kachina-mask
I will betray anything
wearing my kachina-mask

You
the song
bring a smile to my lips
I cannot silence

Muse you are dead
why do you walk along my dreams
my dry veins
hunting your murdered children
and wailing and scratching huge rents
in the backs of lost travellers
like the ghost-woman of the sandflats of the Santa Cruz
I dream
a night-trek of many days
I am impelled to go on
solely by a woman's voice
and the glow of her watch face
at six o'clock always

Listen
Now I come to expel you from your house
Now I come to tear you from my breast
You must rise without weeping
You must dress against the cold of your road
You must pack my gift the unicorn head
You must leave behind the fake wedding ring
I bury your spit in earth
your tear your sweat
the moisture of your cunt I bury deep in rock
So let it be with you
Never creep back into my dream
From you I dry out as from heroin
My soul shall become white again
Your soul shall become blue and later white
Listen

And you earthmother
and you earthwife
this love you lay
selfless as gravity
ah what a burden

ah what a burden

Houses are nets of intrigue
poisonous diaries at nightfall
bedrooms plotting against dressing-rooms
dressing-rooms against guest-rooms
guest-rooms against studies
studies against drawing rooms

burning jealousy and shivering excitement
pressing scorches on the same breasts

all arteries by love corrupted

shall I betray its treachery

Now as the earth curves gently like her lying breast
now our days ring with each other's sleep
I am tired of faces
that shine next to me as close
as a filling station the other side of a motorway
softly shining
at night

You have braided this delicate braid
because I would like it

your confession is a drunk tractor-driver
veering and singing for joy in a prairie of corn
between Mexican silver and Arizonac gold

Let the downpour be stored
let the song
carry its own substance

Road-runner desert bird
killer of rattlesnakes
circle her swinging breasts
with cactus-spines

Stars of the Sonoran
be jealous of her hair
descend still closer
and blind to its radiance
whom she is with

Hair of my new love
of my extremist
dim the close stars
that who walks with her
receive no power

Night
and through the judas hole
one blue star
questions my meaning

Blue star
I do not intend
to hide or escape
let them do their worst

Let her who is fated
hold a gun to my head
with shaking fingers
prepared to kill

A woman you become
time and again
blue star
a woman you become

Which of them blue
star are you by whom
through the judas hole
I am truly seen

You
the song
I
the dream

In beauty it is finished

The white wind blows by day
the blue wind all the time
the white wind masks the blue
the blue wind blows all the same
at night the white wind dies
the blue wind is supreme

If ever the blue wind die
it will take the form of a song
sacred in every note
it will not ever be heard
everything will be there
it will be so short a song

My soul is very lonely
blind he has touched your face
he sends me to be a go-between
to beg you to come

bring a flower of the saguaro cactus
to cure my friend

The indian cemetery at Xan Xavier
square and facing east
their white and nameless crosses

your hand gently enchaining me
and your eyes with love releasing me

it is not of death I think
on this happy day
but as if the whole universe moves towards the east

Notes to the poems: "kachina" (Pueblo-Navajo)—any form concealing a god's presence; "the lord's candles"—yucca blossoms; "saguaros"—tall, limbed cactuses (pronounced su-aro).

THE MAMMOTH HUNTERS

DAVID REDD

They were crossing a featureless snow-covered plain. Dark trees lined the horizon.

Dender, walking ahead of the other two hunters, found himself staring at the silent fur-clad back of their guide. Kashtanov was no ordinary man. He had said that there were mammoths beyond the trees, but how did he know? Perhaps Kashtanov was a creature of the past himself. Certainly there was something subhuman about his features, the powerful thickset limbs and the dark bushy hair. He seemed entirely at ease in the Ice Age.

Dender shivered. He wished he was home.

"Hey, Dender!" The other hunters had caught him up.

"We're trying to fit you in," said Borgman. "This isn't your meat at all. Why did you come here?"

"I—"

Dender hated explaining himself to these men.

"Any reason I shouldn't have come?"

"Hell, no," said Reuter. "Anyone can hunt mammoths. No, you don't look the type, that's all."

"I haven't done this before," said Dender. "I'm new."

"Hey, we can see that!" Borgman grinned. "Your jacket's still shiny from the wrapper."

Dender shrugged. "I have to start somewhere."

"Sure, we all do. You've done no hunting in our time, then?"

"No. Only target shooting,"

"We'll have to try you out," said Borgman. "Let's drop a marker and have some practice now."

"All right," said Dender. He didn't dare refuse.

Reuter pulled out a red plastic diamond. It was much smaller than the regulation target.

Kashtanov halted. He stared at the three hunters. He looked more like a great shaggy Ice Age animal than ever, thought Dender.

"No shooting," said Kashtanov. "Too soon."

"Come on, man," said Borgman. "No harm in a little practice."

Kashtanov slowly shook his head. "Shots carry."

Borgman gestured at the white snowfield around them. "Look at it! Not a mammoth in sight. We might as well fire at *something*."

Dender licked his lips. "Perhaps Kashtanov's right. I mean, they say mammoths get scared off very easily."

"True," said Reuter. "These aren't simulations—nobody's programmed them to stay around."

Borgman hefted his gun. "I came here for shooting, not walking!"

"Beyond the trees," said Kashtanov.

Dender saw Reuter put away the red target.

Borgman relaxed. "It's the damned waiting I can't stand. I've got to *see* the beasts."

Dender nodded, not understanding. They moved on.

"This snow gets monotonous," said Reuter. "It's too empty."

"No distractions, I suppose," said Dender.

"Yeah, not like those southern time-safaris. They say the jungles are crawling with animals, lions, snakes, leeches, all of them after you. You spend more time fighting pests than hunting."

"That's what I figured," said Borgman. He chewed a wad of coco-fibre. "I've been in this game ten years. Started young. I've gone after everything the parks can make, even those recon dinosaurs they tried out." He spat used fibres into the snow. "The last two years, I've had the safeties off every time. And I got the beasts."

The safeties off—Dender understood why Borgman was going after live game. He'd be off to Africa next.

For Dender, one hunt would be enough.

Borgman was still talking.

"The way I see it," he said, "people are born hunters. For millions of years we had to chase our food and kill it. We're still killers."

"Maybe," said Dender. "But we're city people now."

"City jellyfish!" Borgman swore. "They're not men, not killers, not anything. Our babysoft equalitans are spineless weaklings without the guts to explore the next block."

"Usually it's not worth exploring," said Reuter.

Borgman spat out more coco-fibres.


J. CAMPBELL '72

"This is the only real life, out here hunting the way our ancestors did. Life's worth damn-all until you push it to the limit."

Dender knew what Borgman meant by the limit.

"Take him!" Borgman indicated Kashtanov's broad back ahead. "I hate that ape's guts already, but at least he's a man. He's not sitting on his backside in an office."

Kashtanov plodded on without sign that he had heard.

"Hunting," said Borgman. "I never wanted anything else. This is living. How about you, Dender? You feel more alive out here?"

"Not yet," said Dender.

Back at the Centre, the officials had described the time-safaris when he signed up. No other use of time-travel had been so popular, despite the expense of maintaining the transmitter link.

Guides were expensive too—and Kashtanov, they said, was one of their best. Dender was reassured by that. Kashtanov's name seemed oddly familiar, but he couldn't remember why. After the routine medical check he signed the safari contract and from then on he was a hunter.

An hour later, they reached the trees. Kashtanov left them eating in a clearing while he scouted ahead.

Reuter stood guard; Dender and Borgman divided the soya mash. It was very quiet in the forest, dark and still among the trees. Dender tried to make conversation.

"I haven't seen any trails," he said. "Why's Kashtanov so sure there are mammoths here?"

Borgman shrugged. "He's guessing. He doesn't *know* any more than we do. How could he? He has enough trouble thinking of words!"

"His words are very precise," said Reuter. "He says nothing superfluous."

At that moment they heard the animals.

A crashing noise echoed from the forest. Dender jumped up, spilling his mash. "What's that?"

"Beasts," said Borgman, snatching up his powergun.

Reuter was already facing the noise, rifle ready.

The sound grew louder, a snapping of branches and an occasional *thump!* Something huge was pounding through the trees. Dender tried to imagine it, a mammoth, woolly rhinoceros, a cave bear. . . .

He fingered the release disc in his pocket. If he pressed the central button, the monitor would snatch them all back into their own time. Each of them had one of these emergency discs.

Then the noise grew fainter again. The thing was going away. Dender took his hand from the disc thankfully.

"After it!" said Borgman, eager.

Reuter shook his head. "No splitting up. Where's Kashtanov?"

"He's not back," said Dender, looking round.

"We'd better wait," said Borgman. "If he doesn't come back we'll go after him."

Dender tried to brush the food from his clothes.

"Now then, you," said Borgman, approaching him, "what's in that pocket?"

"Eh?" Dender backed away.

"I saw you reaching for something. Out with it!"

Before Dender could protest, Borgman pulled the disc from his pocket.

"I thought so," said Borgman in disgust. "Call yourself a hunter? Executive class—never been outside a city in your life!"

Dender nodded miserably. "I didn't want to come—I couldn't back out—"

"I should tear you apart for mammoth bait! That's all you're fit for! No wonder you look exec, you little rat—"

"That's enough shouting," said Reuter. "You'll frighten off all the game for miles."

Borgman scowled. "You stay out of this!"

Dender grabbed his disc. "Look here, Borgman! See this? If I press it now you'll be home without your hunt! Keep away from me!"

Reuter came between them. "Borgman, hold off Dender, put that away."

Reuter, he realised, was the only one still holding a gun.

"All right," said Borgman at last. "He's only an exec." He came closer to Dender again. "But listen, you boneless time-server, if you wreck this hunt, if you send us back with your jittery fingers, I'll have my kill and it'll be you. I'll beat your brains out the minute we get back. Whatever we face out here, there's worse coming from me. Understand?"

"Yes . . . yes," Dender gasped. "Just leave me alone . . ."

"If you press that button," said Borgman, "I'll kill you!"

At the edge of the clearing, Kashtanov was gnawing a protein bar and watching them.

"Better move on," said Reuter. "I've had enough."

Borgman gathered up his equipment. He called to the guide, "Did you find our mammoths?"

"By the ravine, past the trees,"

Mammoths, thought Dender. Massive hairy elephants, with

huge curved tusks. Borgman or the mammoths, which was worse?

And now there was no escape.

Dender relived the horror as he followed Kashtanov. A time-server, Borgman had called him. Perhaps he was; there were so many people and so few useful tasks. But it still hurt to be called a parasite.

At least he had gone further than most of his friends. No more solido tracks of the past for him—this was real. He had never dreamed that one day he would be in the past himself. He remembered, years ago, hearing the news that Kashtanov had discovered time travel . . .

His thoughts stopped.

Kashtanov . . . discovered time travel.

Now he remembered.

If nothing else, Dender had learned caution in the Ice Age. He waited to approach Kashtanov until the others were looking elsewhere. Then, to his surprise, Kashtanov approached him.

"Be careful," said Kashtanov, his voice thick and earnest. "The ravine is dangerous."

"Thank you," said Dender. "But—"

"I will watch you, city man. You perhaps I can save."

Borgman and Reuter drew closer; Kashtanov moved away.

Dender was left with his questions unasked. Why had the first man to travel through time become a guide for the hunters? And why. . . .

His questions would have to wait longer, Dender saw. They had reached the end of the trees.

Below him was a foaming river, in a gorge of yellow clay and stone.

Across the river he saw brown animal bodies moving on the snow. The mammoths.

Borgman turned a rangesight on the mammoths. "We could get them from here."

Dender watched one of the mammoths, its red-brown bulk moving ponderously nearer the river. It paused uncertainly, facing them across the ravine before turning aside. Its long yellow tusks scraped down at the snow.

Dender hardly dared move. And he'd agreed to hunt such a creature! He said, "It saw us."

"Smelt us more likely," said Borgman. "The wind's rising. Damn it, we'd better move across now."

"Can't you shoot them from here?"

Borgman patted his gun. "Beam spread. Even if they kept still—" He realised Dender had spoken. "This isn't target practice. This is hunting!"

"In the centre," said Reuter. "The old bull."

Dender saw the animal he meant. Stocky and powerful, with one broken tusk. It stood as if it expected trouble.

"No good," said Borgman. "I'm not having that cracked fang on a trophy."

"He would be an opponent," said Reuter. "Not a victim."

Dender found the courage to question Borgman again. "What sort do you want?"

"No question which one," said Borgman. "That young brute on the left."

Borgman's choice was a magnificent beast, thought Dender. Bigger than the old bull, its brown coat shone, its ivory tusks were perfect. It seemed to radiate animal strength towards them. Dender shook inside at the thought of arousing it. Only a born hunter could attack a mammoth.

"Come on," said Borgman. "Back into the trees, circle round over the river. I don't trust that old one."

"He's mine," said Reuter.

Dender followed them through the trees, glimpsing the mammoths in occasional gaps.

"Best crossing here," said Kashtanov, pointing. The trees spread down a small slope towards the river, giving them cover most of the way.

Kashtanov's rifle, Dender saw, was only an old-fashioned projectile weapon. Kashtanov must have no interest in sport for himself; he merely found the targets for others.

Dender, of course, had not chosen a target.

From the trees, Dender stared dubiously at the water rushing past the stream-bed boulders. His clothes were sealed against outside water, but—

"Too rough," said Borgman. "We'll cross at the shallow part upstream—nearer the mammoths."

Down in the ravine, they could not see the plains above. The water had cut deeply into the soft glacial clay. Dender could imagine the beasts waiting for them on the plain. He was a fool to follow the hunters like this.

At the crossing, Kashtanov waded into the stream. He nodded for them to follow.

Dender splashed in behind the others. Immediately the water tugged at his feet, bitterly cold. Melted ice, he thought. In the centre he stumbled, and splashed sideways in the strong current.

As never before he wished he was home. But if he touched the disc he would have to reckon with Borgman.

He was across, freezingly cold, ashamed of his clumsy progress. He recovered his breath and started scrambling up the muddy slope.

To his left, Borgman slipped.

"Agh!" The hunter clawed his way up again.

Why, thought Dender, he can make mistakes too. Keep going, he told himself. No other exec would have got this far.

And he was almost pleased when he reached the top beside Reuter.

His pleasure vanished. The mammoths must have heard Borgman's cry. They were restless, turning their heads towards the river. Involuntarily Dender's hand went to his pocket.

"Don't," said Reuter. "It wouldn't be wise."

Dender would have sworn that the hunter's eyes had never left the mammoths. He nodded and let his hand fall.

The mammoths seemed to make up their minds simultaneously. The whole herd broke into a slow purposeful movement, heading towards the hunters.

"Too many," said Borgman. "One crack from a beam burst and they'll charge. Back to the river!"

"Retreat?" murmured Reuter, but Borgman was already running.

Dender flung himself back down the slope. He felt his rifle strike a boulder and wrench itself out of his grasp. He tumbled downwards without stopping.

He could hear the unearthly rush of the mammoths above. He plunged into the river, and fell. The icy water caught him.

Before Dender could recover, Kashtanov had turned back, reached him, plucked him from the river. Dender reached the shore slung across Kashtanov's shoulders, face buried in fur.

"Fool!" shouted Borgman.

The first mammoths appeared, sliding over the brink with the barest hesitation—

"Now," said Reuter. Very deliberately he went back into the river.

Reuter watched the mammoths charging and calmly lifted his rifle. Dender realised he was looking for something.

A mammoth with a broken tusk approached the edge, and halted. Dender knew why Reuter had waited. But the descending mammoths were so close, the young bulls. Dender pulled the disc from his pocket. If he pressed that button, Reuter would be pulled back to home-time before the mammoths could reach him.

If not, Reuter in his crazy ambition for the old bull would stay there and be killed.

But he shouldn't press the button.

Reuter aimed upwards at the old bull. He fired. The bull reared as the red beam flashed into him.

Borgman fired too, at the nearer mammoths, and Kashtanov was using his old cartridge gun. Dender found himself blazing away with his side pistol.

The nearest mammoth was already dying when it hit Reuter.

The hunter crumpled up in the river, borne along by the impact. Man and mammoth fell together.

Only four beasts in all had come down. The rest stopped on the plain. The old bull crashed into the water, beside the other dead mammoths.

Dender's whole body was shaking. He saw the rest of the herd milling around above the slope. One of them was the young powerful beast Borgman had wanted.

Borgman was gazing at the huge carcasses. He looked up at the remaining mammoths and scowled. Then he went in for Reuter's body.

Dender found that his safety disc had fallen unnoticed into the snow.

The hunt was over. Kashtanov signalled the base, and a technician arrived to transport the trophies and Reuter. The technician surveyed the carnage. "Quite a party. You hunters play rough!" He went off to wire up the mammoths.

"It wasn't my idea," said Dender to himself.

"Mammoths rarely charge," said Kashtanov. "Only if they sense weakness."

Borgman came over. "We'll bring the old bull back as well. I suppose Reuter would have wanted it."

Dender nodded. "Whatever you say." He looked again at his safety disc, wishing he had used it while Reuter was still alive. "I could have saved him, you know."

Borgman shook his head. "No. Once a man gets an idea into his head there's no stopping him. You did right."

"It was the first right thing you did," said Kashtanov.

Dender sighed. "At least you all got a mammoth."

Kashtanov grunted, and turned away. "It's not mammoths I hunt."

In the silence they heard the river bubbling, and the technician whistling as he worked.

THE FUTURE ON A CHIPPED PLATE

BRIAN W. ALDISS

The World of John W. Campbell's "Astounding"

> He opened his mind. All around him, stretching across the earth, the linked thoughts of the Baldies made a vast, intricate network, perhaps the last and mightiest structure man would ever build. They drew him into their midst and made him one with them. There were no barriers at all. They did not judge. They understood, all of them, and he was a part of them all....
>
> Henry Kuttner (Lewis Padgett): "Humpty Dumpty".

It is useless to speculate upon what might have happened if Gernsback's literary flair had been equal to his business sense, or if one editor responsive to the main currents of the time had arisen in the early thirties. Such an editor did not emerge until the end of the decade.

Meanwhile, with the slumps and the strikes and the depressions, it was a tough time both for literature and for people. The reading public of America seemed to want only wonder and escapism. That was what they got, alike from Hollywood and the pulps.

It is for these reasons that the treasured sf magazines of the thirties now make painful reading. Yet, in a fashion they have survived; they have survived as artefacts of that now remote period. They are strange and beautiful to look at. Their covers are gaudy and gorgeous. The art work, in fact, has survived well, for some of the artists such as Frank R. Paul, a Gernsback discovery, Wesso, Virgil Finlay, and Dold projected a genuine outré personality. They are now antiques, valued by connoisseurs much as Meissner porcelain or English watercolours are valued.

These connoisseurs are, in the main, science fiction fans. Gernsback soon discovered and made use of an active fandom,

lads who read every word of every magazine with pious fervour and believed every word of editorial guff. These fans formed themselves into leagues and groups, issued their own amateur magazines or "fanzines", and were generally a very vocal section of the readership. Many writers and editors later rose from their ranks.

This particular factor of a devoted and enthusiastic readership is peculiar to science fiction, then and now. The fans founded their own publishing houses, instituted their own international awards (called, of course, the "Hugos"), and organised their own conventions on local, state, national and international scales. No writer can be other than grateful for this attention in an age when writers by and large complain of isolation from their audience. But there is an obverse side of every coin, and the truth is that several promising writers have been spoiled by seeking popularity exclusively from the fans who—like any other group of enthusiasts —want more of what they have already been enjoying; to attain true stature as a writer, one must look far beyond the fervid confines of fandom, however cosy it may seem by the campfire, yarning of old times.

How far that campfire was from the civilised arts! Those gaudy covers, for instance, which in time became an art form of their own, were totally divorced from all the exciting new movements of the early twentieth century. Cubism, futurism, surrealism exerted no influence. At the time when Burroughs began to write of Barsoom, the Italian painter George de Chirico was founding metaphysical painting; one of his inspirations was Jules Verne,[1] and surely those strange paintings of his would have touched the imagination even of Gernsback's stable. Yet it was not until the early sixties that modern science fiction met modern art, when the English Penguin Books launched their new science fiction series with surrealist and other covers, Bradbury and Blish with details of Max Ernst canvases, Picasso with Roy Lewis's "The Evolution Man", Hal Clement with Yves Tanguy, Frank Herbert with Paul Klee, Aldiss with Dominguez.[2]

By that time, science fiction and fantasy had produced many artists whose names and works were bywords within the field, even if they were unknown beyond it. Virgil Finlay, Paul, Wesso, and Dold have already been mentioned. Later came Orban, Charles Schneeman, Roy Krenkel, Hubert Rogers, Timmins, Edd Cartier, John Schoenherr, Kelly Freas, Jack Gaughan, and two exceptionally fine artists, Richard Powers, whose rise is roughly coincidence with the growth of sf in paperback, with the use of freer techniques, and "Emsh"—Ed Emshwiller, later to be

known as a film maker (his "Relativity" was one of the early and lasting successes of the Underground cinema). Among their English counterparts are Brian Lewis, Eddy Jones, and Bruce Pennington. The Japanese have also produced excellent sf artists, the tremendous wit and style of Hiroshi Manabe being especially impressive. In Europe, the Italians have produced some of the most striking art.

The history of science fiction art deserves to be written. In many respects, it has been less provincial than the science fiction of the magazines—to which we now turn.

What we see in the thirties is very minor competence, where no writer or editor seems to have a very clear idea of what he is doing, beyond producing safe variations on what has gone before. Basically, two moods predominate, the fantasy mode of Burroughs and Merritt, and the "Popular Mechanics" mode of Gernsback and his merry men.

The authors who are of most interest to us today are those who somehow managed to embrace the two modes and add some quality of their own. Three names stand out. Two of them, within the limits of the field, are innovators: Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. and John W. Campbell; Jack Williamson.

Within sf fandom—that is, the coterie of readers to whom science fiction virtually means the magazines—E. E. Smith Ph.D. (known as "Doc" Smith) is one of the greatest names, if not the greatest. Well, we have met many superlatives by now, and E. E. Smith (1890–1965) certainly introduces us to many more. His is the logical development of Gernsbackian thought, the infinite extension of technology for its own sake, the glamorous disease of giantism. It was E. E. Smith who started science fiction off on the billion year spree which is now an integral part of its image. Before his advance, the light years went down like ninepins and the sober facts of science were appropriated for a binge of impossible adventure. Smith set the Injuns among the stars.

Smith was a doughnut-mix specialist when he had his first story, "Skylark of Space" accepted by "Amazing" in 1928. It was full of super-science. Interstellar travel was taken for granted, and the heroes were super-heroes. At the onset of his career, Smith had hit a formula which he never abandoned. The "Skylark" series was followed by the Lensman series, Smith's magnum opus, which eventually ran to six volumes, running from "Triplanetary" (serialized in "Amazing" in 1934) to "Children of the Lens", serialized in "Astounding" in 1947.[3]

This series postulated two extremely ancient cultures, mutually incompatible, the Arisians and the Edorians, the former being

good, the latter horrendously evil. They lived in separate galaxies, unknown to each other until the galaxies happened to drift into each other, the Arisians being gentle and For Civilization, the Edorians being utterly sexless and For Power. The tale of their struggle, with certain Earthmen and other alien life aiding Arisia, fills the six books. "Triplanetary" begins: "Two thousand million or so years ago two galaxies were colliding; or rather, were passing through each other" . . . and goes on from there. Such events as the sinking of Atlantis, the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and the world wars, have been but incidents in the long struggle.

Doc Smith, in short, wrote the biggest game of Cops and Robbers in existence. The saga is loaded to its armpits in unstoppable forces and immoveable objects, in hyper-spatial tubes and super-weapons and planets full of horrendous life armed with terrible mental capabilities.

> And then the doors and windows crashed in, admitting those whom no other bifurcate race has ever willingly faced in hand-to-hand combat—full armed Valerians, swinging their space-axes!
>
> The gangsters broke, then, and fled in panic disorder; but escape from Narcotics' fine-meshed net was impossible. They were cut down to a man.
>
> "QX, Kinnison?" came two hard, sharp thoughts. The Lensman did not see the Tellurian, but Lieutenant Peter van Buskirk did. That is, he saw him, but did not look at him.
>
> "Hi, Kim, you little Tellurian wart!" That worthy's thought was a yell. "Ain't we got fun?"
>
> "QX, fellows—thanks," to Gerrond and to Winstead, and "Ho, Bus! Thanks, you big, Valerian ape!" to the gigantic Dutch-Valerian with whom he had shared so many experiences in the past. "A good clean-up, fellows?"
>
> "One hundred percent, thanks to you. We'll put you . . ."
>
> "Don't, please. You'll clog my jets if you do. I don't appear in this anywhere—it's just one of your good routine jobs of mopping up. Clear ether, fellows, I've got to do a flit."
>
> "Where?" all three wanted to ask, but they didn't—the Grey Lensman was gone.

The whole gigantic roadshow works by magic. The Lenses of the Lensmen, which resemble fantastic jewels, are semi-sentiment life-forms bestowed by Arisia, which provide their wearers with amazing paranormal powers. Space ships travel across hundreds of light years at faster than light speed by "inertialess drive". They can be indetectable when required, can evade thought-screens, can

be converted to perform amazing feats hitherto unheard of in the realm of physics. The Lensmen wear indetectable armour, can enter the minds of sinister aliens or harmless insects. They are unkillable, and encounter the most formidable situations with schoolboy glee.

Smith took great pains with his epic, rewriting the earlier parts to hang together with the whole enormous concept. And the concept is fine. Unfortunately, everything moves at such breath-taking speed—or else stops entirely while everyone talks and the plot catches up—that all the good things in theory are by-passed The author conveys no visual experience and does not make his immense distances real. Nevertheless, for youngsters the entire astounding edifice holds a lot of joy and excitement, mainly because, whatever else Doc Smith could or could not do, he clearly *enjoyed* spinning out this doughnut-mix of galactic action.[4]

He died in 1965, loaded with honours by the science fiction field, unknown beyond it.

It must have been a painful thing to have to write for the pulps in the thirties. One had to conform to formula or get out. There was no sort of cultural tradition or precedent to appeal to. Perhaps things would never have changed, had not editors often been short of material and published stories which, to their amazement, readers liked. . . . However that may be, a few writers did spring up among the hacks like John Russel Fearn, who pillaged ideas from all quarters and wrote under many names.[5] Many of them like Edmund Hamilton, the inventor of "Captain Future", are worth a chapter in their own right, but we must take as representative the stalwart Jack Williamson.

Williamson began writing in Gernsback's "Amazing" and never looked back. He was much influenced by Abe Merritt, and managed to assimilate Merritt's sense of colour and movement without taking over the fairies as well. His output was fairly prolific, as outputs needed to be if one was to live by writing sf in a field where "Amazing" and "Wonder" were paying half a cent a word on publication. His greatest early success was with a serial in 1934 "Astounding", "The Legion of Space", a "Gosh-Wow!" epic which thundered along on the cloven heels of Doc Smith. But there are three later novels of Williamson's which have much more to offer, and which—unlike some of the so-called "classics" of the field—have not been reprinted as often as they might have been.

"The Legion of Time" was a serial in a 1938 "Astounding". Its

plot, while being philosophically meaningless, is a delight. Lanning, a Harvard man who becomes a reporter, is thinking of time. Because of this, he is visited by the fair Lethonee. Lethonee comes from far in the future; she carries an immense jewel, which allows her to travel back to Lanning. Later, Lanning is visited by the sexy Sorayina, also from the future. Lethonee's and Sorayina's futures are mutually exclusive. One will materialise at the expense of the other. Either Jonbar, Lethonee's capital, or Goyonchi, the tawdry capital of Sorayina, inhabited mainly by anthropoid ants, will come into being, depending on how their potentialities are strengthened in Lanning's own time.

After many desperate struggles, which Lanning's Legion of Time generally wins, it is discovered that the crucial moment at which the time-lines divide is a day in 1921. The Legion's time-ship heads for 1921, closely followed by Sorayina's dreaded black Goyonchi ship.

In 1921, they find a boy in a meadow. This is John Barr, who will either pick up a magnet in the grass and thus be moved to become a scientist (making great disoveries from which will develop Jonbar), or will fail to pick it up, will pick up a pebble instead and become a migratory worker. In the latter case, his great discovery will be made by "an exiled engineer from Soviet Eurasia and a renegade Buddhist priest", who will turn the discovery (something about mentally released atomic power) to evil ends, thus developing Goyonchi.

Lanning battles through despite all the enemy can do, pitches the magnet at the boy's feet, and sees the "very light of science" dawn in the boy's eyes. So Goyonchi is defeated. Lanning sails the timestreams to Jonbar to get the girl, and is agreeably surprised (though not very surprised) to find that Lethonee and Sorayina have become merged into one. He's got them both!

Fairy tales have a way of revealing hard truths about everyday life. Science fiction so often turns out to be a fairy tale—never more than in this instance! Some of the inconsistencies in this tale have been discussed elsewhere;[6] but its charm obstinately remains. Like Doc Smith's saga, this also works on magic. Most traditional sf does so. The magical spells are given names like "mentally released atomic power"; the hyper-drives merely light the way to Babylon.

Hardly surprisingly, Williamson's best novel deals directly with magic. "Darker Than You Think" was published in "Unknown" in 1940. Barbee, like Lanning, is a reporter. He goes to cover the return of a scientific expedition from the interior of Asia, the members of which he knows. They return with an iron-bound

box which contains some terrible secret they guard with their lives. Barbee gets mixed up with a beautiful girl called April Bell who sends odd little shivers down his spine. She presents a Lethonee Sorayina duality: by day, a beautiful girl; in his dreams, a superb wolf bitch. And he has the power to change to wolf in his dreams and pursue her into the wilds. In that dream state, she leads him to enter houses and kill. Barbee soon has proof that that dream state is no dream.

In the chest that Dr Mondrick and his colleagues are guarding so anxiously is proof that that Homo lycanthropus once existed—the witch people, whose genes merged with mankind and may now, by skilful interbreeding, become dominant again. One by one, Mondrick, his expedition members, his wife, are killed. Barbee is there, responsible, although he tries to help them. Only his closest old friend, Sam Quain, survives, lugging the chest with its deadly secret. Barbee tries to help him, but Quain will not trust him. Despite the mounting crisis, Barbee tries to remain human. The taunting wolf with its green eyes and red tongue calls to him. Soon the Child of Night, the great new witch, will emerge and start a new reign of his kind.

Barbee is the Child. He turns into a pterosaur, kills Quain, and destroys the evidence that might make mankind rise against his kind. Then he follows the white wolf into the forest.

Preposterous though this sounds in outline, it is extremely well worked out, full of genuine suspense and excitement, and with a good hefty sense of evil working for it. The characters, though obvious, are clearly drawn; but the major advantage of the novel is that it is full of the pleasure of wild life, of running free in the dark, of the forests, the mountainside, and of the scents on the breeze. By God, the novel works like a *novel*, not a diagram, showing us without lecturing how splendid it would be to chase a white she-wolf through the night.

> And suddenly he was free.
>
> Those painful bonds, that he had worn a whole lifetime, were abruptly snapped. He sprang lightly off the bed, and stood a moment sniffing the odours that clotted the air in the little apartment—the burning reek of whisky from that empty glass on the chiffonier, the soapy dampness of the bathroom and the stale sweaty pungence of his soiled laundry in the hamper. The place was too close; he wanted fresh air.
>
> He trotted quickly to the open window, and scratched impatiently at the catch on the screen. It yielded, after a moment, and he dropped to the damp, hard earth of Mrs Sadrowski's abandoned flower bed. He shook himself, gratefully sniffed the clean air of that tiny bit of soil, and crossed

the sidewalk into the heavy reek of burned oil and hot rubber that rose up from the pavement. He listened again for the white she-wolf's call, and ran fleetly down the street.

Free—

No longer was he imprisoned, as he had always been, in that slow, clumsy, insensitive bipedal body. His old human form seemed utterly foreign to him now, and somehow monstrous. Surely four nimble feet were better than two, and a smothering cloak had been lifted from his senses.

Free, and swift, and strong!

"Here I am, Barbee!" the white bitch was calling across the sleeping town.

The plot-hinge of "Darker Than You Think" is characteristic of the period: humanity, or reality, is revealed by some accident of scientific research or discovery to be other than we have assumed. The revelation is always unpleasant. The great exemplar is Charles Forte's dictum, "We're property!", which was embodied in a novel by Eric Frank Russell, "Sinister Barrier" (published in "Unknown", as was "Darker Than You Think"). Slightly later, van Vogt's "Asylum" depicts Earth as a dumping ground for the Bent One. As the psychiatrist Glen says in Williamson's novel, "The unconscious mind does sometimes seem a dark cave of horrors, and the same unpleasant facts are often expressed in the symbolism of legend and myth". Faced by the horrors of a global war, the sf writers were fashioning their own kinds of myth. For all its clumsiness, "Darker Than You Think" still works in this manner.

"The Humanoids" is less successful. As a novel-length sequel to a short story called "With Folded Hands", it appeared in "Astounding" in 1948 under the title ". . . And Searching Mind". Williamson presents a well-constructed plot, buttressed with learned bits of pseudo-science, which centres around the coming of robots to a planet geared for war with its neighbour. The first robot that the hero, Forester, sees, strikes him as attractive when it drops its human mask.

There was nothing really horrible about what emerged from that discarded mask.

Rather, it was beautiful. The shape of it was nearly human, but very slim and graceful, with no mechanical awkwardness or angularity whatever. Half a head shorter than Forester, it was nude now, and sexless. The sleek skin of it was a shining black, sheened with changing lights of bronze and blue. (Ch. IX)

The humanoids arrive by the thousand and take over in the

midst of the crisis. They are units of a cybernetic brain many light years away, and their prime directive is "To Serve and Obey, and Guard Men from Harm". In effect, they bring peace by rendering men powerless—in the most benevolent possible way. Unlike Čapek's humanoids, Williamson's are utterly subservient, and he wisely leaves the ending open, as the humanoids lay their benevolent plans for Andromeda—is their peace-keeping a triumph or tragedy? As Damon Knight says in Chapter 4 of "In Search of Wonder", the book is important because its theme is important.

Unfortunately, the impact is greatly muffled by having it set far away across the galaxy. To have set it on Earth would have been dramatically better. And, of course, the philosophical implications take second place to a tale of adventure. All the same, it has plenty of readability, because Williamson's strong visual sense is at work here as in "Darker Than You Think" (we are constantly reminded of the *presence* of the androgenous metal creatures), and his characters are not thick-ear supermen like Doc Smith's but pretty ordinary fallible people, in need of some sort of prop just like the rest of us.

Under his own name and pen-names Williamson wrote many other novels and stories. Unfortunately, like Merritt, under whose roseate shade he commenced writing, he seems to have fallen silent towards the end of his career, apart from writing juveniles with Frederik Pohl. He is currently teaching science fiction in a university.

The third of our figures who rose to eminence in the thirties magazines is a controversial figure who had a greater effect on magazine science fiction than any other man.

John W. Campbell (1910–1971) was one of the field's intellectuals. He had strong ideas, some of them erroneous, but his positive side triumphed over many of his mistakes. His first story was published in the January 1930 "Amazing"—"When the Atoms Failed". He rapidly made his name in the field of maglamaniac galaxy-busting being pioneered by "Doc" Smith with stories whose very titles can still light the dim eyes of senior fans: "Piracy Preferred", "The Black Star Passes", "The Islands of Space", "The Mightiest Machine", "Invaders from the Infinite", and so on. Most of these stories show a deep interest in complex machines and are studded with explanations of how they work.

In 1934, Campbell changed his approach. Taking on the pseudonym of Don A. Stuart (a name derived from his first wife),

Campbell wrote a series of short stories in much more meditative mood. The first was "Twilight"; it imitates the dying fall of Well's "Time Machine", and features a man who goes into the far distant future when man is extinct because his curiosity is dead. A civilized regret is the mood aimed at. Campbell adopts a kind of sing-song intonation and a faux-naïve style.

> Can you appreciate the crushing hopelessness it brought to me? I, who love science, who see in it, or have seen in it, the salvation, the raising of mankind—to see those wondrous machines, of man's triumphant maturity, forgotten and misunderstood. The wondrous, perfect machines that tended, protected, and cared for those gentle, kindly people who had—forgotten.

When "Twilight" was gathered into a collection by Shasta Publishers, Campbell claimed that it was "entirely different from any other science fiction that had appeared before", which is totally incorrect. It did, however, bring into magazine science fiction a third alternative to Burroughs's talking animals and Gernsback's Gosh-Wow; its "all passion spent" mood was quickly imitated by other writers, among them Lester del Rey and, later, Arthur C. Clarke.

Even in his lachrymose vein, Campbell continued to write about huge engines and the vanishing tricks of supernormal powers, interspersing them with plodding technical detail. Belief in incredible forces of ESP was to dog him all his life. Here are four paragraphs from "The Cloak of Aesir", first published in 1939, which demonstrate several of his literary characteristics. The Sarn-Mother, one of the rulers of a defeated Earth is talking:

> "Aesir spoke by telepathy. Mind to mind. We know the humans had been near to that before the Conquest, and that our minds are not so adapted to that as are the humans'. Aesir used that method.
>
> "He stood before me, and made this statement that was clear to the minds of all humans and Sarn in the Hall of Judgment. His hand of blackness reached out and touched Darnell, and the man fell to the floor and broke apart like a fragile vase. The corpse was frozen glass-hard in an instant of time.
>
> "Therefore, I released Grayth and Bartell. But I turned on Aesir's blackness the forces of certain protective devices I have built. There is an atomic blast of one-sixteenth aperture. It is, at maximum, capable of disintegrating half a cubic mile of matter per minute. There was also a focused atomic flame of two-inch aperture, sufficient to fuse about twenty-two tons of steel per second.

"These were my first tests. At maximum aperture the blackness absorbed both without sound or static discharge, or any lightening of that three-dimensional shadow."

By the time "Aesir" was published, Campbell was editor of "Astounding", taking over in 1938, at the age of twenty-eight. By this time, magazine sf was catching on. The new editor was confronted by some competition. The promising and colourful "Marvel Science Stories" appeared in 1938, to be followed by "Startling Stories", "Dynamic", and "Science Fiction". Thick and fast they came at last, and more and more and more. "Fantastic" arrived as a stable-mate to "Amazing", now owned by the Ziff-Davis chain, then "Planet Stories", and two magazines edited at first by a youthful Frederik Pohl, "Astonishing Stories" and "Super Science Stories", "Future Fiction", "Comet Stories", "Cosmic Stories", and "Stirring Science Stories" pop up shortly thereafter.

"Astounding" itself acquired a sister-magazine in the Street & Smith group. This was "Unknown", which appeared on the newsstands in the spring of 1939 and ran for less than forty issues. Campbell edited the two magazines in tandem. "Unknown" specialised in bizarre fantasy which frequently operated close to reality but stood it upside down—"Darker Than You Think" is a good example. When "Unknown" died, so, it seems, did Campbell's love of that particular genre, and a wartime mood of "realism" spread over stories that were often far from realistic.

Campbell soon proved himself a good and ambitious editor. He forced his writers to think much harder about what they were trying to say, and he clamped down on Gosh-Wowery although, when a genuinely inspired madman like A. E. van Vogt came along, he was wise enough to let him have his head. Also, he had the fortune to take over at a good time, when the monstrous footprints of Burroughs and Gernsback had, to some extent at least, obliterated one another. The stiffening breeze from Europe also introduced a more serious note.

He worked, too, on logic—a quality his competitors had always been short of. It was his own peculiar sideways logic (which accounted for his fondness for Lewis Carroll), but it led him to reject, for instance, the Bug-Eyed Monsters—known in the trade as BEMs—and many of the trashy plots that went with them. As he remarked at a later date, thinking genially about the unthinkable.

Two motives standard in BEM-style science fiction can be dismissed quickly. Aliens aren't going to invade Earth, and

breed human beings for meat animals. It makes a nice background for horror-fantasy, but it's lousy economics. It takes approximately ten years to raise one hundred pounds of human meat, and at that it takes high-cost feed to do it. Beef cattle make better sense—even though that louses up the horror motif.

And that is, of course, assuming the improbable proposition that the aliens' metabolism can tolerate terrestrial proteins at all.

If they can, of course, it's much easier to get local natives, ideally adapted to the planet's conditions, to raise the cattle. Inherently much cheaper than trying to do it yourself. Besides, the local yokels can be paid off in useless trinkets like industrial diamonds, or tawdry little force-field gadgets, children's toys that won't cut anything with any accuracy better than a microinch.

Then there's the old one about raiding Earth and carrying "Earth's fairest daughters" away as love-toys on some alien planet. Possible motive ... if you'd define "fairest" adequately. If the aliens happen to come from a bit heavier planet, the proposed raids on "Earth's fairest daughters" might turn out to be very distressing to the gorilla population. In those "Earth's fairest daughter" bits, I've noticed, nothing whatever is said about the intellectual capabilities of the "fairest"; a charming young gorilla maiden would pass the only test proposed ... if your eye for looks were slightly different. And obviously these interstellar harem-agents aren't interested in offspring; anyway there couldn't possibly be any.[7]

A team of new writers, or old writers operating under pseudonyms—often a surprisingly effective way of altering writing habits—began to gather round Campbell. Unlike many of the other editors in the field, before and after, Campbell knew when a story made sense and when it didn't. He argued strongly with his contributors—and his aguments were often well-informed and unfair. Thus he laid the foundations for what the gentle hearts of fandom call "The Golden Age".

The authority on the subject, Alva Rogers, is definite about the date. When he reaches 1939 in his chronicle, he says, "The July issue was unquestionably the first real harbinger of "Astounding's" Golden Age.[8] This issue carried a story by A. E. van Vogt, "Black Destroyer", which later became part of his book, "The Voyage of the Space Beagle". Other new writers appeared that year, soon to become famous, among them Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, and Theodore Sturgeon.

Heinlein's first short novel, "If This Goes on..." was published

early in 1940—a brisk tale of total dictatorship in the United States operating under the cloak of religion, and this was followed by a serial from L. Ron Hubbard, "Final Blackout", which supposed that the war in Europe dragged on until civilisation broke down. Hubbard had previously been known as a fantasy writer. His story and Heinlein's seemed at the time much more plausible than the lead-stories "Astounding" had hitherto been publishing.

In 1941, Heinlein revealed the plans of his scheme for a Future History series, while Asimov began his long series of stories about robots with positronic brains whose behaviour is guided by three laws of robotics which prevent them from harming men.

In this respect, Heinlein and Asimov brought literary law and order into magazine science fiction. Asimov's robot stories are amusing little puzzles, utterly without the philosophical implications of Williamson's "The Humanoids"; but Asimov's achievement is that he banished those slavering metallic hordes, or those single-minded mechanical men for ever reaching for the nearest axe, which had been a predominant feature of the magazines until Campbell's day.

Both Asimov and Heinlein brought intelligence and wide knowledge to their story-telling. Heinlein showed a preoccupation with power which was sometimes to express itself disastrously, as in a later novel, "Starship Troopers"—but that was later; in the early forties, he could do no wrong. In 1941 alone, "Astounding" published three of his novellas which can still be read with pleasure, "Logic of Empire", set on Venus, "Universe", set on a gigantic interstellar ship, and "By His Bootstraps", a time-paradox story which still delights by its ingenuity, as well as several excellent short stories. It seemed that the cosmos was his oyster, so diverse was his talent. But no author has more than one secret central theme, or needs it; "Logic" is about resistance to authority; "Universe" is about what happens when authority breaks down; and "Bootstraps" is a good-humoured demonstration of the trouble that can come when the father-figure is removed!

The Golden Age was in full swing.

The change may be read in the covers as vividly as anywhere. The symbolic always precedes the actual—a concept must be visualised before it can be realised. So the art side is often ahead of the contents. The 1938 covers of "Astounding" cover a wide range of subjects, are interesting, but have no unity. From 1939, a kind of coherence appears; the Campbell orchestra tunes up.

The January covers for 1938 and 1939 both romanticise industrial processes (i.e., organisational action as opposed to individual action)[9] and can still be used with perfect propriety as factual illustrations today. The age of the solitary inventor is nearly over. The all-action scientist-adventurer is also on his way out. Campbell was bringing the mythology of the age up to date.

What this produced was a synthesis of the previous modes of magazine sf, plus the new contributions. The result was something that for the first time could stand comparison with the science fiction we have looked at in earlier chapters, the ex-ghetto science fiction. The flavour of the two kinds was very different, but the merits of both were apparent.

While magazine science fiction could produce no Swifts, no Wellses, it nourished a whole flow of extremely accomplished entertainers who, at their best, were also thought-provoking and imagination-stirring. Whereas Kafka, Huxley, Stapledon, and other authors of that ilk were critics who arose to deal with a specific socio-technological situation, the very nature of the magazine sf field—its month-by-month continuity—produced something different: a dialogue between writers. The conditions had been there in embryo in the thirties; in the forties, under Campbell, they bore fruit. The constant cribbing of ideas became instead something of a genuine and rapturous exchange. If some of the excitement generated then is hard to detect several decades later, it is because one of the electrifying factors was precisely that creative exchange, going on from issue to issue, year by year, conducted by Campbell and other editors like Pohl—and nobody knew quite what was coming next. Every month brought the promise of something wilder and stranger—and the promise was always kept!

Something like the same exciting situation occurred in the mid-sixties, when Michael Moorcock took over "New Worlds". As Moorcock did later, Campbell seized on his editorial column to expound his theories, hoping that his writers would pick up the trail. It is typical of the whole success story of "Astounding" that it is not only the fiction which has been anthologised again and again; a selection of Campbell's editorials has also been published.[10]

The magazine sf writers differed from the Huxley kind of writer in one other important way, although that way is implied in what has already been said. They did not question the basic value of technology. They saw that technology would bring big troubles (wasn't that what sf was all about!), but they were secure in the belief that more massive doses of technology would take care

of the problem. Huxley and Lewis never laboured under such illusions.

The spaceships that Heinlein and van Vogt dreamed up would have drained the energy-systems of Earth many times over, had they been built, as well as swallowing all its metallic ores. But what *symbols* those spaceships were!

For many years, science fiction fans were fond of saying jocularly, "A spaceship is just a phallic symbol". So it often may have been in terms of cover art—Emsh for one often used spaceships deliberately as phallic symbols. But they symbolised a great deal more. In the thirties, as we have seen, they stood in for tramp steamers or ocean liners. In the writings of Campbell's new wave they might symbolise variously a spirit of dedication, manly togetherness, or a romanticised industrial process of gigantic proportions.[11]

While standing for these things, the spaceships of course served also as a convenient way of hefting their heroes across the paper light years. But one need not be an avid searcher for symbols to see that, whatever else they stood for, spaceships meant the conquest of nature. And vice versa.

> Long rows of shops and warehouses stood deserted. Doors yawned open. Neglected roofs were sagging. Ruined walls, here and there, were black from old fire. Every building was hedged with weed and brush.
>
> Far across the shattered pavements stood the saddest sight of all. A score of tall ships stood scattered across the blast aprons, where they had landed. Though small by comparison with such enormous interstellar cruisers as the "Great Director", some of them towered many hundred feet above the broken concrete and the weeds. They stood like strange cenotaphs to the dead Directorate.
>
> Once they had been proud vessels. They had carried the men and the metal to build Fort America. They had transported labor battalions to Mars, dived under the clouds of Venus, explored the cold moons of Jupiter and Saturn. They had been the long arm and the mighty fist of Tyler's Directorate, and the iron heel upon the prostrate race of man.
>
> Now they stood in clumps of weeds, pointing out at the empty sky they once had ruled. Red wounds marred their sleek skins, where here and there some small meteoritic particle must have scratched the mirror bright polish, letting steel go to rust. And the rust, in the rains of many years, had washed in long, ugly, crimson streaks down their shining sides.

An excerpt from Jack Williamson's "The Equaliser", in a 1947

"Astounding", a story about a power beyond the atomic which makes every man his own master, so that the social contract is dissolved. Williamson appears to be in some confusion here—the rockets were used for oppression, yet their abandonment is "the saddest sight of all"—but the connection between spaceships and mastery of the environment is abundantly clear.

"Astounding" developed into a hymn to this connection. The hymn may not be fashionable nowadays; but fashions come and go.

So the magazine sf writers became able to do many things that the writers outside the field could not do. Above all, they could depict a technological culture as a continuing process—often continuing over thousands of millions of years. Although the writers (optimistically or blindly) neglected the vital factor of depletion of Earth's mineral and other resources, they perceived that Western civilisation rests increasingly on a non-random process of innovation. Ralph 124 c4i+ has gone down before the research laboratory. This continuity of culture has its analogue in the continuity of "Astounding" over its vital years. It is no longer fruitful to speak of influences and derivations, for future research has begun. "Astounding" in its best years was a collaborative work, the first think-tank.

The stellar empires postulated by Asimov in his Foundation series or van Vogt in his Child of the Gods series—though both may have been based on older models (such as Gibbon or Robert Graves' Claudius books)—owe a superior vitality and vividness over previous empires to the basic perception that technology demands continuity and expansion. The Manhattan Project, involving many specialists from many countries, drove the lesson home—but the lesson is foreshadowed in science fiction before it fully emerges in society. That the way to the Moon lay through a door marked R & D is a perception one first encounters in Campbell's "Astounding".[12]

Campbell's special field was atomic physics. This proved to be an area of major expansion after he took over in "Astounding's" editorial office. It was no accident that Military Intelligence agents visited that office in 1944, to investigate the background to Cleve Cartmill's story, "Deadline", which Campbell had just published. The story deals with the development of an atomic bomb; Cartmill assembled facts that were known at the time. What he did not know of was the existence of the Manhattan Project, dedicated to just such a development. The story of the investigation was immensely popular in sf circles; it was held to prove that sf was not just fairy tales, but seriously predicted the

coming nuclear weaponry. More significant is the fact that the Manhattan Project itself, that grandiose and secret conspiracy of talent, had also been foreshadowed in "Astounding". The industrialisation of science, the rise of the industrial spy, the anxious guarding of new processes, the paranoia of high-funded laboratories—these themes emerge in pre-imago state in story after story.

As a corollary of this preoccupation, the typical ASF story was rather cold and impersonal in tone, and sometimes degenerated into a sort of illustrated lecture. Before many years were over, the gimmick or gadget story had fallen from popularity. At least one reader gave up reading (for a couple of months) after a confrontation with the glib superficiality of Harry Stine's "Galactic Gageteers" in 1951. In its heyday, the gadget story was best devised by writers like Hal Clements, a M.I.T. man whose novel "Mission of Gravity" (an ASF serial in 1953) is still a great favourite.

Clement's short story "Fireproof", in 1949, presupposes launcher satellites girdling the Earth in a continued East-West confrontation, with an Eastern spy aboard a Western satellite. The spy is going to blow up the launcher, but fails to do so because fire will not burn where there is no convection of air, as in the gravity-free conditions of the satellite (a fact on which the spy has not been briefed, happily for the West!). The story hardly exists as a story; nor does Campbell regard it as a story but as part of the continuing "Astounding" debate. The evidence for this lies in the wording of Campbell's blurb for the story, a minor art of which Campbell was a master:

> This yarn, gentlemen, introduces a brand new idea in the field of spaceship operation. There's twenty years of discussion gone by—and this beautiful, simple and exceedingly neat point has been totally missed! Before you reach the end, see if you can figure the answer!

There were times when "Astounding" smelt so much of the research lab that it should have been printed on filter paper.

Nevertheless, the research lab approach generated ideas. No popular magazine has ever been such an intellectual delight. Many later problems were foreshadowed in general terms and discussed excitingly. Such superman stories as Mark Clifton's "What Have I Done?" discuss the relative meaning of equality in human society. Simak's 'City' series investigated new relationships among living things. Eric Frank Russell imagined strange new symbiotic forms of life in stories like "Symbiotica". Old

hand Murray Leinster visualised a time when people might lose interest in maintaining the strenuous arts of civilisation; it's true that in this particular story, "Trog", that interest is artificially occulted by a fiendish enemy brain-wave, but the general thrust of the story points to a stage of culture which sometimes seems now to be approaching us. Many writers considered the role of the computer long before the computer cut its first transistor, wondering how it would fit into man's world—one of the most brilliant and pithy answers was contained in the one-page story by Frederic Brown, "Answer" (though it did not appear in "Astounding", its punchline, "*Now* there is a God!" has become a password in some circles). A. E. van Vogt was talking confidently of interstellar winds back in 1943, and dropping in casual word of large dollops of space—as when a survey ship reports that a small system of stars "comprises two hundred sixty billion cubic light years, and contains fifty million suns".

Van Vogt was the ideal practitioner of the billion year spree. He was not hard and cold and unemotional, in the manner of Clement, Asimov and Heinlein. He could balance his cubic light years and the paraphernalia of super-science with moments of tenderness and pure looney joy. Moments of humanity surfaced now and again among all his frenetic mental powers and titanic alien effects. Van Vogt is not seen at his best in longer work (he becomes as hopelessly snarled up as his readers in "World of Null-A"); and among his short stories one of the best, because it exhibits all his talents in dynamic balance, is "The Storm", 1943, which contains some moments of love between Maltby and Lady Laurr (van Vogt was a sucker for a title.) Indeed, there's a hint that the story's title is intended to refer also to an internal storm of emotion. Very sophisticated! But of course it was the inter-galactic storm which interested readers, and that was what they got.

> In those minutes before disaster struck, the battleship "Star Cluster" glowed like an immense and brilliant jewel. The warning glare from the Nova set off an incredible roar of emergency clamor through all her hundred and twenty decks.
>
> From end to end her lights flicked on. They burned row by row straight across her four thousand feet of length with the hard tinkle of cut gems. In the reflection of that light, the black mountain that was her hull looked like the fabulous planet of Cassidor, her destination, a sun at night from a far darkness, sown with diamond shining cities.
>
> Silent as a ghost, grand and wonderful beyond all imagination, glorious in her power, the great ship slid through the

blackness along the special river of time and space which was her plotted course.

Even as she rode into the storm there was nothing visible. The space ahead looked as clear as any vacuum. So tenuous were the gases that made up the storm that the ship would not even have been aware of them if it had been travelling at atomic speeds.

Violent the disintegration of matter in that storm might be, and the sole source of cosmic rays, the hardest energy in the known universe. But the immense, the cataclysmic danger to the "Star Cluster" was a direct result of her own terrible velocity.

If she had had time to slow, the storm would have meant nothing.

Striking that mass of gas at half a light year a minute was like running into an unending solid wall. The great ship shuddered in every plate as the deceleration tore at her gigantic strength.

In seconds she had run the gamut of all the recoil systems her designers had planned for her as a unit.

She began to break up.

The writing has clarity and brevity, ably conveying van Vogt's excitement at his immense drama. Later, and beyond the pages of Campbell's magazine, van Vogt was never to recapture his first fine careless rapture. Nor that mixture of Kookie science—half a light year per minute, indeed! and lyric excitement.

Kuttner also was lyrical and gave the impression of seeing the whole picture.

Kuttner's was a sensuous world, non-diagrammatic, blurred at the edges. Whereas Asimov concerned himself with robots and, later, androids in human society which men could not tell from fellow men, Kuttner's universe rejected such non-resonant themes. He posited a human society in which there was a sub-species of telepaths, all linked to each other by thought and sensation. They could be distinguished from ordinary men by their bald heads (hence the series was known as "The Baldies"*). In Kuttner's world, people marry and have babies and cry and upset milk. They enjoy the earth and the sun. Donne-like, they understand that no man is an island, not even a mechanical island. "Each time a telepath dies, all the rest within minds' reach feel the blackness close upon an exhausted mind, and feel their own minds extinguish a little in response."

Even at a time of tension, Kuttner's telepathic minds are open

* Gathered into book-form under the title "Mutant". (Gnome Press, 1953.)

to random impressions. In "Humpty Dumpty", in a 1953 "Astounding", we read:

> By now Cody was at the little park before the long Byzantine building. Trees were wilting above brownish lawns. A shallow rectangular pool held goldfish, who gulped hopefully as they swam to the surface and flipped down again. The little minds of the fish lay open to Cody, minds thoughtless as so many bright, tiny, steady flames on little birthday candles, as he walked past the pool.

An image like that can burn in a reader's mind for decades after he has read it. Henry Kuttner married another sensitive writer from the pulps, Catherine Moore, and their collaboration was fruitful. Kuttner died in 1958, at the ripe young age of forty-three. Our own minds were extinguished a little in response. Kuttner was never given full recognition by fans, whose prurience could not accept his attempts to coax a little sex and sensuality into the genre (mainly in "Marvel Science Stories"). Of the two trusty critics within the sf field, only James Blish puts in a really strong word for Kuttner.[13] It is undeniable that, faced with the terrors of earning a living in a field where the editor was all-powerful (and hard-up to boot), Kuttner did turn in a lot of hack-work.

Kuttner was exceptional. Campbell liked to give the impression that all stories were machine-turned off a lathe of truth. (The popularity of stories was established in a department drearily labelled "The An Lab").

Nevertheless, "Astounding" never confined itself to what was likely. The technicalities of George O. Smith and Hal Clement were always counterbalanced by one more chunk of the Lensman saga or the wildness of A. E. van Vogt. The impossible was not ruled out, if only because nobody knows what is possible and what is not. Also, there is some evidence that sf writers are particularly prone to confuse science with magic. Even the hard-headed Campbell, who saw in science and applied science "the salvation, the raising of mankind", even Campbell believed that the impossibility of getting something for nothing might be transcended by a formula or incantation—hence his belief in psionics and his pursuit of crank cults like Dianetics (later Scientology, founder L. Ron Hubbard) and the Dean Drive, a neat little device which was supposed to produce thrust without producing an equal and opposite reaction. The Dean Drive sounded suspiciously like the device Jack Williamson had written about a few years earlier in "The Equaliser", a solenoid wound in

a special way which generated almost unlimited electrical power, thus enabling every man to be independent and ending dictatorship for ever. Campbell, convinced of the profound worth of science fiction, tried to live some of it.

"Cultural background" is a term much loved by literary critics. The reality behind the term is something certainly never to be forgotten when we look back at Campbell's achievements with "Astounding"/"Analog". His magazine began as one of many hundreds of pulp magazines, most of them short-lived, short-sentenced, and short-changed. They were considered beyond the pale of literacy. Moreover, when Campbell arrived, the great era of the pulps was over—some say it closed with the paper-shortages induced by World War I.[14] These pulps are slowly coming to be recognised as a new common culture, growing up in place of an old one that had vanished. Certainly they were churned out for a lower middle or worker class—in many cases immigrant—entirely without privilege (another contrast with the prosperous audiences of a moderately stable society addressed by the Huxley-type science fiction writer). They gave a whole stratum of American society, hit by the Depression and other economic evils, a sort of unified viewpoint.

Tony Goodstone points out that the "latent psycho-sexual drama of the Depression" depended in part on the era's "unusually emasculating effect on the breadwinner".[15] More straightforwardly, we can agree that the effect of being unemployed or underpaid is to induce a feeling of powerlessness in a man. Many of the more successful pulps used strong tough all-action heroes with which the under-privileged could identify; all the air-aces, cowboys, Tarzans, Conans, and mighty avengers like Doc Savage and the Shadow (let's not mention Superman, Batman, and the extraordinary rabble of comic-book heroes who have followed them) are in this succession. Science fiction offered an unusual and almost limitless extension of the hero-role and of power. Campbell must have instinctively seized on this function. His response to his times was intuitive.

Nick Carter might set the New York underworld to rights. Doc Savage might own an inexhaustible gold-mine under a mountain in South America. But Campbell's heroes had the real equalizer: the infinite policing powers of the mind, the inexhaustible forces beyond the atom. Where the others messed about with the present, Campbell gave you the future on your chipped plate.

What was more, you could grow up still believing in the

Campbellian magic. You couldn't grow up believing in Doc Savage's ludicrous goldmine, but it needs a very sophisticated mind to sort out prediction from fantasy. "Astounding" was a mag for all seasons.[16]

Notes

1. Writing in an Italian magazine in 1919, de Chirico makes these remarks on Verne. "Joyful but involuntary movements of the metaphysical can be observed both in painters and writers, and speaking of writers I would like to remember here an old French provincial who we will call, for clarity's sake, the armchair explorer. I refer to Jules Verne, who wrote travel and adventure novels, and who is considered to be a writer for children.

   "But who was more gifted than he in capturing the metaphysical element of a city like London, with its houses, streets, clubs,squares and open spaces; the ghostliness of a Sunday afternoon in London, the melancholy of a man, a real walking phantom, as Phineas Fogg appears in 'Around the World in Eighty Days'?

   "The work of Jules Verne is full of these joyous and most consoling moments; I still remember the description of the departure of a steamship from Liverpool in his novel 'The Floating City'."

   The essay, "On Metaphysical Art", from which this extract is taken, is included in Massimo Carra's "Metaphysical Art", 1971.

2. The art editor of the series was the Italian, Germano Facetti. The covers mentioned were, in chronological order: "Penguin Science Fiction", edited by Brian Aldiss—Oscar Dominguez, "Memory of the Future" (1961); "The Day it Rained Forever", by Ray Bradbury —Ernst's "Jardin Gobe-Avions" (1963); "A Case of Conscience" by James Blish—Ernst's "The Eye of Silence" (1963); "The Evolution Man" by Roy Lewis—Picasso's first cover for "Minotaure" (1963); "Mission of Gravity by Hal Clement—Yves Tanguy's "The Doubter" (1963); "The Dragon in the Sea", by Frank Herbert—Paul Klee's "Underwater Garden" (1963); and "More Penguin Science Fiction", edited by Brian Aldiss—Kandinsky's "Small Worlds" (1963).

3. In sequence the series runs, "Triplanetary", "First Lensman", "Galactic Patrol", "Gray Lensman", "Second Stage Lensman", "Children of the Lens".

4. There is even a concordance to the works of "Doc" Smith, an honour he shares with Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, and other greats. It is "The Universe of E. E. Smith", by Ron Ellik and Bill Evans. Chicago, 1966—another publication from the dedicated House of Advent.

5. Fearn's assiduous amateur biographer, Philip Harbottle, claims that the Liverpool-born Fearn used more pseudonyms than any other fantasy writer, and lists twenty-nine of them; there were perhaps more. There were certainly other pseudonyms used for other fields. All the details are given in "John Russel Fearn: The Ultimate Analysis", A Bibliography compiled by Philip Harbottle Privately duplicated by the author, 1965.

6. See the long article, "Judgement at Jonbar" by the present writer in "SF Horizons I", op. cit.

7. The quote is taken from a 1960 editorial, "Unimaginable Reasons".

8. Alva Rogers: "A Requiem for Astounding", Ch.V, The Dawn of the Golden Age, 1939–1940.

9. I owe this observation to Dr Leon Stover of I.I.T., Chicago.

10. John W. Campbell: "Collected Editorials from Analog", selected by Harry Harrison (N.Y., 1966). In his introduction to the volume, Harrison points out the impact of Campbell on his writers and adds, "None of these writers has been so small as to deny the influence of John Campbell, and the number of books that have been dedicated to him gives evidence of this. At a guess I would say there are at least thirty, a record that I am sure is unique in literature."

11. Examples: Van Vogt's "Far Centaurus" (ASF, Jan. 1944) uses the spaceship as symbolising the spirit of dedication—in this case ironically defeated. L. Ron Hubbard's "To the Stars" (ASF, Feb-Mar., 1950) uses it as a symbol of manly togetherness—most noticeable when the crew of the "Hound of Heaven", travelling at near light-speed, bursts out into its favourite chorus, "Viva la *Hound* viva la *Hound*, viva la company". As for romanticised industrial processes, this is so all-pervasive it is hard to exemplify; but one might stipulate most of the Venus Equilateral stories by George O. Smith, or the same author's "The Impossible Pirate" (ASF, Dec., 1946). For the spaceship as a symbol of the imprisonment of life that technological advancement can bring about, one must turn to a later generation of writers—for example, the present writer's "Non-Stop" (1958), published as "Starship" in the U.S.A.

12. Perceptions similar to these first saw the light of day in Dr Leon Stover's acute study of the processes behind literature, "American Science Fiction: An Anthropological Exegesis".... Ch. V.

13. For instance in "The Issue At Hand", pp. 78–79, where I note with pleasure that Blish also seizes on that same passage about the candle-flame thoughts of goldfish. Blish has also vigorously refuted Moskowitz's view of Kuttner as a derivative hack in Riverside Quarterly.

14. For instance, the editor of "The Pulps: Fifty Years of American Pop Culture", edited by Tony Goodstone. N.Y., N.D.

15. Ibid., Ch. 7.

16. For further comments on "Astounding's" effect on readers—and for a full selection of the best-remembered stories mainly from its Golden Years, see "The ASF READER", 2 vols., edited by Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss. N.Y., 1972–73.

THE CAKE CHRONICLE

MICHAEL AHERN

In 1970 the Census Bureau of the United States determined that the population of the Village of Eastford Inc. consisted of 164 human beings. Because of this there were no attempts to reapportion any government bodies. Taxes weren't raised or lowered, with the exception of school taxes, and that only in a manner of speaking. The rate per thousand dollars of property value remained the same but the assessment of that value was increased anywhere from 1% to 2% across the board. This was attributed to inflation and not to population.

To practically everyone both in and out of Eastford there was nothing really important in the Census Bureau's evaluation. Those few who study such things saw it as normal; the logical extension to more than one hundred years of gently declining population. We see this view most clearly in a chart taken from the inside front cover of Louis (pronounced Looey) Wright's notebook (see Figure 1).

If we ignore Louis' aspirations there is little of interest in the chart, with a single exception. This is the discrepancy in the income-outgo figures for 1970. Bob Chase; pillar of the community, husband and father, Justice of the Peace, School Board Member, Eagle Scout at 15 and dairy farmer created the flaw with a deliberate lie. He did this by including in his Census form one Duncan Chase age 3 and omitting that Duncan is a dog. When found out by Louis and challenged on the point Bob remarked that he was fond of Duncan, "like he was my own kid", and that anyway it was common knowledge that there were countless teeming ghettos all over where their own mothers didn't know how many there was let alone the government so he was just helping balance the books. The position was unassailable

so Louis let the figures be though they grated against him like gravel on a peach.

All in all the 1970 Census caused little stir and that is as it should be because it was not very important either to Eastford or to us.

Figure 1

Year	*Population*	*Births**	*Deaths**	*Moved in**	*Moved out**
1850	199	26	16	33	30
1860	194	30	31	42	46
1870	191	33	22	32	46
1880	189	35	34	47	50
1890	189	26	16	35	45
1900	183	30	24	40	52
1910	179	27	23	35	43
1920	182†	29	22	36	36
1930	179	35	26	37	49
1940	172	34	31	35	46
1950	173‡	35	34	50	50
1960	167	33	30	43	52
1970	164	26	30	49	49
1980					
1990					
2000§					

* During Previous Decade
† No influence on trend; decade of First War
‡ No influence on trend; decade of Second War
§ Advent of the Third Millenium; and God Willing the year of my Death

2

Until 1946 there was a school in Eastford. It had been there since 1917. The building is still there and is called the schoolhouse. It is sometimes called the "old schoolhouse" or the "firehouse", which function it now serves. It is a sturdy building and also services the Eastford Community Association, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts and a pottery club which meets bi-weekly. Always it is the scene of two festive occasions a year. Often it is the scene of more but they are either specific events without the honored designation "Annual" or are illicit and not generally noised about; underage beer drinking and the like.

One of these events; and the first to draw the close attention of our Chronicle; is the Annual Eastford School Reunion. We

see it first as reported in the Albertsville Times-Herald, published weekly except the weeks of Christmas and Easter.

"On June 14th the Eastford School Alumni Association held their annual reunion. There were an estimated 120 people in attendance. The eldest present was Sarah Bingham Finch, and the youngest was Andrew Graham, son of Kenneth Graham and Sally Hurston Graham.

After a delicious luncheon was served the business meeting was called to order by Association President Floyd Cramer. It was voted to continue the math prize given at Albertsville Central School to the graduating Senior with the highest average in mathematics during four years of high school. Towards this each person present was asked to donate $0.25, those under 21 excepted.

The following were elected officers for the coming year:

President .. .. Alice Hurston
Vice-President .. .. Al Hubertson
Secretary .. .. Jane Cramer Smith
Treasurer .. .. Tom See

Following the business meeting coffee was served.

It is the opinion of this reporter that a very good time was enjoyed by all.

Last year's winner of the math prize was John Pine Jr."

In such manner was the event brought to the public eye. It is correct as far as it goes but the heart and soul of the occasion is left for our Chronicle to reveal:

Ovens, Utensils, Seasonings, Coffee Pots (40 Cup Cap.)—Eastford Fire Dept.
Silverware and Service—Eastford Methodist Church
Garnishes, Flowers and Songs—Eastford Girl Scout Troop # 147
Boiled Hams—John Pine 2, Jane Smith 2, Dora See 3, David Pitcher 3
Cabbage Salad—Eleanor Cramer 2 lg. bowls
Tossed Salad—Jim and Bob Chase and Families 2 very lg. bowls
Mashed Potatoes—Kitty Smith 3 bowls, Molly Higgins 4 bowls
Coffee—Greg Flank
Apple Pies—Kitty Smith 4, Andrea Ball 6
Chocolate Cakes—Alice Hurston 2, Jane Tatlin 2, Della Reese 2

It is the opinion of your Chronicler that something less than a good time was had by all and that in certain instances it approached the undesirable status of forced labor. It is a testament

to the sanctity of tradition in Eastford that Troop #147 could boast 85% attendance.

3

On the 13th of June Joe Craig died. He was eighty-three years old. He had been a nominal Episcopalian for a major portion of his life so his family elected to pass him on to his maker in that mode. This required that the services be performed in Albertsville, some nine miles away, but well worth the effort when weighed against the advantages of being interred by the One True Faith. As was the custom in Eastford the family of the deceased returned from planting Joe to find their table laden with honest food. As follows:

Kitty Smith—2 Apple Pies
„ „ —bowl Mashed Potatoes
John Pine—Boiled Ham
Gregory Flank and Family—Coffee
Jim Chase—Tossed Salad
Bob Chase—Flowers
Eastford Methodist Church—Flowers (Tiger Lilies)
Albertsville Episcopal Church—Flowers (White Roses)
Della Reese—Chile Sauce and Sweet Cucumber Pickles
Troop # 147—Ten Hand-Woven-and-Painted Wall Hangings with assorted mottos

4

It should be noted here that though the actual population of the village has been delineated at a trim 164 the events of our Chronicle occur in the summer. A sprinkling of grandchildren (17), returned college students (4), service-men on leave (3), and boarders from the city (8) all account for a substantial increase in that figure. More important is the fact that the real population is not limited to mundane considerations of village geography. Outside the village proper and yet within one half mile of its center reside a good fifty people.

All this by way of laying a groundwork for our look at the Annual Eastford Community Association Chicken Barbeque. This is the second event always held at the old schoolhouse. Unlike the Eastford School Reunion its social value is of secondary importance. Primarily it is designed to garner funds for the worthy needs of the Association. As such it is executed in a more business-like manner. This is revealed in the coverage

extended to the event by the Times-Herald. Witness:

"The Annual Eastford Community Association Chicken Barbeque on June 28th was a tremendous success. An estimated 950 people attended, an all-time record. The proceeds will go towards the maintenance of the pool and the establishment of signs to warn motorists about children playing. A portion will also be allotted towards improvements on the Memorial for Veterans of Foreign Wars. The Association warmly thanks all those who attended and who contributed their time and effort."

Though concise and illuminating it is a far cry from the whole truth:

Grilling Racks, Charcoal, Fire Pits, Coffee Pots—Eastford Fire Dept.
Place Settings and Serving—Troop # 147
Silverware and Service—Eastford Methodist Church and Mrs. Maude Lant
Cabbage Salad—Eleanor Cramer 2 lg. bowls, Jane Tatlin 2 lg. bowls, Georgia Russel 2 lg. bowls, Mildred Crease 2 lg. bowls.
Tossed Salad—Harold Flank 2 lg. bowls, Elvira Pine 2 lg. bowls, Elvin Countryman 1 lg. bowl, David Pitcher 2 lg. bowls, Herb Kowansky 2 lg. bowls
Bar-B-Q Sauce—Greg Flank, Bert and Della Reese, George and Jane Smith
Milk—Tom and Molly Higgins, Jim Chase
Coffee—Bob Chase
Apple Pies—Kitty Smith 4, Andrea Ball 4, Henrietta Clay 8
Chocolate Cakes—Dora See 3, Sally Graham 4, Alice Hurston 4

Peter Clay and Johnny Pine sustained minor burns when the Bar-B-Q Sauce spilt and spattered as they attempted to jump Fire Pit # 4. Suzan Tatlin was suffered to desist serving and return to her home by her very first incidence of menstrual flow and accompanying cramps. Duncan Chase ate a filched chicken but was saved by Doc Stevenson from Unidilla who in a perfunctory and no-nonsense manner pulled the splintery bones from his throat. Jeannie McCune from Atlantic City was kissed for the very first time by Timothy Clay after they together doctored his wounded brother.

5

On the 29th of June Otto Hansbruck passed away. At 1:37 am. He was 68 years old and a relative newcomer to the community,

having moved there eight years before with his wife Anna. He had always been cordial but simply hadn't lived there long enough for the inner rhythms of the village to have become part of him. Thus the question of community recognition of his death became a delicate one. There were the donation boxes in the general store and the gas station for flowers of course. You couldn't go wrong there. The real question of tact involved the mustering of the traditional dinner for the family following the funeral. Since few people had ever spoken to Anna there were no precedents. Finally Andrea Ball took the bull by the horns and went and asked Anna if the family would care to be fed on the day of the funeral. Anna did not really understand the question. She politely and tenderly described the last meal she and Otto had had together in a tattered mixture of German and Brooklynese. The quandary was solved nicely the next day by a stunning blonde woman who could have been a model from New York City. She informed the boy clerking the general store that no meal would be necessary. She also stipulated that the proceeds of the donation boxes were to go to the Albertsville Emergency Squad Ambulance Fund for their quick response to aid her father, unsuccessful though it had been.

It was agreed that Andrea Ball had done the right thing even though she had not acted quickly enough to prevent the following:

Eleanor Cramer—Angel Food Cake
Jane Tatlin—Scalloped Potatoes 1 bowl
Della Reese—Raspberry-rhubarb jam 2 jars
Kitty Smith—Boiled Corned Beef
Dorothy Flank—Boiled Cabbage
Jane Smith—Macaroni Salad
Margaret Chase—Coffee

These miscalculations were not the only tolls extracted from Eastford by the Hansbruck clan. Skippy Smith spotted the model from New York City, as she came to be called, as he sped along Eastford's single street on his motorcycle. She was truly a miracle in the flesh and his reaction was to accelerate, downshift and brake simultaneously. His drive chain snapped, jammed, whipped around a bit and slapped Skippy on the calf. Skippy would often recall the scene. "I see this chick stacked to High Holy Heaven so I drop her down to third and slap on the binders and then BAMMO!"

There was a lot of blood but the cut was minor. The model pulled up his pants leg and examined it gently with her warm fingers. As she looked up from her work and brushed the honey-blonde hair back from her face she said the words that Skippy

would play over and over in his mind like a record; "It's cool, man." He often thought of going to New York City and finding her but he never did.

Kitty Smith, Skippy's mother, was in the pottery room of the old schoolhouse when she received word of the accident. She became flustered and picked up a bluebird shaped ashtray which had just been removed from the kiln. This burned her hand severely and shattered when she dropped it. That was all right though because it was her favorite design and she had 22 more of them at home.

6

On the evening of the morning of Otto's death, that is the 29th of June at about 9:30 pm, Joey Capezio was struck by a car as he ran across the road. One witness, Joey's sister Marie, stated that the car swerved and hit Joey who was well to the side. All the witnesses except Marie observed that Joey actually ran into the car more than the other way round. He was driven some forty feet along the pavement and sustained a fractured skull, fractured leg, multiple fractures of the arms, and a fractured pelvis. There were abrasions both severe and minor too numerous to mention. He was reached by the Albertsville Emergency Squad Ambulance at approximately 9:47 pm and was taken to Clinton Hospital. He was listed as being in serious condition.

Get-well cards were sent either to Clinton Hospital, Clinton or to his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Angelo Santandria, Eastford, with whom he was spending the summer. When he recovered consciousness on the morning of the 30th his first words were, "We was only playing in front of the firehouse."

The family was allowed to see him that afternoon, which they dutifully did. When they returned home they enjoyed the following dinner:

Eleanor Cramer—Angel Food Cake
Jane Tatlin—Scalloped Potatoes 1 bowl
Della Reese—Raspberry-rhubarb jam 2 jars
Kitty Smith—Boiled Corned Beef
Dorothy Flank—Boiled Cabbage
Jane Smith—Macaroni Salad
Margaret Chase—Coffee

July in Eastford was in the main a quieter time than the end of June had been, what with bodies and casseroles flying back and forth with unprecedented vigor. The only two events which required public support were the St. Joseph's Annual Ice Cream Festival and the Eastford Volunteer Fire Dept. Annual Donation Supper. The St. J's.A.I.C.F. took place in Brunswick, some eight miles away and only affected those families in Eastford who were Catholic (6). The E.V.F.D.A.D.S. took place at the end of the month and will warrant our attention when we get to it.

A more positive reason for the peace in Eastford was that it was haying time and the young men who usually created the most noise and endangerment to life with car and motorcycle were exhausted. Also it was the hottest July in many a memory and kept most of the oldies sitting in the shade. Thus the entire month passed without a single coronary.

If the village was quieter in noise and in terms of life and death it was by no means dull.

It was proven that the driver of the car that struck Joey Capezio was a college student which meant that he was more than half likely bonkers on LSD or heroin. This served to redeem Marie Capezio's social standing somewhat after lying in opposition to eight other witnesses. After a decent period of time she was even noticed to have resumed wearing her red, white and green "No. 1" flag pin which had been stripped from her by her uncle in shame.

Louis Wright, lay preacher at the Methodist Church and amateur local historian had a good trick played on him but gave as good as he got. He was a crusty old fellow and much given to his nature walk, as he called it. This walk always led out of town uphill towards the cemetery, through the cemetery proper and over the stone wall at its end. Here it could branch out in any direction. The return could also be from any direction but always came to the same spot on the wall. Now Timothy Clay often observed this ritual, his house being near the cemetery, and was struck by inspiration. Since Louis always returned after dark or dusk at the earliest, he and some cronies dug a huge trench just inside the wall. They then dressed up in sheets and awaited Louis. Luck was with them and it was pitch black when Louis clambered over the wall he knew better than his wife's body and careened into the pit. Immediately ghosts appeared and demanded to know what he was doing in their grave. With all the righteous indignation of a minister of the Lord, Louis demanded to know

what in Hell's name they were doing out of it. It was the kind of advanced theological question that fifteen year old ghosts just can't answer and they faded into the night.

It was something of a banner month for Timmy Clay. He managed to kiss Jeannie McCune repeatedly on the mouth, feel her right breast twice inside her blouse, her left breast three times and once in orgiastic splendor both together when she took off her blouse and bra.

Duncan Chase was declared a hero and the village thanked God with one breath for old Doc Stevenson. This was prompted by Duncan grabbing Betty-Ann Ball's hand firmly in his big teeth and leading her to the abandoned well into which Allen Flank had fallen and was grimly hanging on for dear life. The event was perhaps best described by Agnes Court, Della Reese's aged mother when she said: "Just like Lassie."

The Jim Chase family won a new Ford in a contest sponsored by a major cereal company.

Della Reese won an all-time Eastford record of Blue and Red ribbons (12 and 7) at the Eggleston County Fair for jellies, jams, preserves, canned goods and a quilt.

The Eastford Fire Dept. won First Prize in the One Truck Dept. Division at both the Eggleston County Fair Parade and the Albertsville Firemans Carnival Parade.

Ronny Dutcher, Lost in Action, Assumed Dead, was returned from Viet Nam with only one leg and one hand missing but otherwise alive. When it was mentioned that it was too bad that he hadn't arrived in time to be wheeled in the Albertsville Fourth of July Parade he replied at the top of his lungs that it sure the fuck was too god damned fucking bad he sure fucking hadn't returned for he dearly would fucking have liked to be there to donate his single souvenir grenade to the fucking festivities by fragging the fucking politicians giving speeches! Yessiree bob! Fucking-A!

This caused considerable scandal at his ingratitude, lack of patriotism and filthy-mouthed talk until it was revealed that those were the last words he spoke except for an occasional yessir. With that it was understood that he had been a little touched by the war and was not just bitter.

Harold and Jane Tatlin were pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter Joanne to Herbie Flank.

Kenneth and Sally Graham welcomed a blessed event weighing 6 lbs., 11 oz., and whom they named Mary Lou.

A fruitful and eventful month, taken all in all.

8

The following account is taken from the Albertsville Times-Herald.

"The Annual Donation Supper of the Eastford Volunteer Fire Dept. was held at the Eastford Methodist Church Hall on July 31st. There were an estimated 600 people in attendance. According to Fire Chief Bud Praeger the proceeds will go towards the maintenance of the firefighting equipment for the coming year with the possibility of some new equipment being added. He pointed out that thus far the dept. has won $75.00 in parades and the summer is far from over. He said, 'If we continue to do well, the winnings, combined with the income from this supper, will insure the continued tip-top shape of the Dept.' He added that the supper seemed to grow in popularity with the years and that there were people present from as far south as Florida and as far west as Kansas City. He extended his thanks to everyone who contributed their time and effort and to all who attended."

Behind the scenes our little play remains much the same:

Silverware, Service and Hall—Eastford Methodist Church, Mrs. Maude Lant
Cabbage Salad—Eleanor Cramer 4 lg. bowls, Marge Flank 4 lg. bowls, Alice Hurston 4 lg. bowls
Macaroni Salad—Jane Tatlin 4 lg. bowls, Andrea Ball 4 lg. bowls, Al Hubertson 4 lg. bowls
Mashed Potatoes—Bert Reese, Herb Kowansky, Tom See
Pickled Onions—Della Reese
Milk—Jim Chase, John Pine, Angelo Santandria
Coffee—Tom Higgins, Bud and Mae Praeger, Henrietta Clay
Money Collectors—Floyd Cramer, Harold Tatlin, Elvin Countryman
Flowers and Serving—Women's Auxiliary and Troop # 147

The only oustanding incident that went unreported in the Times-Herald was the slapping of Timothy Clay's face by Jeannie McCune. It happened near the end of the evening and served as an audio and emotional exclamation point to the month of July.

9

The 1st of August was ushered in with the WHOOP WHOOP WHOOP WHOOP of the Albertsville Emergency Squad Ambulance cruising into Eastford to verify the death and secure the remains of Mrs. Maude Lant. She died peacefully asleep. The

body was exhibited at the Dunn Funeral Home in Brunswick and the burial took place in the Eastford Cemetery overlooking the home she had lived in all her life. Following the interment the family returned to that house; very well built and in a lovely spot. On the way the line of cars was overtaken by the flashing red WHOOP WHOOP. They hardly noticed, being deeply engrossed in honing sharp arguments for ultimate possession of the house, since the old lady had left no will. These oratorical swords were unsheathed and wielded mercilessly while the following was consumed:

John and Elvira Pine—Mashed Potatoes
Eleanor Cramer—Cabbage Salad
Jim and Bob Chase Families—2 Roast Beeves
Della Reese—Candied Apples
Jane Smith—Chocolate Cake
Jane Tatlin—Pumpkin Pie*
Kitty Smith—Pumpkin Pie*
Dorothy Flank—Pumpkin Pie*
Troop # 147†

10

The flashing red WHOOP WHOOP that passed the Lant clan was desperately trying to reach Jimmy Russel before his life's blood drained away into the roadside dust. He had been performing the ultimate trick: No Hands Eyes Closed Down Branton Hill. It was dangerous but there was always a companion riding along to shout "car". According to the rules of Branton Hill that was the only warning which could be given. If your bicycle went off the road you were safe as long as you fell properly into the level grassy fields on both sides. Both Jimmy and Steve Smith forgot the mailbox erected two days earlier by the city people in the trailer.

Faulty memories aside the rules were rules and inviolate. Jimmy was not and he died even as Ellen Lant Crosby of Schenectady explained that because her dear Louise's piano playing had always brought such joy to Nana Maude she and Ben should get the house. The date was the fourth of August. Heat clouds

* A storm on August 2nd caused the phone lines to snap, crackle, pop, buzz and otherwise behave in an eccentric manner. The wonder was that the misunderstandings were limited to pumpkin pie.

† Troop # 147 had left for two weeks of camp on August 1st. Except Suzy Tatlin who brandished an irregularity and severity in her period that would be her curse all her life. She joined Troop # 147 on the 5th.

built in the south and fat forks of lightning lashed at the earth much in the same way Mary Lant Carter riposted Louise's piano playing with her Albert's interest in lapidary, always so close to Nana Maude's heart, God rest her soul. The clouds chundered up the valley and changed from heat to wet. This caused no abatement in the lightning and consequent thunder so Ralph Lant and his wife Linda had to scream as they poignantly recalled how it had been Nana Maude's dearest wish to have their Billy near her always, to sing to her in his oh so sweet voice. In a sense the thunder was a blessing since Billy's grunt-crackle voice could not be tested. At that point the storm broke in Hell-shaking earnest and both Gilda Lant Forbes of Lexington, Ky. and George Lant of Allentown, Pa. were prevented from advancing their arguments. It was just as well since the final arrangements were conducted by lawyers in a quiet air-conditioned office in New York City anyway.

11

It has been the effort of your Chronicler to present the facts of our situation with as little possible editorializing as a human witness can manage. We shall continue in that endeavor. However we wish to point out that in a document of this nature it is not the bold facts in themselves that are of interest but their interrelationship; their tone, if you will permit the expression. It would be wrong to deny that there is opinion. There is. Where it is clearly stated as such it is meant to express the prevalent state of the village mind. Elsewhere it is the result of our prejudices, our frailties.

It is foolish perhaps but we ask you, implore you, to savour each bite of our little stew, each pea, every carrot.

Forgive us. Read on.

12

The storm was incredible. So was the death of Jimmy Russel. When a boy of ten is killed there is a huge difference in reaction from the passing on of a 78 year old woman. When electricity and phones are out of order there is the return of a nearly forgotten sense of isolation. The severity of the simultaneous events can be read in the gifts and food the Russel family received on the day of little Jimmy's funeral:

John Pine and Family—2 Chocolate Cakes
George and Jane Smith—Cabbage Salad
Henry and Kitty Smith—2 Chocolate Cakes
Bert and Della Reese—Apricot Preserves
Eleanor and Floyd Cramer—Cabbage Salad
Jeannie McCune and Timothy Clay—12 White Roses
Mark and Andrea Ball—2 Apple Pies
Alice Hurston—Tuna Fish Casserole
Ronny Dutcher—One Bushel of Oranges and a Note Which Read: "I got these oranges from my buddy in Orlando and thought maybe you could like them. Ronald Dutcher"
Herb Kowansky and Family—1 Roast Goose
Kenneth and Sally Graham—1 lb. Vanilla Fudge
Tom and Molly Higgins—Milk and Coffee
The Jim Chase Family—1 Roast of Beef
The Bob Chase Family—1 Puppy Named Dunk II
Angelo Santandria and Family—A Mass Card
Joey Capezio—A Watercolour Portrait of Jimmy
Jane and Harold Tatlin—2 Chocolate Cakes
Henrietta Clay—1 Roast Leg of Lamb
Louis Wright—1 Bible
Tom and Dora See—1 Angelfood Cake
Troop # 147—Still at Camp and yet to be heard from.

13

The aftermath to Jimmy's death and the big storm was a more or less universal sense of doom and gloom in Eastford. Even those too young to understand the actual events knew there was no-good going on because the 6:00 pm curfew inaugurated by Mrs. Santandria spread through every family in the village. Television, Monopoly and card games achieved new heights of popularity. Unnaturally, and in a forced manner, it was quieter than July. Agnes Court couldn't keep her food down and muttered over and over: "Bad things come in threes, bad things in threes." She was so persistent in this tack that her daughter, Della Reese, thought that she would insure the truth of her belief by being the next to go. Such was not the case.

Life in the village droned on through the heat and sweat of August. Work still had to be done and there were bumper crops of tomatoes, beets, corn, cabbage, string beans, peas, Swiss Chard, summer squash and potatoes to be washed, boiled, sliced, pickled canned and frozen. Such was the plentitude of food and the near desperation with which people threw themselves into the harvest that Jim Chase, Herb Kowansky, Floyd Cramer and Henry

Smith all purchased freezers of various sizes during a Special Summer Sale at the Eggleston Sears-Roebuck's.

Jeannie McCune gave Timothy Clay a book of poetry by Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Louis Wright began ringing the Angelus on the Methodist Church bells.

Duncan Chase brought home a swallow with a broken leg.

Ronny Dutcher continued not to talk except for an occasional "yessir" and that only when no one was near. Sometimes he would salute Duncan Chase, but not often.

The parents and friends of Troop # 147 began to miss them and count off the days until their return.

It was a period of building tension, isolation, depression and boredom. There were no untoward events. It was hell.

14

Suzy Tatlin joined her troop the day after the death of Jimmy Russel. If the death had made an oven of tension of the Village of Eastford it made a pressure cooker out of Troop # 147. They were a representative microcosm of Eastford and far closer to Jimmy than the village as a whole. For 11 days they seethed together in their loneliness and simmered like the minor matrons they were. On the 15th they erupted from camp a far more thoughtful and sober lot than when they had entered.

15

At 8:00 pm of the 15th of August there was a meeting of the Eastford Community Association. It was held at the old schoolhouse. Though the meetings had always been open to all there was an unprecedented attendance. Those who were usually ill, busy, forgetful or uncaring were now present. As was customary at these meetings there were refreshments and chit-chat first gradually fading into the formal meeting. This was attempted:

Alice Hurston—2 Apple Pies
Eleanor Cramer—2 Apple Pies
Jane Tatlin—1 Chocolate Cake
Molly See—1 Chocolate Cake
Marge Flank and Dorothy Chase—Coffee

Despite these tasty efforts there were just too many people. The shortage was accepted in good spirit and the general feeling

of the meeting was one of cheer. Present were the long missed members of Troop # 147 and the 6:00 pm curfew had been relaxed. There was an exchange of general gossip that had been subdued or non-existent during the past week. It was recognized as a definite release and even Georgia Russel had to laugh at the lack of food. Several young people were dispatched to the store to fetch cookies, dough-nuts and ginger ale. It was like a quiet party.

Gradually the younger people drifted outside to play or sit on the lawn and the meeting began to shape up. Finally Floyd Cramer called for order. Kitty Smith read the minutes from the last meeting with some difficulty. Elvira Pine had filled in for her while she was sick and her handwriting was terrible. Tom See then announced the final tally of the Chicken Barbeque after all expenses had been cleared. Vice-President Bert Reese reported that the CAUTION: CHILDREN PLAYING signs had been ordered and would be up by August 20th. Here the meeting was thrown open to questions or suggestions from the floor.

This caused a lull. It seemed to your Chronicler that all present wanted in some way to use the association to steer the town out of its rut of depression. In a small way it had already done so. Nobody seemed to know quite how to formulate the wish as a matter requiring official attention. This awkward spot was conveniently by-passed by the loping entrace of Duncan Chase and the standing ovation that was given him. He was at first bemused and then bored so he left to vanquish dragons. (Your Chronicler became very fond of Duncan during our sojourn in Eastford.)

Prior to the meeting proper there had been casual talk of a memorial to Jimmy Russel. Several people were on the verge of bringing it up but thought better of it because the death had been so recent. Finally Betty-Ann Ball stood up. She was Leader of Troop # 147. She explained that while they were at camp they had thought much on the subject of Jimmy's death and had wanted very much to do something. It was the first time that the full impact of what it all meant had reached them. Ever since they could remember they had made wall hangings or wreaths or sympathy cards but they had all served the double purpose of advancing their scouting careers. Since they rarely knew the person who had died except as a name they had performed their part blindly. While they were away they together had decided that the best thing they could do was offer a suggestion: Jimmy's bike should be placed in front of the War Memorial as a reminder and a remembrance. She had finished what she had to say, she

was twelve years old and embarrassed and she sat back down.

If any group of people can be said to have a single thought at that moment it was "out of the mouths of babes". On its heels there came a concerted look at Bill and Georgia Russel for confirmation and approval. They looked at each other and he nodded to her. She stood and walked to the front of the room. She turned to the assemblage and there were tears in her eyes. She opened her mouth as if to speak and her face grew red. Her mouth closed, her face grew redder, her mouth opened, spewed forth dough-nuts and coffee, she convulsed, keeled over, and died.

16

If things had been quiet before they were now frozen. Frozen and furious. Each in their own way prepared:

Chocolate Cakes—Dot Chase 9, Molly Higgins 11, Betty Pitcher 6, Elvira Pine 9, Della Reese 1, Dorothy Flank 12, Eleanor Cramer 8

Cabbage Salads—Eleanor Cramer 20, Jane Tatlin 5, Alice Hurston 6, Andrea Ball 10, Dora See 8, Sally Graham 2, Kitty Smith 9, Della Reese 1

Angelfood Cakes—Lyn Countryman 4, Margaret Chase 3, Anna Hansbruck 1, Kitty Smith 2, Jane Tatlin 6, Marge Flank 4, Henrietta Clay 5, Alice Hurston 2, Della Reese 3

Apple Pies—Elsie Kowansky 14, Eleanor Cramer 6, Sally Graham 6, Andrea Ball 4, Della Reese 2, Kitty Smith 10, Alice Hurston 8

Pumpkin Pies—Molly Higgins 6, Dorothy Flank 12, Elvira Pine 19, Betty Pitcher 4, Della Reese 1, Eleanor Cramer 4, Dorothy Chase 16

Macaroni Salads—Everyone at least 5, Jane Tatlin 9, Andrea Ball 7, Phillipa Santandria 12, Marge Flank 10

Scalloped Potatoes—Everyone at least 1 gallon, often more

Roasts of Beef—Everyone at least 6, Jim Chase 10, Tom See 14, Henrietta Clay 9

Boiled Hams—Everyone at least 4, Greg Flank 8, Floyd Cramer 5, Bert Reese 12, Angelo Santandria 7

Coffee—Each as much as possible

Tea—Each as much as possible

Milk—Each as much as possible

17

As there always is in such situations some took other roads to salvation. Agnes Court managed to keep her food down, seemed more spry than she had in years and muttered incessantly: "See, bad things in threes, bad things come in threes."

Louis Wright added a morning Angelus and then a noon Angelus and eventually mixed it up so that there was no pattern at all.

Ronny Dutcher began to talk but only to Duncan Chase and that only when no one was near. As their friendship grew he was forced into speaking in the presence of people. This would happen if there was someone near and it was the first thing in the morning, or if they had not seen each other for some time. Later it would happen oftener.

On the night before she was to leave her aunt and uncle to return to her parents in Atlantic City Jeannie McCune and Timothy Clay made love and there was nothing fast or furious about it. He gave her a ring he had hammered from a Kennedy half dollar.

ME AND MY ANTRONOSCOPE

B. J. BAYLEY

MY DEAR Asmravaar: Many thanks for your last burst, and apologies for the long delay in answering. Not that it has been wholly my fault, because my burst sender broke down—for the third time this trip! When I get back home I shall have something to say to the Transfinite Communicator Co., and you can tell them that from me.

However, to be honest I repaired my sender some time ago and so my silence cannot all be laid at the door of our unspeakably muddling technicians. The rest of the time I have been kept busy keeping track of a gripping little "adventure" that I chanced to catch in my sights, almost in passing as it were. At the moment I am feeling tired, but also very excited, and I just cannot resist staying awake a little longer so that I can get it all down and burst it to you. It's a fascinating story and I'm hoping it will even change your mind about a few things, you grumpy old stay-at-home!

At this point I am going to allow a note of triumph to creep into my account. Why not?—I have won a philosophic victory! For too long, Asmravaar, you and others of your ilk have laughed at the explorer-wanderers such as myself. You say that there is no point to our wanderings, that we are on a fool's errand—that the universe, though endless, is everywhere of a dreary sameness and that one might as well stay at home where there is at least a little variety. Well of course I have to admit that there is *some* substance to your allegations, and none knows that better than myself. I, more intimately than any of you pessimists, have seen what the universe consists of: an infinite series of spatialities, every one more or less the same, each containing innumerable worlds conforming to only a small number of basic types, and—as you complain—rarely any life to be found anywhere. I grant that if we were to believe in the existence of a Creator of this immensity of ours, then we could justifiably charge Him with

lacking imagination. Once one gets over the awesomeness of sheer physical grandeur then there is precious little else!

Yet I am reluctant to accuse nature of being niggardly. No, it is *you* I accuse, Asmravaar! You are guilty of "philosophical defeatism"! In my belief the universe still has a few surprises in store for us, if we keep looking. It can still ring a few changes!

And I have proved it!

Well, I'll get on with it. I was transiting through the 10^{5298}th range of spatialities, not expecting to find anything unusual, when I came across a world which turned out to contain life. Not very much life, it is true, but life. Physically the species is not of our reticulated tendricular type but of the much rarer oxygenated, bipedal type. Moreover I do not believe they can be native to their present habitat but must have migrated there a considerable period ago. At any rate, I was suddenly thankful that I had recently invested in a fine new high-powered Mark XXXVI sound-and-vision antronoscope*, as well as in a new instant semanticizer —for this is what I saw . . .

AGAINST the yielding rock wall the big vibro-drill was working well, despite its age. Tremoring invisibly, the rotating blades sliced through the basalt at a steady rate, shoving the finely divided rubble to the rear to be dealt with by a follow-up machine —which, since this was only a demonstration run, was in this case absent.

Erfax, Keeper of the Machine Museum, flicked a switch and the drill died with a protesting whine. His friend Erled nodded. He was impressed. In a few minutes the drill had already buried half its length into the rock wall, carving out the commencement of a six-foot diameter tunnel.

"So this is how they tunnelled in the old days," he said.

"That's right. The ancients may have been primitive in some ways, but technologically they weren't bad, not bad at all. This type of machine made possible the great epic explorations—the migratory ones. If one is to believe history—and personally I do —with such drills they tunnelled hundreds of thousands of miles. These days we could do better, of course. They must have spent an awful long time travelling those distances with a vibro-drill, apart from wearing out God knows how many machines in the process."

Erled smiled wistfully. "A few centuries was nothing to those

* An instrument for peering into caves and hollows through the surrounding rock.

people. They had *will-power*." He watched as the drill was withdrawn from the dent-like cavity it had made and was turned round for the short journey to its resting place in the Museum. Behind it a packing machine moved into place, scooping up the rock that had been thrown out and ramming it expertly back into the hole. He tried to imagine the drill spinning out a tunnel thousands of miles into the infinite rock, pushing relentlessly forward on a vain search for other worlds. He imagined thousands of people passing along that tunnel as their home cavity gradually filled up with the rock from the excavation—until, eventually, they gave up the search, filled up the tunnel itself and settled in the new cavity they were thus able to hollow out—*this* cavity in which Erled had been born. Yes, he thought, those ancestors of ours had a quality we have lost.

"I should congratulate you," he told Erfax. "It looks as good as new."

Erfax laughed shyly. "Part of my duties is to keep the machines entrusted to me in working condition," he said. "Ostensibly that drill is five hundred years old, the last of its type—but between you and me it's had so many parts replaced it might just as well have been made yesterday."

Erled nodded again, smiling. "Yes, I suppose so. Well, thanks for showing it to me, Erfax. It's helped—seeing how they did it in the old days, I mean. I feel encouraged, now. If they had the nerve to explore the universe with relatively primitive equipment like this, then we can certainly do it with what we have available. Maybe we will succeed where they failed."

Erfax' assistants were guiding the vibro-drill under its own power down a broad, even ceilinged corridor. He and Erled followed turning away from the rock perimeter and walking Inwards. Erled was a tall, sharp-eyed man, a few years beyond the freshness of youth but still fairly young. Erfax, rather older, was a shorter, rounder man who walked with short, quick strides and he had to hurry to keep up with the other.

A short while later, at the gates of the Machine Museum, Erfax turned to Erled.

"You are very confident, friend. But whatever the hazards of the voyage might be, the greatest hurdle you will have to overcome is still here, in the Cavity. You still have to gain the assent of the Proctors. However, I wish you luck."

"The Proctors?" Erled answered lightly. "They will be no trouble at all, you can depend on it. Why, Ergrad, the Proctor Enforcer, is the father of Fanaleen, my betrothed. This is practically a family affair!

Erfax merely smiled uncertainly, waved farewell and disappeared through the gates of his Museum in the wake of the whining, elephantine vibro-drill. Erled went on down the low passage whose ceiling, as everywhere in the Cavity, was barely six or eight inches over head. He was not discomforted by this pressing closeness; it was the condition of life he had always known, that everyone had always known.

Centuries ago, had Erled raised his eyes and looked about him, he would have seen a vast cavern several miles in extent with a roof that curved perhaps a mile overhead: such was the Cavity as it had first been hollowed out, the total emptiness capacity of the known solid universe all in one piece. In the intervening centuries humanity had increased in numbers and had learned to use the space available to it with greater efficiency, compartmentalising all of it into closely calculated living and working space. In its present honeycombed form the Cavity petered out indeterminately into the surrounding rock like an amoeba trapped in a solid matrix. Its diameter was roughly fifteen miles and its population was three quarters of a million. Incessantly computations were carried out to see whether, by an appropriate readjustment of existing arrangements, more living space could be gained from the inert plenum.

One thing was certain: no new emptiness could be created. That was a scientifically established law of conservation. Emptiness could be rearranged in any number of ways, or it could be moved from place to place by the substitution of solid matter, but its total volume could not be increased. Like solidity itself, that remained unchanging throughout time.

Which meant that humanity could never expand beyond the space that was already available to it; that its numbers could never increase beyond a certain tolerable density.

Unless.

Unless, as Erled had told himself a thousand times, new worlds, new Cavities, could be discovered in the infinite solidity.

After walking half a mile Inwards Erled took the public conveyor system which carried him speedily towards his destination: the workshop on the other side of the Cavity where he and his colleagues were preparing for the most exciting enterprise for many, many generations.

ERLED'S confrontation with the Proctors came only a few work-cyles later.

It was not what he had expected.

He was summoned abruptly from his home during the relaxation period. On arriving at the Chamber of Proctors he was ushered directly in, and almost before he had time to compose himself he found himself faced with the interrogating stares of the men and women who ruled his life.

There was Erfloured, Ergurur and Erkarn, all representing different vital departments of life—Sustenance, Machine Technology, and Emptiness Utilisation. To their left, wearing ceremonial robe and sash, sat Erpiort, Proctor of Worship, and beside him the man who made Erled feel most nervous because he already knew him slightly: Ergrad, Proctor Enforcer, wearing the wide shoulder-sleeves and dark cowl of Law Enforcement.

Sitting to the left of Ergrad were the only two women on the Council: Fasusun, Proctress of Domestic Harmony, and Fatelka, Proctress of Child Care. Both were in the full bloom of an officious middle-age, and were looking at Erled with particular suspicion.

"Be seated, Erled," said Erkarn, the man from whom, as Proctor of Emptiness Utilisation, Erled was expecting the most enthusiastic support. However, he was surprised to observe that the Proctor was apparently extremely annoyed with him.

"Over the past few days we have discussed your quite interesting proposal very seriously," the Proctor announced, "but before we deal with that, it has come to our notice that recently you and Keeper of the Machine Museum Erfax, without permission and entirely in defiance of the law, operated a tunnelling machine Outward of the perimeter."

"But no excavations were carried out, Proctor!" protested Erled, bewildered. "It was a demonstration run only. The run Outwards was only a few feet and it was made good immediately. I cannot see that we transgressed the law in doing that."

"You will allow *us* to decide when the law is transgressed," put in Ergrad darkly. He leaned towards Erled and suddenly looked menacing and sinister. "The law against uncontrolled excavations is a very strict one—as it must be, if emptiness is not to be eroded. Only state-commissioned vessels are allowed to operate in the solidity, as well you know, and the degree of the transgression is not the point in question."

Erled looked crest-fallen.

"However," resumed Erkarn, "we shall leave that aside for the time being. While ignorance is no excuse it is possible that we may, in this instance, exercise our own discretion. Let us move to the main burden of the meeting: the proposal that long-range expeditions should be sent into solidity. While we have your full argument in the written tender, it would be better, for the sake

of procedure, that you give us a brief account of it now so that it may appear on the transcript of this meeting."

"Very well, Proctor." Erled licked his lips. There was a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. The Proctors had done everything they could to put him at a disadvantage and that could only mean that they were opposed to the project.

"Essentially our effort is designed to be a continuation of the exploratory sagas of ancient times," he began. "As you are aware the difficulty with the ancients' method, apart from its slowness, is that it requires a permanent tunnel. Eventually all available emptiness is drawn into this tunnel, necessitating that the entire population should migrate along it and take part in the exploratory drive.

"An alternative, much preferable method is for the drilling vessel to fill up the tunnel behind it as it proceeds, thus becoming a genuine vehicle isolated in solidity—thus leaving the Cavity intact. In the old days this was impracticable since there was no way of solving the supply problem. No vessel could possibly carry enough sustenance to support its crew during time periods which might extend to years or generations. But today the situation is different!" Erled's voice rose as his obsession gripped him once again. "We are no longer limited to the vibro-drill. The modern tunneller works by disassociating solid matter into a perfectly fluid dust which, as the solidity-ship moves forward, it passes to its rear through special vents and simultaneously reconstitutes into the original rock. With this type of system almost incredible speeds can be achieved—close on forty miles per hour. Furthermore, by now it has proved its reliability, having been employed for over a generation in the vessels that are used to survey the close rock environs of the Cavity. The time is long overdue when we should rediscover the passion of the ancients for the discovery of new worlds!"

The vibrant voice of the Proctor of Worship answered his declamation. "The ancients were endowed with intense religious zeal and embarked on their migrations in search of God, not of new worlds," Erpiort said critically. "Dauntless and resourceful though they were, it is also true that the ancients were at the primitivist stage of religious knowledge. To our more sophisticated intellects it is obvious that God is not to be found by travelling through the horizontal universe, no matter to what distance. Why should we repeat their follies?"

Erled knew exactly what Erpiort was driving at. It had been recognised for a long time that the universe was stratified. In any transverse direction the rock remained, as far as was known,

unchanged to infinity. Downwards, one entered a Region of Intense Heat, while if one attempted to travel Upwards one encountered a Region of Impassibility. Above this region, which could be entered only by the souls of the righteous after death, God was acknowledged to dwell. Conversely the profound Region of Heat was a place of torment reserved for the souls of the wicked. Both regions were held to be infinite in themselves, but to Erled, or indeed to anyone else in the room, the very idea of travel either Up or Down for more than a few hundred miles was virtually a metaphysical notion. These transcendental directions were literally beyond possible human experience. Only horizontal directions had any practical meaning, and it was these that one normally meant by infinity.

Erled's interest was not religious, though he agreed that to hope to find God by travelling through the rock was naïve. "But what of the urge to discover new worlds, to determine once and for all whether there really are other cavities in the solidity?" he countered in a dismayed tone. "We should not stifle such aspiration, surely?"

His dismay was caused by the fact that this aspiration was, to him, a burning ideal that had become second nature, and he simply could not understand why some other minds did not appear to share it. "Besides, the discovery of unknown cavities would make new emptiness available for mankind," he added placatingly.

Erpiort's mouth twisted cynically. "The ancients also exercised their minds with this hypothesis of other worlds," he remarked. "As we all know, they found nothing. Your proposition has come at a very unfortunate time, my fellow. A deposition is currently before the Holy Synod to declare the Doctrine of One Cavity, long preached by all devout priests, an article of faith! This deposition, if accepted, will make it a heresy to believe anything other than that God made but one cavity in the whole of solidity!"

"But that may not be true!" Erled blurted. "Why, Ereton, who is working with me on the project, has produced a calculation—hypothetical, I admit—to show that there may be a definite ratio of emptiness to solidity in the universe. If the ratio is one part emptiness to one quadrillion parts solidity, as he thinks, then there must be innumerable cavities—" He broke off, suddenly aware that he might be causing trouble for Ereton. "Well, at any rate shouldn't the matter be decided scientifically?" he ended lamely.

"Silence!" thundered Erpiort. "The age of cold intellectualism

is over, along with the age of religious disputation. We have entered the age of faith!"

Erled fell silent.

The silence was broken by Ergurur, Proctor of Machine Technology. He was a mild-faced man with an easy manner, and he addressed an apologetic smile at Erled.

"Er . . . you gave few details of the design of your proposed exploratory vessel when you submitted the tender," he said. "Perhaps you could say a little more about it now?"

Erled nodded. "We gave little information before because we wanted to make an early application to the Council so as to lose no time," he said. "At that stage our solidity ship was still undergoing development and the final designs were not complete."

"And now?"

"Both the designs and the ship itself are complete," Erled replied woodenly. "Completed and ready to embark on its first voyage. The engine is basically a sturdier model of the engines used in the Cavity environs surveyor vessels. The ship has its own sustenance recycling plant and can supply itself with food and air for at least a year, perhaps a year and a half. It carries a crew of two."

"And its speed?"

"Nearly forty miles per hour!" announced Erled triumphantly. "At least, that is what we gained on the test rig," he added hastily. "The ship has not yet been tested in a true rock environment, naturally."

Ergurur listened to these details in fascination. Erkarn, alert in his Proctorship of Emptiness Utilisation, broke in with a voice like ice.

"You boast that the despatch of your solidity ship will not deprive the Cavity of emptiness," he said. "Nevertheless it must carry *some* emptiness with it, and if for any reason you failed to return then that emptiness would be lost forever. Just what *is* the vacuity volume of your solidity ship?"

"Much thought has been given to this question," Erled answered. "We even thought of cutting down the vacuity volume to near-zero by immersing the crew members in a liquid and allowing them to breathe through flexible tubes directly from the recycling plant. However, we decided that such an existence would prove intolerable during a long voyage, and so we have merely economised as much as possible. The vacuity volume of the ship is only a hundred cubic feet."

"Pah! And if you had your way you would despatch a hundred such ships into the rock, which if they failed to return would

deprive mankind of ten thousand cubic feet!" Erkarn leaned back, smugly satisfied with this damning calculation.

"Quite so," murmured Ergrad. "Erled, I fear your solidity ship must be confiscated and destroyed."

"Could it not be placed in the Machine Museum?" suggested Ergurur regretfully.

At this moment Fasusun spoke, giving Erled a look of sorrowful annoyance. "What compelled you to think up this wicked scheme, Erled?" the Proctress said. "I fear your soul is bound for Hell, but I shall pray for you."

"Not wicked, Proctress," Erled replied evenly. "It is merely the natural scientific desire to explore and discover."

"But of course it is wicked! You are defying nature, defying God, trying to upset society! Were you not taught as a child that God intended us to remain where He put us? That He created the Cavity specially for us, and therefore could not possibly have created another? Think again, Erled! Try to lead a better life! Spend more time in the temple and study the scriptures!"

Erled kept silence, unable to devise a suitable reply. My God he thought, why do they have to allow women on the Council? For bigotry and narrowness these two, Fasusun and Fatelka, had even old Erpiort beat. They spent their time attempting to produce a population trained in doctrinaire placidity, being particularly active in the nurseries.

In addition they were almost certainly fundamentalists, taking literally every word of the scriptures. Believing, for instance, that God created the Cavity in the twinkling of an eye, complete with sustenance, machines and atomic energy, and a small tribe from which mankind grew—that was before the Cavity had by artificial means been moved several hundred thousand miles, of course. Even Erpiort had too much intelligence to swallow that one, Erled thought. Doubtless the Proctor of Worship held, with some reservations, to the scientific, evolutionary theory that Erled himself accepted—that first the Cavity had appeared, possibly by act of God or in some unknown manner, and that life had then developed by an evolutionary process. First, by spontaneous generation, sustenance had appeared, the edible yeast-like growth that could recycle body wastes and air. Then there had appeared tiny animalcules to feed on the sustenance. Rapidly these had evolved through various stages into present mankind. It was also necessary to suppose that far before present mankind had appeared, the primeval pre-human ancestors had been endowed with an instinctive knowledge of machines and of how to release atomic energy.

Finally the silence was broken by Erkarn. "Well, you can see how it is, Erled. The decision of the Council was unanimous except for one abstaining vote." He glanced disapprovingly at Ergurur. "You are to forget these mad dreams and that's a command."

"You're stifling something that can't be stifled forever," Erled muttered peevishly.

"You will mend your ways and forget the whole matter," Erkarn said sternly. "There is still the business of the illegal drilling hanging over you. We are willing to suspend the charges *if* it is seen that you show contrition—do you understand?"

"Yes," said Erled sullenly.

"Very well, then. The disposal of the solidity ship will be considered later. Much emptiness to you."

"Much emptiness," muttered Erled, and turned away.

ERLED'S resentment did not abate during the next few hours, but he had no thought of defying the Council. He was powerless against the Proctors, and he did not relish the thought of the criminal charges, with which he was being frankly blackmailed, being laid against him.

It would have to be left to some future generation, he told himself, to carry out the great task of exploring the universe.

He did not immediately convey the news to his colleagues in the project. Instead he felt in need of some different kind of comfort, and when the relaxation period arrived he made his way to the dwelling of Ergrad's family, to call on his betrothed, Fanaleen.

The thought of facing his future father-in-law so soon after his humiliation partly at his hands caused him a slight degree of trepidation, but he reassured himself that on such visits Ergrad usually put in only a brief appearance or none at all. However, as he approached Ergrad's well-appointed dwelling through a low-ceilinged passage, the tall, hooded figure of the Proctor Enforcer suddenly appeared from nowhere and barred his way.

This section of the passage-way was dimly lit. Erled felt menaced by the looming form. Dark black eyes flashed at him from beneath the cowl.

"Proctor Ergrad," he stuttered. "I have come to see Fanaleen—"

"Turn round, Erled, and go home. You're not welcome here."

Erled was astounded. "But—Proctor—"

Ergrad clenched his fist in exasperation. "Can you be so thick-headed?" he growled. "Didn't you see what went on in the Chamber today? You're *finished*, Erled, you'll be a nobody for

the rest of your life. Not the sort of man I'll allow to marry into my family. You'll never see Fanaleen again."

Abruptly the Proctor turned and strode towards his dwelling. For nearly a minute Erled stared after his retreating back, the finality of what had happened slowly seeping into him.

Never see Fanaleen again.

There could be no revision of that sentence. It was a strict law that the union between a couple must be agreeable to the parents. And the word of a Proctor was inviolate,

Dazed, Erled allowed his feet to carry him to the only place where he was likely to find understanding: the Inn of Vacuous Happiness, the haunt of his friends and colleagues in the solidity ship project. As he anticipated, they were all busy drinking there, and Ereton, with whom he shared co-leadership of the project, greeted him eagerly. So, in their favourite room where the ceiling beams touched one's head if one stood erect, he explained the double disaster.

Ereton squeezed his shoulder consolingly. "It appears that we chose the wrong time," he said sombrely.

"There'll *never* be a right time in this generation," Erled exclaimed heatedly. "And we'll never get a chance to search for other worlds. What right have the Proctors to dictate to our consciences like this? It's tyranny!"

The others agreed fervidly, after which Erled retired to a corner and brooded. His resentment was building up like a burning fire, and as with so many men before him, the tragedy of thwarted love turned his mind to lofty sentiments, so that he began to think again about his lifelong dream: the existence of other cavities. As if hypnotised, he returned to the cosmological questions that at various times had haunted him. Was the rock really infinite? It had to be—for if at some extreme it ended, what lay beyond that end? An infinity of emptiness, as Ereton, in a fit of brilliant extravagence, had once suggested? Erled soon pushed that idea aside. Baffling though the concept of infinity itself was, an empty infinity was something the mind simply could not grasp, and besides the notion was needlessly artificial.

He had expected to get drunk, but two hours later he found that he was still completely sober, having drunk but little. Ereton, too, did not seem to be in a mood for drinking. All seven others, however, drank heavily, and as their intoxication increased so did their indignation at the Proctor's decision. Erled found himself aggravated by the noise and he was about to suggest to Ereton that they leave when there was the sound of a disturbance and the flimsy screen door burst open.

Ergrad, at the head of four or five other enforcers, entered the inn and stood surveying the room, his head slightly bent beneath the big black beams.

"Looks like the whole pack is here, eh?" he barked. "All right, Erled, the Council has just now ordered that your solidity ship be destroyed, so lead us to it so that we may get on with the good work."

"Do you need us for that?" Erled retorted. "Do the job yourselves."

Ergrad looked at him thoughtfully. "Don't try to be obstructive, Erled, or it will go all the worse for you. It seems that you've managed to keep the site of your workshop to yourselves, at any rate Erkarn found himself unable to locate it for some reason or other, which looks damned peculiar to me. Well anyway, we knew you people came here for relaxation and I'll thank you for the information."

A chain of thoughts flashed through Erled's mind. For a workshop, or any other site for that matter, to be unlocatable by the Proctor of Emptiness Utilisation was not only peculiar it was downright incredible. Only one explanation came to Erled. Since the machines and workspace had originally been allocated by Ergurur, who was sympathetic to them, then somehow he must have concealed this legally obligatory information from Erkarn! An ecstatic flash of hope passed through Erled's heart. Even in the Council there was dissension! Ergurur was trying to help them!

Around him the others were crying "Shame!" and protesting to the law enforcers. Ergrad rounded on them, his face livid.

"To your homes, all of you, or you'll learn what it means to cross the law!"

Threateningly he brandished his truncheon and his followers produced theirs. There was a moment's pause.

Then a heavy glass came sailing through the air and struck Ergrad on the temple. He staggered, while the glass fell to the floor and shattered. With a howl of rage Ergrad ordered his men to attack and in seconds the inn was the scene of an unsightly brawl.

Erled and Ereton, already made nervous by the tense situation, had backed to the far end of the room. They looked on the brawl appalled. Then a cry floated through to them, from Ervane, Erled believed.

"Save the solidity ship! Save the solidity ship!"

That cry prompted Erled into action. Surreptitiously he eased open the rear exit and beckoned to Ereton. Together they slipped

away. Minutes later they were headed for the perimeter, having changed direction several times on the public conveyor system to elude pursuit.

"This is terrible!" Ereton said, although he had obeyed Erled as if he had no will of his own. "Do you think we should go back Erled, and apologise to Proctor Ergrad? Otherwise everyone will be punished severely."

"Our friends would never have dared to attack the enforcers if they hadn't been both drunk and angry," Erled admitted. "Perhaps that will count in their favour when they come to trial. As for us, a wild intention has entered my mind of which I think the others would approve, Ereton."

They spoke no more during the rest of the journey, aware that anyone sitting near them on the transporter chairs might be eavesdropping on their conversation. Before long they came to the workshop on the edge of the Cavity where the solidity ship was housed.

The area was deserted, no residences being nearby and this being the rest period. Erled opened the gate and they crept inside. Before them the solidity ship stood on a short ramp, its snout facing the bare rock of infinity but a few yards away.

The ship had the form of a fluted cylinder, either end being squarely blunt and intricated with drive machinery. "To destroy this ship would be a crime," Erled said. His mouth curled in disgust. "They talk of faith. But isn't *our* effort a matter of faith? —Faith that the universe contains more than just our one cavity? That there *are* other worlds if only we will look?"

"You want us to take the ship and go illegally into solidity," Ereton said tonelessly.

"Yes, why not? What else is left to us? It's either that or abandon all our dreams and live useless, frustrated lives. We've got this one chance, so let's take it!"

In his heart Ereton had known that this was why they had come here, but the thought of such a step made him go deathly pale. "Do you realize what it means? It will be the death sentence when we return!"

"Not if we return with news of other emptiness in the rock!" Erled replied triumphantly. "We have friends even in the Council, you know!" One friend, anyway, he told himself privately.

Ereton opened his hands in a hopeless gesture. "And suppose we find no new emptiness? How long did the ancients search?" He shook his head. "We're both mad."

"*Both* of us, eh?" Erled grinned. "I *knew* you were with me!

Don't prevaricate, we may only have minutes in which to make our get-away!"

Smiling wryly, Ereton patted him on the shoulder. "Of course I'm with you, old friend. As you say, what else is there to do at a juncture like this?"

Hastily they scrambled aboard the solidity ship and made a rapid check of all the equipment. The newly complete craft slid along its ramp until reaching the further wall, when the rock touched by its snout seemed to collapse and to flow like fine oil. The ship lurched suddenly forward, and seconds later it had merged and disappeared into the bare, blank rock.

"INCREDIBLE," murmured Erled.

Ereton joined him from aft and peered over his shoulder at the flickering bank of instruments. "What is it?"

"I think we're being followed."

They had been *en voyage* for just over two weeks. In the cramped space, Ereton leaned closer. Pretty soon there was no doubt of it: the image plates of both sonicscope and tremorscope sharpened to reveal that a second solidity ship was following them. And it was close.

While they stared in amazement they heard a *ping* and a light came on over the rockvid receiver. Erled flicked a switch. Across the plate streamed recurrent ripples that slowly built up a crude, low-definition picture carried by sonicwaves from the following ship.

The hooded face of Ergrad stared at them from the plate, distorted somewhat by the incessant ripples.

"I never dreamed they'd go this far!" Erled breathed.

The Proctors, presumably, were so furious at their escape that they had sent Ergrad in hot pursuit! The second ship must have been put together in a hurry by modifying a surveyor vessel. At that, Erled thought, the enforcer had done very well indeed to catch up with them so quickly. He must have strained the engines to the utmost, at considerable danger to himself.

Ergrad spoke, the words coming blurred through the speaker.

"Erled, Ereton! Halt and turn your ship round at once! I am here to escort you back to the Cavity, where you will stand trial for your crimes!"

Erled and Ereton looked at one another quizzically.

"No return!" Erled said fiercely. "We keep going!"

Nodding, Ereton spoke into the transmitter microphone. "Sorry, Proctor, we can't turn back now."

"Be warned that we are armed with quake beams and will not hesitate to use them! Obey or be destroyed!" Ergrad glowered, and his voice was like iron.

"What shall we do?" Ereton hissed, switching off the microphone. "Those beams can shake us to pieces!"

"Perhaps we can dodge them."

Ereton crouched down behind Erled as the latter took over the controls. The solidity ship surged forward at top speed and began to weave about through the rock. Shortly afterwards there was a screeching, rumbling sound and the ship shook as though it were a bell struck by a giant hammer. Erled gasped as the vibrations caught hold of him and made him feel that he was being turned inside out.

Although they had been struck only a glancing blow, Erled had been counting on the fact that quake beams travelled fairly slowly through their rock medium and therefore were difficult to aim at a fast-moving object. Unfortunately, Ergrad—or whoever was operating the weapon—seemed to be skilled in its use.

Finding the controls unaffected by the strike, Erled put the ship through a dizzying series of turns. He knew that he had to avoid another hit and at the same time to put distance between himself and the pursuer, because their only hope lay in the probability that Ergrad's vessel was limited in its range and therefore he would soon have to turn back.

He peered at the sonicscope and tremorscope plates, trying to judge precisely where the pursuing ship lay and where it might strike next. But suddenly both plates erupted into an unreadable, screaming flurry as the quake beam went into action again. All around them the tortured rock quaked and imploded and the metal of the ship shrieked as if demented. Erled and Ereton immediately lost consciousness, but the injured solidity ship, its engines still working at full blast, plunged blindly on at top speed through the eternal rock.

ERLED did not know how much later it was that he came to himself again. His first impression was of a grating noise jarring on his ears, telling him that all was not well. He saw that Ereton too was stirring, and then he climbed back to his bucket seat and scaled down the accelerator.

"Are you hurt?" he asked Ereton.

"I don't think so," groaned the other, and he hauled himself to his knees in the confined space, "What in God's name is that noise?"

"We've sustained some damage, I think. Something amiss in the traction motor by the sound of it."

He glanced at the 'scope plates. They were both working normally but showed no hint of anything unusual in the vicinity. "No sign of Ergrad," he announced.

"Eh?" Ereton stared at the plates in delight. "What can have happened to him? He should be able to track us down easily enough."

"It's possible he believes us destroyed," Erled said with a shrug. "Or he might already have been at the point of no return when he caught up with us and is unable to follow us any further. It could even be that the quake beam backfired on him—that happens sometimes, you know. Anyway the first thing we've got to do is check the ship."

When they had done so the news was not good. The steering gear was severely damaged. Worse, the relatively delicate sustenance recycling plant had also suffered damage. Erled and Ereton debated what to do.

Erled said gloomily: "We may well die here in the rock. But even if we manage to turn round now and head back home, what future have we? Our rank rebellion earns the death sentence, apart from the possibility that Ergrad may have died, for which we will be held responsible. Let's continue as best we can, Ereton."

Dourly Ereton agreed.

In the ensuing months they spent much of their time trying to repair the damage. The recycling plant required enormous attention to keep functioning properly. Sometimes the air became foul and the food uneatable, and neither could help but notice that even its best output was deteriorating over a period of time.

The traction motor never quite lost its ominous grating noise, but they did manage to jury-rig a steering system.

But despite all their successes the confined conditions of their existence, combined with persistent hard work, anxiety, poor food and air, were sapping their strength. As time advanced something like a stupor overcame them. Eventually each privately despaired of reaching their goal, though neither would speak of his despair to the other. During that time only one thing happened to break the monotony. Ereton was taking his turn on watch, staring with heavy-lidded eyes at the image plates. Suddenly he gave a hoarse cry which brought Erled hurrying forward.

"Look!"

Furious ripples were appearing on the tremorscope, threatening to break out at any moment into a maelstrom of violence.

"Definitely not a cavity," Erled mused. "To me it suggests only one thing: a natural quake—and a big one! Furthermore it's directly ahead!"

"A natural quake?" said Ereton wonderingly. Theoretically they were possible but none had ever been observed. It was calculated that the violence of such phenomena, if they did actually occur, would be simply colossal—enough to wipe out in an instant any cavity luckless enough to be caught in them. Erled knew that they would not survive even for seconds in the giant rock storm that lay ahead.

"If we're to get out of its way we're going to have to turn ninety degrees or more," Erled said. "Preferably to the right."

"Do you think we can?"

"We'd better have a damned good try."

Both were having a hard time to stay alert in the foul air. Cautiously they put their temporary steering system into operation. Reluctantly the ship turned a little. Then a little more. There was the sound of something snapping and an alarm sounded. Gritting his teeth, Ereton forced a little more pressure from the collapsing valves that were supposed to bring the head of the ship round in the rock. The ship turned a few degrees more, then the whole system gave way under the strain.

"Ninety degrees," said Ereton, breathing deeply. "Just about!"

But they were without steering of any kind, and both knew that they did not have the strength to try to jury-rig the system again. Leaving the ship on automatic, they returned to their bunks.

Their morale was now falling rapidly. Whenever they could either Erled or Ereton attended to the recycling plant, but the rest of the time, completely debilitated, they simply lay on their narrow bunks and waited for whatever fate would bring.

Four months after their departure from the Cavity Erled was awakened from a deep slumber by the ringing of an alarm. He was perplexed to find that the engines were silent and that the ship was apparently motionless. Dragging himself from his bunk, he saw that the emptiness indicator was flashing—and, he guessed, had been flashing for some time.

Feverishly he shook Ereton to awareness and coaxed him to the control panel. The instruments told their own story: with no one at the controls to heed the "emptiness ahead" warning, the solidity ship had plunged straight on until encountering that emptiness, upon which the automatic cut-out had brought the vessel to a stop.

The two friends did not even speak to one another. Wordlessly they broke open a locker containing oxygen masks which were included in the ship's kit in case the air of alien cavities proved unbreathable. Thus equipped, Erled summoned up his last remaining strength to force open the hull door.

The solidity ship had emerged halfway from a sheer rock wall. As luck would have it, it had struck emptiness only a couple of feet above one of the many rock ledges jutting from the cliff face. After testing the ledge for firmness, Erled and Ereton stumbled down and looked about them.

The new emptiness was faintly illumined by streaks of luminescent stone in the otherwise inert rock. These streaks occurred in the home cavity, also, and were held to be one of the prerequisites for the primeval development of life. The two men, having spent long periods inside the solidity ship in total darkness, adapted to this faint light with little difficulty. At first a terrible cosmic fear gripped Erled; for although he saw the great rock wall streatching unevenly away in all directions nearby, and below he could dimly discern floors, boulders and plateaux, ahead of him there seemed to be nothing but unending void. Was Ereton's wild notion true? Had they come to the edge of solidity, to look out on an infinity of *emptiness*? But as he peered harder Erled saw that that impossible dream was not to be. He saw a dim film of *something* hanging, like a curtain, far away in the distance, and he knew that this was a cavity such as the one in which he had been born. Except that *this* cavity apparently contained no life.

"So it's true!" he declaimed in a cracked voice, the words coming muffled through his mask. "There *are* other cavities in the rock! Some of them *must* be inhabited! Our faith is justified —we are not alone in the universe!"

At that moment his strength failed him. He felt Ereton's arm around him, helping him back into the solidity ship, where they both lay down for the last time.

WELL, ASMRAVAAR, what do you think of that? A sad tale in some respects, perhaps—but above all, I think, a triumphant victory for the spirit of intelligent life.

There is one tiny aspect of the narrative that may strike you as suspicious. I mean the part in which Erled and Ereton were turned aside from their course, and thereby enabled to find the new cavity, by the intervention of a rock quake. Did this smack of providence? Well there, I confess, I failed to play fair and concealed the truth:—it *was* providence—*my* providence. The

rock in which these creatures dwell is scattered with caverns at intervals too infrequent to hit upon by sheer luck, and the antronoscopes they use are so primitive that they are only effective over a range of two or three miles. So, seeing a suitable cavern lying quite close to their route, I could not resist helping them out a bit by causing a minor disturbance with an effector beam!

How the bipeds came to exist in their rock environment is something of a mystery. Since the surface of the planet, a thousand miles over their heads, is desolate and airless, I surmise that they might have retreated millennia ago from a natural catastrophe or, what amounts to the same thing, from a war of annihilation.

It might seem surprising that the bipeds have never guessed that they live in the interior of a spherical planet, until one remembers that there is nothing in their environment to suggest the fact. The rock stratum in which they live is a variety of basalt and is roofed over by a somewhat rare phenomenon—a five-hundred mile thick stratum of extremely hard carbon-bonded iron and granite. It would take some really advanced expertise to penetrate this particular lithosphere and when the bipeds took refuge below it, afterwards allowing their science to deteriorate, they effectively imprisoned themselves inside the planet forever.

The stories about the epic voyages of ancient times are literally true, by the way. They really *did* journey hundreds of thousands of miles, never suspecting that they were simply travelling round the planet's gravity radius (at that depth a circumference of roughly eight thousand miles) again and again.

In a way I feel glad that they never knew.

And where is my "philosophic victory", you want to know? As you are too blockheaded to see it yourself, I shall have to explain. I have discovered a solid universe of infinite rock! But, you protest, the bipeds only *think* they live in such a universe—in actuality they dwell in a completely unremarkable, average planet, leaving aside one or two details of geological interest.

Yet, Asmravaar, are imagination and reality so very much different, really? If the mind is able to entertain some state of affairs as though it were real, then perhaps somewhere in the transfinite universe it *is* real.

As it happens I have a little more than just fancy to support this contention of mine. There is a puzzling little coincidence in the tale I have just related. Ereton, the theoretician, made a calculation of the hypothetical ratio of "emptiness" to "solidity" in his (imaginery) universe. I was astonished when I realized that the figures he produced come close to describing the actually existing *converse* case in the real universe—namely the average

ratio of *matter* to *empty space*. I cannot help wondering, therefore, whether this is something more than a coincidence.

Some years ago there used to be much talk about the universe possessing "matter/anti-matter symmetry", that is, that spatialities of out type might correspond to an equal number of spatialities where matter has its electrical charges reversed—the electron being positive and the proton negative. Since no anti-matter spatialities have been found one hears little about this idea nowadays. Well: Ereton's calculation has led me to construct, along somewhat similar lines a theory of my own which I shall present to the Explorers' Club on my next return home. In my theory the universe exhibits "space/anti-space symmetry", or if you like, "emptiness-solidity symmetry" to use the bipeds' terminology, so that if one passes the "mid-point" of the universe, as it were (not a very accurate way to speak of transfinity, I know), then one enters a complementary series of spatialities where there is, not primarily void containing islands of matter, but primarily solid matter containing occasional bubbles of void.

I'm pretty confident that my theory will make quite a splash when I announce it. It's amusing to think how one might explore these solid spatialities. Just imagine me and my antronoscope as I bore endlessly through the rock in search of cavity-worlds!

Well, I think that's about enough for now, as I'm very tired. I'll burst this lot to you without delay, and then I'm going to get some much-needed sleep. Yours, and let me hear from you soon: Utz.

MY POOR Utz: While it was delightful to hear from you after so long, I'm afraid that your ravings about a "philosophic victory" only go to show that you are suffering from hysterical boredom. Your story, let me say at once, was most entertaining, but apart from that all you have done is to blow up a simple incident into some sort of cosmic hot air which you revealingly admit to be all in your imagination. As for your theory of anti-space it is purely hypothetical and has no solid evidence to support it (the pun was unintentional). These fanciful theories never do turn out to correspond to reality anyway.

I have warned you many times about the monotony of the universe at large and now I think it's beginning to get at you. Let me urge you to come directly home, for I think the rest will do you good. I might even find a part for you in my next play, since you obviously have a misplaced talent for the dramatic. Your ever-loving friend: Asmravaar.

:: :: :: Transfinite cable to Venerable Gob Slok Ok :: Please collect :: :: ::

DEAR REVERED Uncle,

I trust that the surprise and distate you will feel on receiving this cable will be decreased when I tell you that I am sending it from the 10^{6248}th series. Since many, many infinities of solid rock and metal therefore separate us, you need not fear an attack of the disgust and revulsion which my presence seems to cause you.

I am contacting you because, whatever your feelings for me personally, you are still one of the most noted scholars whose professional opinion I value, and I cannot refrain from notifying you of a discovery of mine, even though I know how much you disapprove of my life as a cosmic explorer.

Having transmigrated myself into the 10^{6248}th series of solidities I proceeded to tunnel strongly through rock which proved, for an immense distance, to be unbroken. I was, I should add, in a region far removed from any of the cavity-clusters which usually abound in this series, a desolate region which would normally remain unexplored for all time. My reason for tunnelling in this direction, I say without shame (at the risk of enraging you, Uncle) was sheer caprice.

At any rate my antronoscopes registered the unexpected presence of a very large cavity so I hurried to investigate. It transpired that this cavity was the largest I have ever encountered or heard of. The mean diameter is ten million miles!

Let me repeat that, Uncle, in case you think there has been a mistake in transmission. Ten million miles! Not only that but the cavity contains a rich biological life and has several intelligent species scattered around its circumference, none of which I have made contact with yet, as I want to await your advice before doing so.

The fact is, Uncle, that so far I have investigated only one of these species and it entertains such an astonishing picture of the cosmos that I don't know quite how to proceed. Let me explain. In a cavity of this size centrifugal gravity works very efficiently. Consequently there is a film of atmosphere about two hundred miles deep upon the walls of the cavity, but the rest is void—pure emptiness.

I should also add that it is almost impossible to see as far as the opposite side of the cavity, for reasons rather too complicated to go into here. Anyway, the upshot is that these intelligent beings, who live, of course, within the atmosphere, are aware that a vacuum lies above them after the atmosphere peters out (being compressed, of course, by the excessive gravity). But their world

is so large, and so impossible for them to explore fully on account of its size, that they possess no idea that it constitutes the inner surface of a sphere! (Or near-sphere.) They suppose that the void above them extends without limit—*that the cosmos is an infinity of vacuum with only islands of solid matter in it.*

It was some time before I was able to comprehend a belief so bizarre and inconceivable. And yet now that I have managed, after a fashion, to grasp it, I find the idea rather compelling and fascinating, and I can't help wondering, whether there *might*, among all the solidities as yet unexplored, be one consisting of almost nothing but emptiness?

I hope, Uncle, that you can forget our differences for long enough to give your attention to this question. We are both, remember, animated by a love of knowledge and I would listen to your opinion most earnestly. Do you think that a nearly-empty solidity—one would, I suppose, have to call it a "spatiality"—is possible?

And apart from that, should I attempt to contact the beings in the giant cavity, or should I leave them alone with their delusion?

Your perplexed and respectful nephew,
Awm.

:: :: :: Transfinite Open Cable Receipt Awm Oosh Ok :: Transmit 10^{62--} range :: Reply not prepaid :: :: ::

DEAR Nephew,

Not only is your idea of a vacuous infinity inconceivable it is also downright silly, and utterly impossible as well you know.

In a way it's a pity we don't live in such a world because no type of propulsion could operate in a void, since there would be nothing on which to gain traction, and that would at least prevent you young grubs from gadding about the cosmos with all the irresponsibility of flame-flies.

I have placed on record your discovery of the curiosity, namely the giant cavity, and I suppose I should thank you for that trifle. However I feel it is amply repaid by my deigning to reply to your cable, which otherwise I would have ignored.

If you solicit my opinion then you must accept it on any subject I care to name. Let me be quite specific: your larvae, of which you seem to generate an indecent number with each visit to your long-suffering family, are hatching without the benefit of a father to guide them in the rituals of the swarm, and seem most unlikely to grow into decent, low-crawling worms. Your wives grow fat

and lazy without the discipline which only a strict husband can provide, and the affairs of your estates are going to rack and ruin. I thank God that your father is not alive to see how his son has turned out.

A worm's place is at home—that is my opinion, and I strongly recommend that you repair hither post-haste. As for whether you should or should not communicate with ignorant savages, that is of absolutely no interest to me.

Your most displeased uncle,

Gob.

FAMILY LITERATURE

CHARLES PLATT

To use J. G. Ballard's phrase, contemporary life is increasingly a series of intersections between fiction and reality. It is thus appropriate that the greatest psychopath of the nineteen sixties seems to have drawn largely on fiction to structure his philosophy, his life style and his atrocities.

In his obsessively-documented black comedy *The Family* (Hart-Davis £2.50) Ed Sanders states that Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* ". . . helped provide a theoretical basis for Manson's family . . . Manson borrowed a lot of terminology and ideas from this book . . . to this day Manson's followers hold water-sharing ceremonies where Manson, in jail, magically takes a long-distance hit off a glass of water which is being stared at by a circle of sitting adepts."—This ceremony being an exact replica of those performed in the novel by the super-powered hero, Martian-raised Earthman Valentine Michael Smith. Heinlein readers will recall that Smith establishes a religion with a harem of beautiful women who worship his sexual prowess and are given to crying "Thou art God!" at the moment of penetration (a phrase which Manson's female followers also used to use under those circumstances). Smith teaches his followers to master their latent psychic powers, often in the morally-justified act of "discorporating" (Heinlein's euphemism for "murdering") anyone who threatens Smith's way of life. Victims are predominantly the rich, the decadent and the police.

Still further correspondence between the book and Manson's activities is provided by the fact that he named his first child Valentine Michael Manson, and called his parole officer Jubal, after another character in the book.

Manson's encounter with *Stranger in a Strange Land* seems to have been back in the early sixties. To use Sanders' phrase, there were several subsequent "sleazo inputs". He came to believe, for

instance, in the hollow earth theory, and thought that a deep hole in Death Valley was the gateway through to this idyllic inner universe. (Stagnant water filling the hole represented a barrier; Manson obtained estimates for pumping it dry, but the costs were prohibitive. Nirvana, alas, remained out of reach.)

Manson believed in the threat of black supremacy; was convinced that he was Jesus Christ; drew heavily on the Bible and groups like the Process and, originally, Scientology, that other science-fiction-inspired cult.

But even near the end of his freedom, shortly before his arrest, it is probable that he was re-reading Heinlein's novel: "There was one occult shopkeeper on Santa Monica Boulevard who remembered selling Manson a copy . . . around this time" writes Sanders. The novel was found in an "army type pack" (as the police described it) belonging either to Manson or one of his followers.

Thus the long-rumoured influence of the book on Manson is now confirmed in detail and beyond doubt. What used to be thought of as a slightly corrupt but basically trivial piece of science fiction has turned out as a blueprint for atrocities. A brief re-examination of it is in order.

Like so many cult novels, Heinlein's is long, slow, and narrow in its appeal and obsessions. Its weaknesses are easy to tabulate:

It has little coherent structure or plot, characters fading in and out of situations according to their being required for participation in pseudo-philosophical arguments.

There is little color or sense of environment, and no use is made of potentially evocative imagery.

The cultural background is of a future society, but details of it are vague and contradictory.

There is very little science-fictional inventiveness; Heinlein's base-concept is Earth-child-raised-by-Martians; his elaboration of it is extrapolative, not innovative.

Characterization is rudimentary; women in particular are so identical in speech and behavior as to be interchangeable.

Heinlein has only two real interests: obsessive detail and "thought-provoking" philosophical dialogues.

The dialogues are almost all exercises in logic applied to taste and mores (always a suspect approach), and they exist supposedly independently of whatever the author's own ideas on the subjects may be. Heinlein likes to give the impression that he is creating free and open discussion for its own sake; any conclusions which are arrived at are not *his* conclusions, they are those which his fictional characters come to as if of their own accord.

Consequently it has often been claimed impossible to deduce anything about Heinlein's personal bias.

This claim is, of course, demonstrably false. A writer may argue philosophies different from his own, but will find it far harder to conceal his assumptions and bias in other areas, particularly when describing the way in which people feel, act and relate to one another.

The behavior of Heinlein's characters is odd in several respects. They are coy, ingenuous and inhibited, sometimes using absurd sexual euphemisms: "—he was not the infantile type, solely interested in the size of mammary glands! No, it was herself he loved." They deal in shallow, clichéd emotions: " 'Are you in love with him?'

"Jill gasped. 'That's preposterous!'

" 'Not at all. You're a girl, he's a boy—that's a nice setup.' "

And they reveal decidedly "unliberated" values: " '. . . a present ought not to be expensive—unless you are trying to get a girl to marry you—or something.' "

The shallowness of the characters would be unremarkable in most science fiction adventure novels. But in a book which is primarily concerned with the way in which people behave, it is a weakness that invalidates Heinlein's conclusions and indicates a fundamental lack of sympathy and understanding for people as opposed to stereotypes.

His sexism is blatant. His female characters *enjoy* being treated as objects. Here, for instance, a woman discovers the excitements of undressing in front of a striptease audience: "When she felt their admiring stares or outright lust . . . she did not resent it; it warmed her and made her smugly pleased . . . if a healthy woman liked to be looked at . . . healthy men should like to look."

Jealousy is used casually as a natural motivation for murder, early in the book, where a man is described as having killed another and then committed suicide, because of his wife's infidelity.

And there are, in effect, not one but *two* harems, the second being operated by a father-figure stereotype recurring in many Heinlein novels. In this one he is called Jubal Harshaw, a bombastic, tyranical old bastard with a heart of gold and an inability ever to admit being in the wrong. His three secretaries clothe, feed and love him—stopping short of sex, however, since he is getting past that kind of thing.

One by one, all the characters become converted to Valentine Michael Smith's male-supremacist vision of free love and communal sex. But it is an unconvincing and often ludicrous conver-

sion. They continue to blush and euphemize (like self-conscious middle-aged suburbanites trying desperately to "swing") during the casual sex which they supposedly find so natural. Heinlein's own assumptions about social behavior make it impossible for him to conceive of a truly uninhibited free-love situation.

Turning to the philosophical dialogues themselves, we find aphorisms as glib and reactionary as midWest bumper stickers. (Heinlein could undoubtedly write better bumper stickers than he does novels.)

" 'Killing a man may be necessary. But confining him is an offense against his integrity.' "

" 'You go into a man's house, you accept his household rules. That's a universal rule of civilized behavior.' "

" 'Abstract design is all right—for wallpaper and linoleum. . . . What modern artists do is pseudo-intellectual masturbation . . . obscurity is the refuge of incompetence.' "

"Jubal had burned his honorable discharge and all that went with it the day the United States ceased havings its own forces."

"Mike would grok a 'wrongness' in the poor in-betweeners [i.e. homosexuals] anyhow—they would never be offered water." (Thus excluding "deviants" from the religion founded by a man supposedly free of all moral preconceptions.)

The above are not direct statements by the author. Most are expressed as the views of Jubal Harshaw. But Heinlein goes to great lengths to give Harshaw even more authority and "wisdom" than the naïve cult-hero Smith. Harshaw is always proven correct. His opponents in arguments are weak, easily convinced and fundamentally in awe of him. No liberal or humanitarian statements are ever given any weight. Few are even touched upon. I suggest that it would be impossible for an author with liberal or humanitarian inclinations to present such a set of opinions, so complacently and smoothly, capturing what might be called the authentic flavor of fascism, and making no attempt to include any balancing, opposing viewpoint. Heinlein may well be exaggerating his real feelings. But he is clearly pleased with the result.

Turning from the book to its readers:

Despite (or because of) its depiction of women as slaves to a male cult leader, the novel often has its greatest impact on female readers. Several female students in a science fiction class I teach in New York confessed to having been deeply affected when they had first read the book years previously, during adolescence. They knew other girls who had also been changed by it, incorporating the word "grok" in their everyday speech, naming their pets, friends and children after characters in the book, and looking on

it as a kind of sacred and exquisite fable. The idea of a totally "sinless", child-like and beautiful man coming to Earth and founding a cult based on sexual gratification seems to provide sufficient romantic appeal to distract such readers from the hero's tendencies toward mass-murder and world domination.

Science fiction fans used to be thought of as harmless eccentrics who sometimes took a shallow, escapist literature too seriously. It took the social mores of California in the sixties, psychedelic drugs, and the disillusionment of U.S. youth culture to create a situation in which the science fiction readers could become far more eccentric, and no longer harmless. There is no indication that things are going to get any better. There are abundant raw materials for many more Mansonesque cults: naïve adolescent girls, cheap supplies of acid, and many more novels which could be used as social blueprints. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* or *Farnham's Freehold* could be quite useful, for instance.

There can be no sensible case made for censoring cult books which might turn out to be useful for potential psychopaths. But shouldn't there now be some kind of a case for self-censorship in the part of writers of such books? Can Heinlein now continue writing his reactionary philosophies, giving easy answers to all the most complex moral questions? Can he really pretend, now, that Manson misunderstood his novel, when so many of the murderer's attitudes, beliefs and living habits were copied with such slavish devotion?

Unfortunately, the answer to all these three questions is, *probably, yes.*

THERE ARE NO BANISTERS

JACK M. DANN

Eighty-three books, half that on psychology, were reflected in the antique silvered mirror. All out of date. Fleitman had stopped trying to keep up on anything long ago—these books were only a part of his ritual. I never liked to read, anyway, Fleitman told himself. And television had never been enough, even with cerebral hook-ins. He had stopped paying rent on the tiny machines when he had started to enjoy feeling the commercials. He could not rationalize having an orgasm over a cigarette advertisement.

Fleitman rested his forehead on the mirror: two clouds formed under his nose. If only you could forget where you are. If only you were young. But you should be content, Fleitman told himself. It is safe and calm here; there are no young people to intrude. Fleitman leaned back in his chair and smiled at himself in the mirror. He remembered when his professional degree had become obsolete. He remembered forty more years of soft jobs, jobs he could handle, jobs where his education and experience would be useful. He remembered working as a module superintendent.

Fleitman lit a cigarette and watched the smoke curl before his face. He experienced a vague sexual sensation. But he would not permit himself any more synthetic pleasures. He glanced around his room, all the familiar objects in their proper places, everything clean, ready for tomorrow. But the whole place will change, he thought—after this generation dies out. And you'll be dead.

Mercifully, the phone rang. A very white, wrinkled face appeared in the wall hollow; it smiled and without waiting for a customary greeting said, "You have a meeting, Professor Fleitman. Have you forgotten?"

Bitch, Fleitman said to himself.

"The Entertainment Committee is waiting for you. Shall I tell them you'll be right there?"

Fleitman watched his expression in the mirror. "All right. Tell Taylor I'll be there as soon as I get dressed."

"But you're already dressed, sir."

Forty years ago she might have had breasts, he thought, instead of dried up gunny sacks. Where had he heard of gunny sacks? No image came into his mind. "Tell them I'll be there when I dress, Mrs. Watson?"

Fleitman was happy that a meeting had been called. He needed the company, and a good argument would clear his head. And, as usual, everyone would end up hung in the feelies, Fleitman thought. He felt an urge to join them. No, he thought, and tried to forget about it. He felt squeamish about leaving his room.

He took a shuttle to the park. It would be a short leisurely walk to the conference building. And he could forget all that mass above him, pushing down on his thoughts by its mere existence. As was prescribed, there was a thin drizzle. Fleitman had forgotten his raincoat, but the cold little bites of rain felt good on his arms and chest. His shirt clung to his skin.

The park stretched out before him. Haze hung in the trees and connected them into a pale ceiling supported by an undergrowth of frozen arms and legs, gnarls for chests and branches for limbs. A yellow chalk road sliced through the wall of trees. Fleitman did not look at the sky-scrapers behind him, steel stalagmites reaching toward the bright surface of the dome above. The sunlights—the thousand eyes of the sphere that surrounded and supported the underground city—were turned on full. The sun-shower had been scheduled to last for an hour.

Fleitman walked along a causeway near the edge of the park and listened to the shuttle trains passing below him. The sidewalk enclosure shielded him from the rain. He watched a crowd waiting to step onto a slidewalk ramp. They were all wearing raincoats. Fleitman was repelled by their age, by their once soft skin that had turned to parchment. Fleitman touched his own face. He left the park—it was a five minute walk to the Entertainment Building. Like a somnambulant, Fleitman edged his way through the crowds, ignoring them. He took an escalator into the building and then an elevator to his floor.

He paused for a few seconds in front of the conference room door, inches from the sensing line. He kicked at the air and the door slid open, revealing five old men seated around a polished metal table.

"'bout time," Taylor said. He was seated at the far end of the table. "Christ, waiting for you for . . ."

Jake, who was sitting to the left of Taylor and opposite Sar-

torsky, said, "Sit down, Fleitman. We've got a great idea." He nodded at Sartorsky, who was studying his distorted reflection in the metal tabletop. Sartorsky's breath clouded the reflection. "Remember the old screen movies?" Jake continued. "I mean you've heard of them."

Fleitman straightened his back to gain a few more inches height. Relax, he thought. They're sitting down. He rested his palms against the back of the chair. No need to stand up, you old bastards. "The rules of order prescribe . . ."

Good, Fleitman thought. Jake is going to be trouble. That will give me some time to think.

"What are the rules of order?" asked Sartorsky.

Sartorsky's blind, Fleitman thought. He fought down a gleeful urge to pull the black visor band from his eyes. "First of all, I received no notice at all of this meeting. Why was that?"

Tostler, who was sitting beside Fleitman's chair, winked at him. Fleitman had never seen him before. He was younger than the rest of the men. Fleitman ignored him.

"It was posted," said Toomis, who was sitting opposite Tostler and to the left of Fleitman.

"And you also got a call from me yesterday," Taylor said. "What the hell else do you want?"

"Out of order," Fleitman replied. An idea was forming. "Out of order you sonovabitch." Everyone was playing the game, but they would not give Fleitman more than five minutes.

"Sit down Fleitman," Jake said. "Listen for a minute. Sartorsky, over here, came up with a great idea." Jake looked at Sartorsky, but he was still looking down at his reflection. "It's good for the whole goddamm sector, good enough for a couple of months at least."

"It stinks," Taylor said. "People want a feelie or, at least, a hook-in." Toomis nodded in agreement. Tostler smiled at Jake, waiting for him to reply.

Sartorsky looked up from the table. "Let me tell it myself. It's my idea."

"Shut up," Jake said. "I'm doing this for you." Tostler nodded in approval; Fleitman was not listening.

Popcorn, Fleitman thought. What the hell was popcorn? Popcorn—movies—dried gunny sacks. The words were there before the images.

"Let me tell this," Sartorsky said, propping his knee against the table and pushing his chair back. "It is a good idea. We could show a few screens a week for recreation."

"Movies," Toomis said, "not screens." Taylor grinned.

"Right, movies. There weren't that many that were available to us. We couldn't get anything popular." He held up a notebook. "These are the titles we can get right away: *Blood of the Artist* by Cocteau; another one—it's only fifteen minutes—by Dali, but I can't read the title; another one by . . ." He passed the notebook to Jake.

"Disney. Says it's a cartoon. What the hell is a cartoon?"

Cartoon. I'm getting near it, Fleitman thought. Little children running around, balloons. What's a balloon? Talking, laughing, gasping, whispering. Sideshow. Sonovabitch.

"Well anyway," Jake continued, "there's a lot of them here." He passed the notebook to Fleitman.

"This is interesting," Tostler said. "*Freaks.*"

"What's that?" Fleitman asked. Freaks. That felt right. Fleitman tied it into popcorn and gunny sacks. It still did not work. Soon, he thought.

"It's no good," Taylor said. "People won't give a damn about these movies, not without, at least, a hook-in. It has to be a feelie, or something like it."

"People want something different," Sartorsky said, tracing a line over his reflection with his index finger. "They don't have to experience everything through a feelie. People want something else."

"Do you?" Toomis asked.

Sartorsky flushed. "You know why I use the feelies. Let me put out your eyes and we'll see how well you can see with a visor band."

Taylor smiled at Toomis and relaxed in his chair. Fleitman was still standing, his palms red from his weight. He stood up straight.

"So what do you think, Fleitman?" Jake asked. "The girls should like it; hell, they suggested it, didn't they?"

Sartorsky grimaced.

It's not that easy, Fleitman thought. He could go one better; if not, he would side with Sartorsky. Fleitman could outyell Taylor. His ideas were still fuzzy, but a word came to mind and he blurted it out: "Circus. We can have a circus. That's better than a movie, that's almost real."

"What the hell is a circus?" Jake asked.

"Shut up, Jake." Animals, Fleitman thought. Pictures began to form in his mind. "We can pull thirty floors out of the rec building. Christ, it's a module, isn't it? The big top will be burlap." He had once filed this information, but he could not remember when or for what reason.

"What's burlap?" Sartorsky asked.

Tightrope walkers, lion tamers, trapeze artists, clowns. From a book? Horses jumping through hoops.

"What's wrong with the movie idea?" Jake asked.

Fleitman ignored him and sat down. Everyone was watching Fleitman.

"I know what a circus is," Tostler said. "It's like the movies, only closer to a feelie. The movies, I think, are flat. A circus is live people performing tricks. You can't get inside the performers, but you can watch them right in front of you. Not like on a board."

Jake was silent.

"Is this thing a feelie?" Taylor asked.

Fleitman did not look at him; he looked at the wall over Taylor's head. "No, Stephen. It's not a feelie. You just watch it; the excitement is watching the other people, fearing for them."

"What people are you going to ask to perform? Is it dangerous? It must be, if it's as exciting as you say."

"No one performs. It's a projection." That would work, he thought. He would give in a little.

Taylor laughed and Toomis tittered. "Then," Taylor said, "it can be worked as a feelie."

"No," Fleitman said. "Then you lose the fun of being a spectator. And you lose the enjoyment of being with other people."

"We'd better do the movie," Jake said. "It's the middle of the road."

"It is not," Taylor said.

Fleitman allowed the badinage between Taylor and Jake to take its course. "O.K.," he said, "we can hook-in the seats. Those who want cerebral hook-ins can have them, and those who just want to watch can do so."

"But why not a feelie?" Toomis asked.

"Because I want people to be in one place together. I don't want them isolated from each other in a feelie. I want them to smell each other, to touch each other."

"Why?" Taylor asked.

"Why are you in this meeting?"

"But that's almost the same thing we wanted to do."

Sonovabitch, Fleitman thought. "No it wasn't, Jake. You would have used private screens or borrowed television time."

"Without hook-ins," Toomis added.

Sartorsky nodded his head. It was over, another meeting would be called to find out what had been settled, and Fleitman would begin on the circus. Alone. Everyone began talking at once. Jake started an argument. Fleitman doodled with his forefinger on the polished steel.

"Speaking of feelies," Tostler said, "why don't we all go down and hang?"

Fleitman nodded to Tostler and smiled. Get them the hell out, he thought.

"The hell with it," Jake said. "Then let's go down to the feelies. Everyone agreed?" It was always the same: the feelies and to bed. "Are you coming, Fleitman?"

Taylor played along. "Of course he's not coming. That's not the real thing, is it, Fleitman?"

"Neither is his circus," Jake said.

But that's closer, Fleitman thought. He made a fist and extended his index finger. The room had become too dense. He counted the men as they left; Tostler was last. No courtesies—they had not even been introduced. That was Taylor's fault. But why didn't Fleitman ask? The door slid closed; Fleitman felt elated in the empty room. He looked forward to the work ahead; he could delegate permission formalities to the secretaries. They had probably changed the system again. He smiled. But not that much.

What the hell. The building will probably be razed within the decade. Why not an amphitheater for a day? The big top. The classic show of shows. And actors of actors?

He would busy himself with his secretary. That should build up anticipation and keep the walls at their proper distance. He tapped out her number on one of the table phones. Her face appeared in the wall hollow before him. He leaned his elbows on the table. Thanks for the idea, gunny sacks. A tick in her temple snapped in and out as she worked her mouth.

A generalized tape on the feelies. Bring back Mary. Bring back a body that felt right, not too loose on the bones. Skin pulled tight on your face—supple, won't crack when you smile. Fleitman suppressed these thoughts; submerged they became anxiety. Projection isn't real; it's an excuse for a feelie.

"No, Mrs. Watson. It shouldn't take more than a day." Her tick snapped in and out a few times.

"Then quit, goddamm it." Very good, Fleitman. Suck in your skin. Feel good. Stop the pressure, push out the walls, take in a feelie. Don't think about it. A tape can make you anybody. A-n-y—B-o-d-y.

Go. The whole morality had not been working very well. He walked down the hall to the elevator. The doors slid open before him. No good, he thought. You should get help. Fleitman, you're confusing morality with hard-on and you're too old for either. Fleitman had pushed the wrong floor button. He tried not to

move his lips when he talked to himself. He sucked in the tick pounding in his cheek.

The elevator door opened and Fleitman walked past the feelie room. The door was open. Exhibitionists, Fleitman thought. He could turn around now. Say hello.

"I thought you didn't approve, Mr. Fleitman," Tostler said. "My name is Lorne Tostler; I'm sorry we weren't introduced." He shivered. "Cold."

"Then use a robe."

"Uh, uh. Why use a cotton prophylactic?"

"What's a prophylactic? Fleitman asked himself. You know, idiot. It's cotton that you don't know."

"I like your circus idea. Taylor refuses to recognize it, but the feelies don't permit enough freedom. You always know that you're twice removed from the action. Even when your emotions are juiced, you always know. But all that coming from you. After what I heard about you . . . The circus idea reminds me of a place called the *Circus House* in Santa Balzar."

"I think I've heard of it," Fleitman replied. "In Ecuador. I believe."

"It was the only house in the city where you could get away with losing two kidneys at roulette. Illegal everywhere else. Had quite an operating room set up. They also had a bordello called the *Slave Market*. Made for a good house. It was so damned realistic you talked Latin." He pushed his hands through the padded loops and watched the hollow in the wall opposite him.

He didn't wait for Fleitman to leave. He had stepped into the stirrups, rested his back against the long supporting pad that stimulated his spinal nerves, and activated the tape. His arms were already moving, reenacting a prefabricated motion, caressing a smooth face. His knees were buckling, and he looked as if he would collapse. He stared at the hollow, catching the electric impulses through his retinal wall, transmitting them through his optic nerve to his brain. The spinal pad quickened his heartbeat and at the moment was providing vague feelies of pleasure accompanied by a prescience of danger.

Fleitman found it difficult to breathe. But Tostler was smiling, then laughing. His torso cracked in a spasm of laughter. Then tears: rich, oily baubles. Made of plastic, Fleitman told himself. He backed out of the room swallowing his guilt.

He walked to the nearest elevator. Fleitman had just desecrated Mary. But she was pulp, anyway. Thoughts of Mary spider-webbed into bizarre images. But, he thought, everyone always went to the feelies after a meeting. At least they all said they did.

No. They did. He had passed this room before. Don't think about that. Then why was Tostler the only one there? And why was there only one feelie? There should have been ten racks.

He pushed the elevator button. *There were ten racks.*

Fleitman researched the circus from its birth in Rome to its end in Russia. He was fascinated with Astley, the former sergeant major, who traced the first circus ring while standing on his horse's back. Fleitman would make the horses and their famous riders the major event of the circus. There would be a North, a Robinson, a Ducrow, a Salmonsky from the Baltics, a Carre, and a Schumann. And there would be a Philip Astley, surveying the acts around him, genuflecting to the great Koch Sisters performing on a giant semaphore arm. But the program could not be too outre. No one would care if the details were authentic or not, but for the sake of aesthetics he would do it correctly: First the overture played on a thousand horns, then the voltige, strong man, trained pigeons, juggling act, liberty horses, clown entree—how many clowns?—and a springboard act. And then he could have an intermission while popcorn and pretzels, beer and coke, ice cream and cotton candy were being passed out by red nosed old men. (They would have to stay the same, he thought. Might be tricky.) The intermission ends with an aerial act—all the greats on the trapeze: the Scheffers, the Craigs, the Hanlon Voltas. He would leave no one out—Sandow, Lauck and Fox, Cinquevalli, Caicedo, and the Potters would all be there. Then the wild animal act (Van Amburg could put his head in a lion's mouth), the wire walker, one hundred performing elephants, trick riding, and a finale of clowns. There were other choices: springboard acts, hand to hand balancers, artists on the rolling globe. But he had to stop somewhere.

Fleitman felt confident that he could reproduce a circus. And set it askew and ruin it. But it would be a perfect conception: the greatest show on earth. This is going to be real, he thought. It will breathe with realism: I'll forget I made it. But he knew that it was all wrong, too much to rationalize. Fleitman held the wand; he could direct his own purgation.

Fleitman spent most of his time four stories below street level in the computer complex of the Entertainment Building. The small stark complex of the Entertainment Building. The small stark room where he worked seemed to grow warmer each day. Fleitman knew that this was impossible: the temperature was equalized on all levels. He worked in his underwear, constantly

wiping his perspiring forehead with his wet forearm. The computers reproduced and projected all the circuses Fleitman had scanned earlier, superimposing one set upon another, suggesting proper costumes, proper colors, proper periods.

But Fleitman loved contrasts: He matched Roman Gladiators and Victorian ladies, made the orchestra impossibly large had the computers compose special music for the overture and finale. He exaggerated the clowns until they looked quite inhuman—short hair, long paste noses, cauliflower ears, exaggerated fingers and toes. Some were dwarfs, others were giants, and all were painted with bright colors—orange lips covering an entire jaw, accentuated age lines drawn in ochre, burnt sienna moles, a beard of raw umber, baked blue buck teeth. He rejected the colosseum schematics and insisted on five stages surrounded by a hippodrome track, canvas walls, and wooden posts. The more changes randomly made, he thought, the more authentic it would become. He twisted the computers' suggestions into travesties as he giggled and wiped his forehead. His best idea had been to set a small fire in the tent during one of the high wire acts. That would give the aerialists a chance to show their mettle.

Fleitman carefully created the performers, all manifestations of himself. He molded their emotions, exaggerated their possibilities. All pictures in an exhibition, all self portraits. But he was careful to vary their physical appearance.

The computer room grew smaller each day as it filled with wraiths, painted clowns and old acquaintances. Mary remained silently at his elbow, complimenting him on a good idea, shaking her head at a bad one. A midget gleefully mimicked him. He stood directly behind Fleitman, always out of sight; but Fleitman sensed his presence.

The room became more crowded. All the young men from his first job lined the walls. An old student roommate crouched on the floor. The juggler had left all of his pins and plates in the middle of the room where Fleitman needed to work. The juggler's assistant was making love with the strong man: it did not arouse Fleitman. Fleitman did not look up when the door slid back with a hiss. It was probably the blacksmith working his bellows.

"We haven't seen you lately, Mr. Fleitman," Tostler said, taking off his sennet straw hat. Fleitman glanced up at him and scowled. "I've begun to dress for the circus." Tostler always smiled when he spoke.

The room had emptied. The midget had disappeared; Fleitman could sense it. Suddenly, he felt exhausted and uneasy. Fleitman felt a chill; the temperature seemed to be falling.

"I hope you're ready for tomorrow," Tostler said. "Sartorsky's all excited. He thinks the set up is wonderful."

Fleitman did not remember showing Sartorsky anything.

"—And your friend Jake died."

Tostler's gums are blue, Fleitman thought.

"—You can still have a goodbye, if you like. Sartorsky, Taylor, and Toomis are having a party for him. They hooked a feelie into him."

Fleitman felt sick; he swallowed a lump of vomit. He remembered dead Ronson begging him to stop. Artificial men are better company, Fleitman thought. The room had become too important to him. "After Ronson, I thought we decided . . ."

"Always exceptions. It doesn't seem to bother younger people; it never bothered me to hook-in with anybody."

It will, Fleitman thought as he vomited all over the juggler's equipment. He did not hear the door slide shut, but Mary was laughing at him. He told her to be quiet; he told her he was sick; but she continued laughing. And then the low bass of the weightlifter joined her laughter, and others joined in as they reappeared: the cowboys, the clowns, the aerialists, the midget, the red head with her marionettes, the fat lady, the man with two heads, the snake woman, the popcorn man, and Tostler.

Fleitman returned to his apartment early and fell asleep. He would have to be alert for the first performance. He would eat tomorrow.

Fleitman arrived early. He sat on the uppermost tier and waited for the spectators. He had planned it all perfectly, even to the smell of horse dung in the stalls. In the center ring a tightrope walker was doing knee bends while five men in coveralls slung a net under the high wire above. Three acrobats were jumping on a trampoline in the right corner of the center ring, their mascot hound crooning each time they shouted *hey*.

Everything seemed so real, Fleitman thought. He could not completely believe that it was only an illusion. The popcorn man yelled at him and threw him a box of popcorn. The box was made of transparent plastic and was warm to the touch. This did not feel right, although the computers had proven to him that it was indeed correct. Fleitman could smell the stink of the man. It was perfect.

A fight broke out in the side ring between the juggler and the unicycle clown. They were both immediately fired by the man-

ager. This was one of Fleitman's touches—the computers would not fill in such a detail on their own.

The seal trainer ignored the fighting and firing, he shouted at his seals, promising them no food unless they came out of the water. They were a main attraction. He threw them a fish; it disappeared with a snap. Fleitman knew that if he were close enough, he would be able to smell the fish, a tart, stinging odor. He had made sure of everything.

Illusion, he thought. It can be rationalized. It's healthy. Forced feelie. Enjoy it. Don't hook-in.

A few people came into the tent and looked for the best seats. Two old ladies sat down in front of him, giggling and hoisting their imitation leather skirts above their thighs. Fleitman looked up at the trapeze.

An hour later the tent was almost filled. A half hour after that, the tent was filled to capacity. Folding chairs were quickly provided for latecomers. Another one of Fleitman's touches: it would be authentic.

Fleitman watched an old man squirming on his bench, fiddling with his hook-in apparatus. Soon, they would all be searching for their hook-ins.

Then the horns blared, and fifty red uniformed Cossacks rode into the center ring, screaming and vaulting on and off their horses. One fell: it was not an accident. The next act was the strong man, and then the trained pigeons. Fleitman had substituted flying reptiles for effect. An acrobat, who had replaced the juggler, kept dropping balls; and the crowd hissed and booed and screamed and laughed. He could even blush.

When the clowns came out to announce the intermission, Fleitman had finished three boxes of popcorn. The clowns were well disguised, but too many of the performers resembled a younger Fleitman. An oversight, Fleitman thought. It would soon be over. It didn't matter. He threw popcorn at the clowns.

The second part of the program began with a wild animal act in the center ring, flanked by hand to hand balancers and perch performers. An aerial act was performing above the right ring; below, a chain of elephants were bowing to a screaming audience. Fleitman watched the trapeze artists. The young man was Fleitman. And the woman somersaulting toward him was young Mary.

The crowd screamed. There was no slap of powdered palms. The click was missing. She fell toward the sawdust mounds, toward the clowns staging a mock fire. Her scream was absorbed by

the roar of the crowd. Of course, some people were laughing: "It's not real."

Fleitman was standing up, perched precariously on a wooden runner board. He did not see the man shaking beside him, trying to pull out the jacks of the hook-in console. Another fell off the bench, dangled for a split second, and then with a silent pop, fell twenty feet. The old ladies sitting in front of Fleitman were vomiting, splashing an old man below who thought it was funny.

This incident had not been planned. The safety net had been spread ten minutes before; Fleitman had watched. It had disappeared.

Two men dressed in white ran across the ring. As they swung her on the stretcher, the barker directed the audience's attention to the elephants. The men in white looked like Fleitman.

And then the springboard act, and more acrobats, and liberty horses. Out of order, Fleitman thought. The liberty horses should have been before the intermission. But the crowds were cheering again, hooking into their consoles, yelling at the handsome rider on a grey mare jumping through a flaming hoop. His saddle slipped, and he fell into the fire, straddling the hoop as his horse ran around the ring. Two men rushed toward him carrying blankets, but he ran away from them, his hair on fire.

Fleitman did not remember this. He counted the minutes to the finale. The small fire he had planned never occurred.

It was overdue.

The barker was waving his baton, telling the spectators of the next show, as the clowns led the parade of performers around the hippodrome. The horses stepped high, the young girls atop them curtsying; the acrobats glistened with sweat; the strong man bunched his muscles (but he should not have been there); and the strippers stripped. The old ladies shouted and screamed, the old men disconnected their hook-ins and got up to leave.

"Not yet," Fleitman screamed.

The tent darkened, the performers disappeared, the walls became translucent, revealing offices and meetings in session. People began to sit down. Fleitman fumbled with his hook-in. He was nauseated. It didn't matter; it would soon be over. The last time.

Fleitman leaned back, resting his head on the tier above him. The illusion was precise: the walls narrowed, almost seemed to be moving. Above, a dot of light growing smaller. Fleitman screamed with the spectators. Vertigo. He was in an elevator shaft. He lost his balance. One of the old ladies in front of him died. The other gurgled, pulled down her skirt, and skipped from

tier to tier. The shaft was telescoping, pulling the crowd into its maw. Fleitman held his hands against his ears and screamed.

He does not remember this: he dreams that he is being swept toward the light. His heavy breathing echoes in the shaft, growing louder as it bounces from one wall to another. He awakens as he reaches the rim, as he opens his eyes to the glaring sunlight like an ant whose stone has been kicked away.

Fleitman was alone. The tent had disappeared along with the sawdust floor and wooden beams. Floors, walls, and ceilings had been hurriedly joined to accommodate all the meetings scheduled after the show. Fleitman had been taking up too much room; as he moved, two panels slid together behind him to form a larger office. A snatch of conversation, and then a click as walls met to fill the space, as other walls opened up.

He followed a glowing blue line through corridor after corridor. He listened to the echo of his footsteps along the metallic floor. Another echo. Tostler was walking beside him, his sennet straw hat in his hand.

"Sixty-seven heart attacks. Not bad Mr. Fleitman. Old Toomis died too. No one really bothered with him; they just wanted to get out. And you fell asleep."

Fleitman could see the elevator at the end of the blue line. He walked faster, but Tostler took him by the arm and led him down another corridor.

"Where are you going?" Fleitman asked, trying to break away from him. "You're off the line."

Tostler giggled. An old lady ran past them and collapsed, her arms flapping like a bird. "She was running around the center ring just like that," Tostler said. "Around and around. It's a wonder she got this far."

Fleitman stopped walking, but Tostler put his arm around Fleitman's waist and dragged him along. "Where are you taking me?" Fleitman asked.

Tostler smiled and his dimples turned into furrows dividing his face. "Why, you're going to the surface. That's what your whole gig was for, right? And that elevator sequence was beautiful. Pure wish fulfilment. And this is it. The idea had come up to pin a paper note to your apartment door and turn off the sensor. You know, a written note on parchment. But this way is better, don't you agree?"

Fleitman did not want to go. They turned a corner. He could see an elevator at the end of the hall.

"They moved an old lady into your room," Tostler said. "She likes it quite a bit." His grip grew tighter on Fleitman's arm. "Why didn't you just ask to get out?" The elevator doors opened as they passed the sensing line. "Silly question." He pushed Fleitman into the elevator.

Fleitman didn't resist. He positioned himself in the middle of the elevator. The doors closed. Fleitman thought he heard "Good show. Come back and see us sometime," but he knew that sound could not pass through the closed doors. The books suddenly seemed very important to him. But they have probably already been transformed, he thought.

The elevator walls seemed to disappear, and Fleitman could hear his heavy breathing echo along the length of the shaft, growing louder as it bounced from one wall to another. He closed his eyes and waited for the surface light to redden the insides of his eyelids. He dreamed of grotesque clowns waiting at the surface to jump into the elevator as the doors opened and stab him with their rubber knives. Fleitman was shaking.

The doors slid open. Children were pushing against him, trying to get into the elevator. They were breathing heavily from running and perspiration glistened on their dirty faces. Fleitman stepped out, pushing children out of the way. The bright light hurt his eyes. The street elevator stood behind him, a huge grey monolith.

"What's that, what's that?" a twelve year old asked his playmate. She shrugged.

"We can't fit in there anyway," the little girl said. She turned to Fleitman and wrinkled her crinoline. "I'm Bozena Boobs. Do you want to do it?"

Fleitman did not understand her. He paid no attention to the children pulling at his hands and clothes. He kept shaking them off.

The buildings had risen much higher since he had been underground. And the sidewalk enclosures were shattered in places. The buildings, distorted by flaws in the enclosure plastic, blotted out the sun, formed their own grey horizon. Fleitman was dizzy. He thought of the levels of city beneath him, spiderwebs of corridors growing out of the dark like fluorescent spurs in a child's crystal garden. He felt suspended in the center of the city, and the heavy steel seemed to crush him from both directions.

The artificial light was too bright; it whitewashed the street and leveled the prominent features. The children's faces looked flat.

Fleitman noticed that the slidewalks were not operating.

"Hey old man," screamed a boy dressed in a blue zip suit. "Catch this." He threw a plastic scrap at Fleitman, but missed.

"We've got to go," another boy said. "We can't wait. They'll catch us." He paused for breath and looked around at the other children. "Come on, let's go." He grabbed Bozena.

"Leave her alone," her playmate shouted, looking for a rock.

"I want to watch the old man," Bozena said.

"They can only take one of us anyway."

Fleitman thought he heard something in the distance: it sounded like the far away rantings of a mob. The children were growing in number, clustering around Fleitman. Fleitman guessed there were about forty children. A little girl was screaming and crying. "We've got to go. We've got to go. He can't help us."

The children took it up. "He can't help us, he can't help us."

"He's a rag."

"He's a hag."

"He can't be hag," a little girl said as she looked for something to throw.

There was a line of sediment around the buildings. Slowly, Fleitman thought, they were wearing.

"Bag."

"Scag."

"Fag."

Fleitman covered his face. They were throwing pieces of metal and garbage. A piece of yellow metal cut his face. They were chanting, "He can't help us, he can't help us, he can't help us."

"Rag."

"Scag."

"Hag."

"Glag," a crippled boy shouted.

"No good, cripple." More children joined in. "No good cripple, no good cripple," but it died quickly. They were all around Fleitman, wiping their dirty little hands on him, crying for help, spitting at him, caressing him, picking their noses, throwing stones, smoking cigarettes, coughing, giggling, belching. And a little girl kept screaming, "I'm afraid."

A piece of decayed food smacked against Fleitman's cheek. He felt it run down his neck into his high collar.

"Go back where you came from."

Fleitman ran around a corner. A rock hit him in the small of the back. The children easily stayed behind him, screaming and laughing, barely running. He crossed a street and turned into a main avenue. It was deserted, like the other streets, and the slide-

walks were either broken or shut off. Fleitman noticed a large piece of plastic from the sidewalk enclosure propped against the side of one of the buildings. Three stories of window glass were broken.

There were about sixty children behind him now. His back had become numb. He felt a sharp pain in his chest as he inhaled. He sagged forward, his head lolling as he ran, his torso bent over.

Fall down. That's easy. They'll grind you, they'll crush your face.

He turned another corner. No garbage, he thought. No people. He couldn't see any windows in the buildings.

He stopped. A large crowd was pushing down the avenue. The children were behind him, the screaming adults before him. But the children turned and ran, and the crowd broke over Fleitman as so many waves in a hypothetical ocean.

Someone grabbed Fleitman's arm, but Fleitman broke loose, tripping over a young woman who had fallen down. Blood was welling from the collar of her zip suit.

The crowd was pushing Fleitman along. He was a dancer trying to keep his balance on an undulating floor. A young man waved to Fleitman and screamed, "This is a good one. Isn't this a good one?" He looked like Tostler. Fleitman noticed a number of men were wearing black robes, their hoods thrown back to reveal cropped hair.

The crowd stopped running, and Fleitman began to feel the ache of his new bruises. One of the children had been caught by the crowd. A little freckled boy kicked and shouted as he was handed from one person to another atop the crowd. Fleitman could not see any more of the children.

"This one, this one," screamed a young man next to him. Fleitman ducked as they passed the boy over his head. He thought he heard a voice whispering in his ear, more vibration than speech.

"What are you doing?" Fleitman asked the man next to him. The man wore a black cloth robe and his face was flushed with pimples and sores. He looked puzzled. "Well, you're in it," the man said, "aren't you?"

"In what?"

"You mean you don't know? Then . . ."

The man was waving his arms. Fleitman allowed a few people to scramble beside him. The man was soon too far away to be a nuisance.

Fleitman listened. The murmuring in his head was barely audible; he could make it out. He could see the man in the robe grinning at him: it was Tostler.

The voice: *Do not unite yourselves with unbelievers; they are no fit mates for you. What has righteousness to do with wickedness? Can light consort with darkness? Can Christ agree with Belia, or a believer join hands with an unbeliever? Can there be a compact between the temple of God and the idols of the heathen? And the temple of the living God is what we are. God's own words are: "I will live and move about among them; I will be their God, and they shall be my people."*

This is brought to you by . . .

Someone took a shot at the little boy. He was sitting on the priests' hands, his legs crossed in a lotus position.

"Well, he's imposing enough."

"He should make it into his thirties."

"Not that way."

A few more shots. An explosion. The little boy was crying and trying to break loose. The priests held him tightly, pressing his legs in place, crossing his arms. The crowd was howling, about to stampede. Fleitman saw a few of the children. They seemed to be enjoying the show.

Fleitman pushed his way to the edge of the crowd. He had only a few minutes before the crowd would break, pushing itself in all directions, crushing everything in its way.

"He's nothing without thorns."

Fleitman pressed himself against the building, merged with its greyness.

A few more shots. A priest's face exploded. Laughing children, dimly perceived. Fleitman closed his eyes: if he couldn't see them, they couldn't see him.

The crowd chased itself, unable to decide the fate of the new king. The screaming softened, and the crowd disappeared into the perspective lines of the street.

The shadows were all wrong—De Chirico's *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*. Of course the shadows were wrong. Fleitman waited for the little girl to appear from a shadow pushing a hoop before her. And shouting, "I'm Bozena Boobs. Do you want to do it?"

Fleitman began to walk. He would look for other people. The eyeless buildings stood above him, watching him, not yet ready to topple over and crush him.

Kicking a plastic package of refuse out of the way, he turned a corner. The slidewalks were working. He stepped on the ramp and watched the buildings turn into a blurred grey wall. An old woman carrying packages stepped on in front of him. And another. Then a young boy and a few teenagers. A couple was holding

hands beside him. A prostitute nudged his arm. He skipped to a faster ramp. But the slidewalk had become crowded. It was difficult to breathe. Pushing people out of his way, Fleitman worked his way to an exit ramp. He stepped off, ignoring the beggars and pimps.

The buildings were drab and undistinguished, but the smells were overpowering: defecation, spoiling meat, incense—orange, tabac—perspiration, exhaust fumes from makeshift engines. The foodstuffs piled behind the vendors' barricades were acrid and sweet—candies and oils, synthetic fruits and fetid sweetmeats. Fleitman watched three girls dancing on a podium in the street, their bodies oiled, electric tatoos decorating their paste white skin. To his right, a respectable little shop with an imitation wood portico. A pleasure ring was drawn around the large shop window to entice shoppers. Over the door an antique sign blinked on and off. Fleitman couldn't understand the lettering.

A balding huckster sat in front of the store and passed out loaves of burnt bread. A little girl walked toward Fleitman. She was furiously tearing a small loaf apart and stuffing it into her mouth. Fleitman remembered the food machine in his apartment He wanted a piece of bread: its ugliness made it appetizing. The little girl walked past him, her hair crawling with tiny silver bugs.

Fleitman looked for a slidewalk, but most of the secondary walks were not operating. He passed street after street of markets, carnivals, and whorehouses—all interspersed with module office buildings and expensive shops. There should be more modules, Fleitman thought, not less. There probably were: this might be an isolated fad.

"Over there." The little girl had been following Fleitman. Crumbs of bread clung to the front of her dress. "There's something good over there. Come on, I'll take you. I'm old enough." She caught up with Fleitman, but he walked faster and she fell behind. "I can't keep up. I'm a cripple."

Fleitman slowed down. She limped as she walked; her right leg was shorter than her left. Why didn't I notice that before? Fleitman asked himself. Maybe it's not the same little girl. Fleitman was unconvinced.

"Turn left here. Come on, I know where it is."

"Where what is?"

"Right here," she said. "I'll show you."

Fleitman breathed through his mouth: she smelled. She led him into a crowd of people. Fleitman was nauseous.

"See, look up at the building."

A young woman was standing on the seventh story window

ledge of an old building that had been partly torn down. There was a space between the buildings. The sky was a grey mouth that had lost a tooth.

"All these buildings are old," the little girl said. "They started tearing them down. I watch them do it all the time. I like it; it's always the same."

The woman on the ledge was laughing and screaming at the spectators. She looks like Mary, Fleitman thought. He knew that it really was Mary. Her face was thinner than he had remembered. She was young, about twenty-seven. And she was suntanned, as always. Probably under a light, but he remembered the citizens' beach at Cannes; he remembered digging old beer cans out of the sand. Her hair and earlobes had been removed. She pointed at Fleitman and laughed.

The crowd was egging her on. Someone took a pot shot at her. She laughed and waved her arms. There was only one refreshment man running in and out of the crowd; he was hurriedly doing as much business as he could before news leaked out and other vendors arrived. He was selling red hots. The little girl bought two.

"Come on and eat one," she said. "This is a good one, isn't this a good one?"

Fleitman watched Mary. He pushed his way to the edge of the crowd. The little girl followed him.

"We better move, you know. She's going to jump soon."

"We've got to help her," Fleitman said.

"Why? She's having a helluva time. Look at her."

She was making obscene motions at the crowd. The crowd began to scream "Do it now" in unison. Fleitman heard himself whispering with them. The little girl was jumping up and down.

Mary closed her eyes and held her arms out in front of her.

"Open your eyes," Fleitman screamed. He knew when she would jump: he had seen this already.

She leaned over the edge, her back arched. That's right, Fleitman thought. Very good. Fleitman noticed that he was screaming. Someone had drawn a pleasure circle around the crowd. Fleitman relaxed.

She jumped and fell in front of Fleitman, splashing herself on his slippers. He took a deep breath of her and counted the entrails before him. A good omen: the refreshment man had stopped selling red hots.

"You want to take a walk?" the little girl asked. She smiled at Fleitman. He looked back, impatient for something to happen, and took the little girl's hand: it was cold and dry.

He listened to an advertisement softly buzzing in his brain.

WALKING BACKWARDS

PHILLIP LOPATE

to Dziga Vertov

If time went backwards the bread would
return to the bakeries,
and newspapers to the typewriter keys' chapped lips,
the paper to the tree, crying and holding tight,
the maple syrup shuffling its feet up the bark

Mothers would know their children again:
The rock star, returning with an embarrassed kiss at the door,
would unpack his bag and go into his old room
with the green lamp and homework blotter and ham radio
to stare at the ceiling, then see if he can pick up Tokyo.

The walleyed security guard, hallucinating
in the bank, returns to the spot where
his eyeballs first began to pull apart,
like college friends after graduation.
The subway token woman, again a thirteen year old girl . . .
the pensive receptionist pretending to look busy,
in bed the night before with her jobless boyfriend

The lovers moving from climax to foreplay
from wetness to uncertainty, looking for a sign
the parachutist faltering and stretching his neck
like a turtle, not knowing which way is up

People we thought we had done with
would hit us like boomerangs:
girls walked away from at mixers,
dentists with dirty jokes, gym teachers,

blacks in pale green uniforms
wiping the counter at Chock Full Of Nuts.
Rush hour faces recorded for no reason
than the wish that it might draw them back for a second look
this one a bonus, this time for pleasure—

I am not saying it would be so simple
I am not even saying it would all be worthwhile
but something I do know: the beef would get its intestines back
and I would get you back
resting my hand one more time
on the horn of your waist

and we would see snow
returning to the empty clouds
like a guilty wife, covering her husband
in ferocious white kisses to make him forget.

THE DIS-INHERITING PARTY

JOHN CLUTE

1. Joseph Zuken

How he blubbered when they began to operate the winches in 1934!

"It's all right, Joseph," said Mate.

But the spiders fell from the long finger going pop-pop into the square mouth; next they would eat Joseph, who was fifteen.

Smythe shrugged his shoulders at Mate.

"I want my Daddy!"

Smythe's face was wet.

Mate tousled Joseph's golden hair.

"Go inside, Joseph. It's all right."

Joseph's throat gobbled; he ran across the steel deck into the corridor. He was shivering. Uncle Cassidy said This is the ship, this is Florida. Looking for his father, Joseph ran up and down. Uncle Cassidy said Don't forget. That was yesterday. Goodbye Joseph. Go with Mr Smythe. Uncle Cassidy's chin tickled Joseph. Uncle Cassidy? What's my name? Joseph! boomed Uncle Cassidy. You must never forget. Your name is Joseph. Smythe is your friend.

Smythe grinned hi!

His two eyes came together and made a big O.

"Well, well," said Smythe, "this must be Joseph."

A boy's room had to be his very own room.

"Here's Mate," said Smythe.

Mate said hello.

Uncle Cassidy walked away.

Joseph cried!

He scrubbed at a stain beside the porthole. Mate said this is your room. Rust flaked like an open mouth. Joseph closed his mouth.

He peed on the floor.

Joseph began to cry.

Smythe said, "I am your friend! I'm going to take you across the sea to Greece. That's where your father is! Soon you'll be in the mountains of Greece, and you'll laugh and laugh."

Joseph smiled.

"Ho, ho, ho," laughed Smythe.

So Joseph laughed!

Pop-pop-pop.

The spiders were eating, each spider had six snakes, Joseph hid in his room.

He closed his mouth.

Cook said, "Here are your sheets and your pillow and your blankets."

Cook was brown. That was Negro.

There was a wooden ridge along the side of the bunk. Cook said Because the ship rolls, that will be fun. Joseph touched his head against the metal wall. It vibrated like a voice. It was Father huffing like Santa Claus, tickling Joseph, why he had been sleeping, he had taken forty winks.

Joseph giggled.

But Father wouldn't come out.

"Stop hiding."

It was not fair. Joseph couldn't find his father. He clutched the edge of his bunk. But he couldn't fall out. He chewed the side of his unlined hand. Mate said, "When you hear the engine go Rrrrrrr, then we'll begin to move. That will be fun."

Joseph tried to smile, but it was new.

He waited like a good boy. His hand had fuzzy stuff on it. That was saliva.

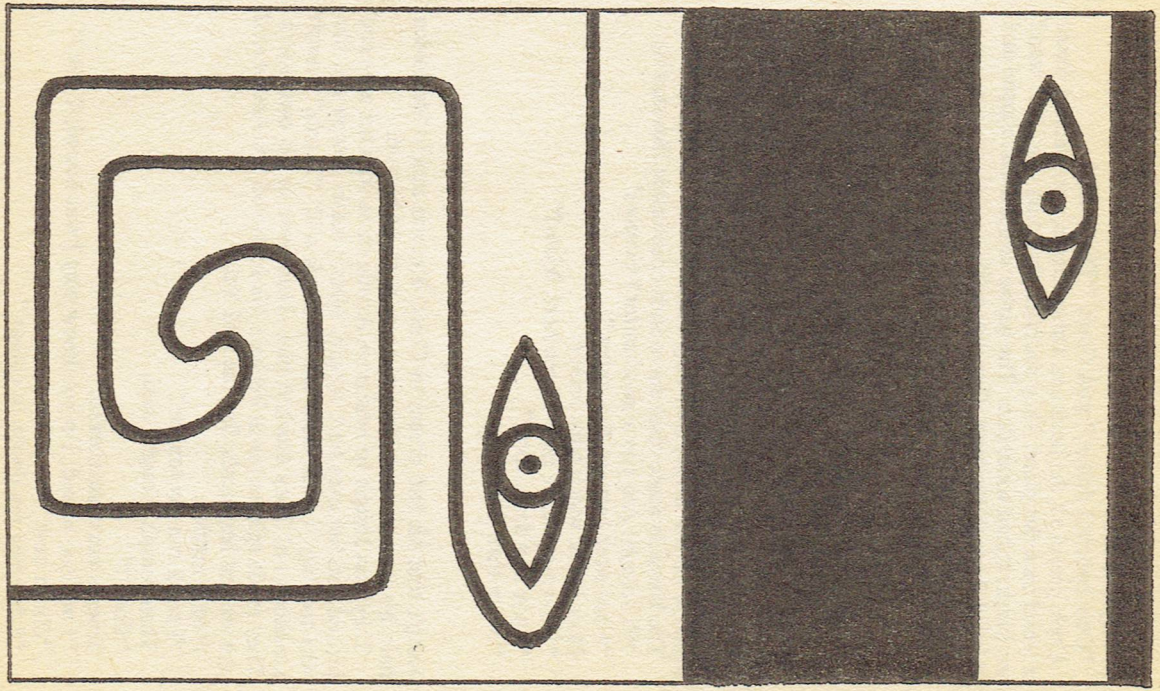
They all shouted. There were no spiders now. They were hiding. Joseph held his pillow. Soon he could help steer. Mate said! Father said Rrrrrr. The sun was red.

Mate said the new place was Trinidad. A barber came on board. Joseph's hair grew so fast. Father said always ask the price.

"How much?"

"Two Trinidad dollar, sir."

Who was sir?



"Please," said the barber with a gold tooth. He smelled like the engineroom.

"One Trinidad dollar," said Cook. "That's all."

Cook peeled all the potatoes. Other brown men clacked pieces of wood on a flat place. They shouted. One man won. The wood was black. It had white dots. The barber clipped and clipped and whistled through his teeth. One was gold.

"That's better now, Joey."

Father said he was a lucky young man, and should keep neat.

The locket around his neck said Joseph Zuken, there were snakes on the locket but they said hi. They looked at Joseph with their big eye. They wrapped around his name. When he polished the binnacle up high in the wooden house on top he also polished the locket. That was where he steered. The binnacle had a tawny eye, like the O in Joseph where the snakes looked through. The binnacle smiled. Sometimes they talked.

The binnacle made clacking sounds deep inside like snoring.

"Hi Joseph! Are you a good sailor? Greece!"

"I can steer between the waves."

Mate stood watch with Joseph.

"How many days have I been here, Mate?"

"Days and days, Joey."

"More than five?"

Joseph told his bad dream to Cook. The sun caught his golden hair, his Roman nose, his enormous eyes, as he told.

They said Joseph be neat now. Auntie came with her eyes and looked and her eyes hurt Joseph. Auntie made Joseph cry. She was too big. Auntie cried saliva. Cook said, "Shush." Joseph screamed no! They touched him. They were in his own room. They made spiders touch his hair. He screamed no. Auntie said she washed her hands. Smythe said Yes.

Joseph giggled.

"I stuck out my tongue."

Then Joseph thought hard.

"Cook?"

Joseph was remembering.

"I was too scared. Do you know why I was scared, Cook?"

"Shush now."

"I dreamed my dream in colour."

Cook put his arm around Joseph, the sun drowned Joseph.

"The spiders had red eyes!"

The barber cut his hair in Trinidad.

Cook said, "Goodbye, Joey."

"No!"

"I'm too old to work."

"But you're Cook."

"Shush."

"Aren't you coming to Greece? That's where we're going, Cook. We're going to the mountains."

"Oh no, Joey."

Cook was sweating.

"But I'll see you there, Joey."

When his fingers ran paternally through Joseph's hair, golden strands adhered to his damp palms.

Mate said he was terribly shocked by the death of President Roosevelt.

Joseph sat on the toilet, he did not like to eat, there were bugs and spiders. The new Mate said, "Out of there, Zuken." The brown men played "dominos" clack clack on the flat place. The Captain told the new Mate, "Watch your tongue if Smythe ever heard you talk to Zuken that way . . ."

Real Mate said, "That's your name on the medallion, Joseph." He said, "I'll come and visit you. Keep the binnacle clean!"

"Goodbye, Mate."

Then Joseph cried. That was yesterday.

When the new Mate came Joseph asked the voice that talked to him through the eye all about Greece and the mountains and the thin air.

The voice clacked deep in its throat.

Joseph asked Santa.

Rrrrrr.

He fell asleep.

He sat on the toilet.

The barber said:

"For two Trinidad dollar I sell you a tonic, make your hair grow again."

But Joseph cried.

He ran into his room.

THIS IS NOT MY SON!

Santa bellowed at Joseph.

THIS IS AN UGLY BOY. THIS UGLY BOY DIDN'T KEEP NEAT. NO GREECE FOR YOU!

"Daddy!"

A strand of brownish hair floated to the worn linoleum.

Another Mate said:

"Well if you won't get your hair cut, at least let me put what's left of it into a topknot."

Joseph bowed his head, he was shivering. In the Caribbean Sea, Joseph Zuken steered between the waves.

A new Mate came to Joseph. He was a bright Mate, his face was like the moon.

"Oh," said Joseph, "hi Mate."

"Do not be afraid, Joseph."

Joseph was afraid.

"Do not be afraid, Joseph. The Captain wants to talk with you. Go up to the bridge, Joseph."

"Yes Mate."

The new Mate whispered, "Smythe," he was shining.

Joseph ran up to the wooden house, he began to run his hand through his hair, his hand stopped.

He tapped on the Captain's door.

"In."

"Yes Captain?"

"Cigarette?"

"Father says not to smoke."

The clean Captain with the moustache smelled like soap, he did not light his cigarette.

"Now Joseph," said the Captain, "how would you like to come with me to a brand new ship."

Shush.

"Now now," said the Captain, raising him up, "Shush now," but the old salt could not stand unaided.

"It's a nice ship," said the Captain.

Smythe waved the Captain away.

"Well Joseph," said Smythe, "isn't this fun," and he grinned hi! and his face became an O.

Joseph said, "Hi!"

"Do you know what, Joseph," Smythe said, "it's almost time to disembark, soon you'll disembark and go to Greece and the mountains."

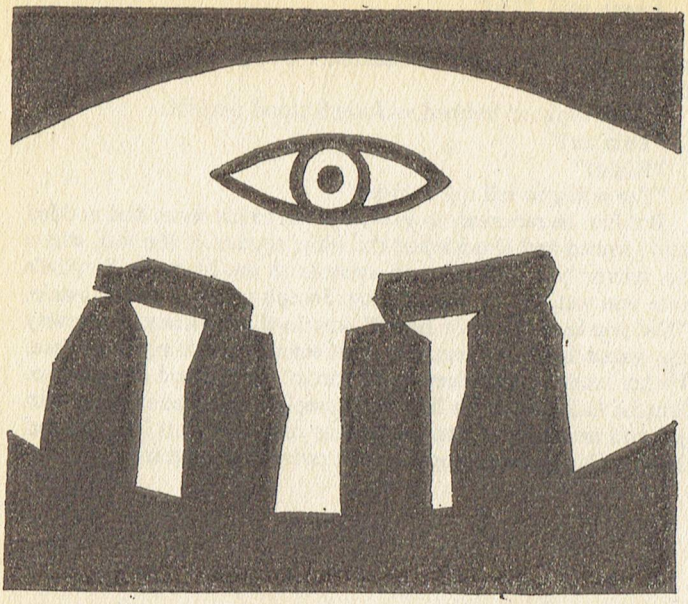
Mate's topknot bobbed as Joseph stood upright.

"Thin air!"

"Right!"

"I'm going to tell my Father!"

But first he ran away to pack. He ran to his room and nodded and grinned and chuckled at the white square on the wall where his mirror had been. He ran upstairs to the binnacle. Smythe's face was wet, but he was smiling. Joseph spoke to the binnacle, "Did you hear? Did you hear?" Smythe tiptoed away. The tawny eye gazed back at Joseph and reflected his shining lined face. Father made sounds deep in his throat. Joseph had come home. Smythe had lines in his face too. Joseph Zuken was shaking with joy and trembled so that the greying remains of his hair escaped Mate's disintegrating topknot and covered his shining face.



2. Nancy

On the beach she patted a frolicking mongrel whose owner whistled sharply so the dog bounded away from her, spraying drops of salt water. "Nigger," muttered the owner loud enough for her to hear, and attached a leash to his soiled pet. She stared at the shabby brown Long Island sand, she said, "I am tired to death of this." Gabriel had emptied his bottle, the pale sun dazed him. The polluted sea tossed up used condoms, half-eaten dolls, swollen plastic shapes, foetal cellophane organs. "You cunt," she said, "hurry." He followed her past a dog straining at its leash, hot dog stands pealing under the macabre northern sun. Manhattan received them, they crossed Second Avenue in the sluggish car, she sniffed her armpits. He said, "I must find a place to park." When they stopped for the light at Third Avenue she jumped out of the car and began to walk, he followed her. Behind them cars began to honk, raising the fever. They passed a policeman on his way to the scene. She said, "Won't they trace the car?" "You forget," said Gabriel. "It's stolen."

Suddenly he was too drunk to climb down to the subway

without her assistance, he could not remember what day it was, it was May 1962. He said, leaning on her, "Ya the image of death comes readily to a whore." But her close-cropped hair was always clean, he remembered. Very softly he whispered apologies, it was as though she did not hear. She pulled him up the tenement stairs, he decided to count the "odours of bile," she pulled him up flight after flight, he was counting on his fingers. She said, with anticipation, "This is the end."

She dropped her wedding ring to the floor, the cat pawed it, Nancy turned her back on Gabriel who was crouching on the floor, her hunched shoulders throbbed. She repeated:

"This is the end."

"I feel sick to my stomach. It was the sun."

"You cunt, I want some money."

Gabriel cunningly hid her ring under his palm, but continued to crouch; Nancy closed the blinds, the empty liqueur bottles on the sill lost their translucence, the cat slapped at a swinging cord.

"I want some money."

"Where are you going?"

She was hugging herself, she stroked her brown arms:

"Maybe Trinidad."

"You're hurting me," said Gabriel.

"If you tell my parents I'll kill you too."

"Come down here," said Gabriel, fumbling at his clothes.

"I want some money."

"Come here."

"I have a passport."

She was removing her clothes, she lay on the floor beside her husband, in the moment of highest passion she said:

"Kill me now, Gabriel."

He gave her as much money as he had, and the locket he wore around his neck; when opened, his golden locket revealed a grim daguerrotype of his grandfather, who had been executed by Battista or Castro, his grandfather as a young boy, he stared dumbfounded and prim from the previous century. Gabriel fell asleep. He mouthed, don't go. She took a cab to Idlewild, she fell asleep in the jet, she left the plane and walked unsmiling into the thalassocracy of Trinidad, behind the low moist hills. The locket hung between her stiff breasts where she sweated slightly under the bronze sun, she checked into the Trinidad Hilton on top of a hill. She walked alone at night through the harbour. She tussled with a massive sweating sailor who seemed Greek, although he said nothing. Her back was arched when he used force to enter her, her hair was matted, she remembered little. She took green

pills and yellow pills and white pills on the advice of a black physician, who later moved to England; she was able to sleep. Each morning she took care to make an immaculate appearance for breakfast up the hill at the Trinidad Hilton. She wore a freshly ironed dress, an attractive print. When she phoned Gabriel to say she thought she was pregnant by a Greek sailor, she laughed over the wire. Hanging up, she said:

"You cunt I'm dying here."

Gabriel fled Manhattan in a fugue of guilt, driving a stolen car.

She sat in a bar in front of her third rum and coke and said, "I think I am pregnant by a Greek sailor."

She was running out of money.

Balliol Urquhart said, "Drink up, my dear."

She said, "I've had trouble all my life. What am I going to do with a child who can't even speak English?"

"That is a very attractive dress you are wearing. I am reminded of my childhood."

"Who are you anyway?" said the slim mulatto. "I don't remember meeting you."

Balliol rose to his feet, a flowing baldman with a ghostly face. He said, "You didn't meet me. I met *you*."

She held onto Balliol's silk cape and followed him down the streets, always downhill, into the damp cobblestoned alleys near the harbour. In the distance the Trinidad Hilton was occasionally visible above them. She was tiring, she began to stumble.

"You cunt."

Gabriel Jimenez drove westwards.

A soft mist rose from the cobblestones in lower Port-of-Spain, her nose wrinkled.

"Smell the moon."

But Balliol Urquhart continued to escort her along without slowing.

"Where are we going?"

Balliol said, "Sorrowing."

"What?"

They came to the parked car.

"What?" she repeated.

"You are pretending innocence," said Balliol. He smiled gently, his face mooned.

"Is this a stolen car?"

They drove south. They stopped at the edge of town. Once more the Trinidad Hilton was visible, for the last time. The Greek sailor got into the back seat with a thin companion.

There was no need to begin to sob, she was able to say:

"Hi."

They drove south, into the low tropical agricultural region, when they stopped she saw that the sugarcane grew higher than any of them in Trinidad. In one hand she held her leather sandals. She stroked her locket.

"I can hear nothing at all, nothing."

No one answered her, she followed them through the sugarcane; Balliol glimmered on the path before her, he had turned around, his pale face reflecting the great moon.

"Follow."

She obeyed, her print dress was wet with hidden moisture, the path led down, she clutched his cape.

"Follow."

Her lips split with mirth, for she had given up any choice.

"You cunt," she said, as though she were with Gabriel, "kill me now."

There was a sudden smell of water, they came to a circular structure, a ring of stone, though when she touched what seemed to be a carved rock in passing, she saw that it was plywood. She jerked her hand back. Her feet shuffled in the sand. The men encircled her. She could see the water immediately before her, depthless, silent, as though nothing could be easier. She had never let go of the cape, she put her arms up to Balliol's shoulders. Very quickly, she kissed him on the mouth.

Balliol screamed.

The Greek sailor knocked her to the sand, which she tasted; he leaned over Balliol, who had crouched retching beside one of the plywood rocks, and slowly stroked his shoulders. The thin companion jabbered wordless, he began to ululate, the Greek sailor put his fingers to his lips, his companion began to quiet down, but Balliol was gasping, as though in great pain. Nancy stared, as she had been struck hard the scene remained out of focus, a plywood rock toppled soundlessly to the white moonlit sand; suddenly she realized what the ring of fake rocks had reminded her of.

Stonehenge.

Balliol got to his feet.

"Now do you understand?" he said, his voice mounted, he was pealing. "She is of the Sorrowing. He sent her. She is a spy."

He wiped his mouth of her.

"You cunt," she whispered.

The Greek sailor stripped her quickly, she hardly fought, her hair was tangled. She wept when he took her locket, but only in passing. They were fast tears, she licked at them, she was lick-

ing sand, his hands were on her shoulders, he was forcing her to kneel, she knelt and her face touched the rich salt-impregnated sand, her tongue moved.

She felt the sailor enter her, the sand scraping.

Fumbling in his cape, Balliol said:

"Whore."

He found his notebooks, he leafed through them, dropped one then another, found the passage finally, which he recited over her:

"Her eyes are buttered with Thalassos,
The garment falls, the heart rips."

The Greek sailor had pinioned her arms, so that when she felt Balliol's silk cape against her naked side, and the point of the knife between her breasts, she was unable to move; somewher behind her the thin companion gobbled on. She said, her lips caked:

"Kill me now, Gabriel."

Gabriel had told her it came easy for a whore.

Balliol's shoulders knotted unctuously.

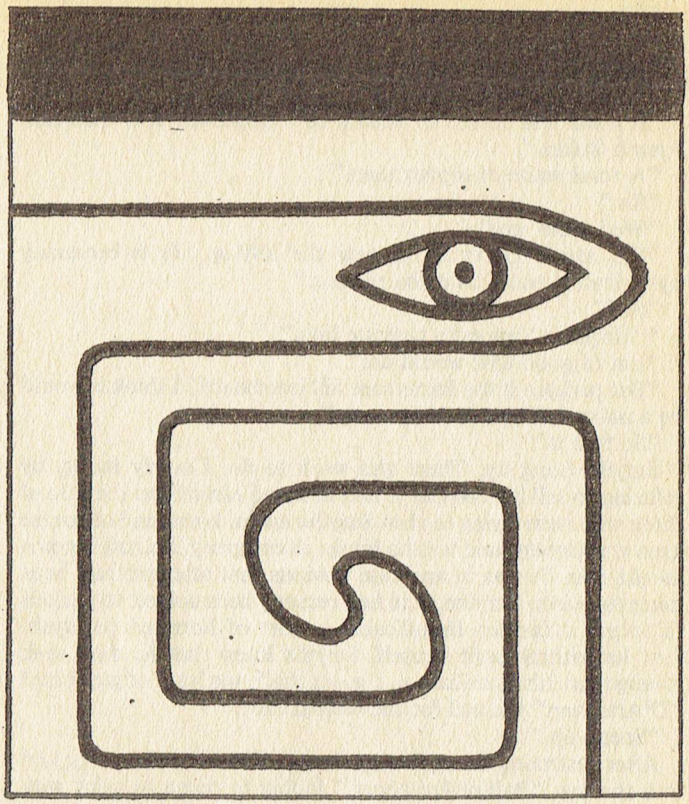
She said, "Ah."

The waters sucked at her blood; her matted head sank until there was no sign of her; the gobbling mounted; Balliol took the locket from Porthos and placed it around his own smooth neck, where it clattered against his medallion. His face was calm. Consulting his notebook, he said:

"The interstitial sweat within the moss
Spoils Euclid and the moon drips."

He said:

"Hush, Joseph."



3. Smythe

Not being fully sane, Gregory Smythe allowed himself to dream of a purer time. The sun hurried through the venetian blinds, cutting his face into speedlines so that he seemed inhumane. He ordered the legions of his persecutors to stop, once and for all. Deep within himself, he could not admit that any of them were his children. It had been a rancid century. In this way he was able to receive "D'Artagnan's" radiotelephone messages without visible signs of nausea. "Balliol Urquhart" had gotten out of control and killed a girl.

"Mulatto?" he asked.

"She was mulatto, yes," said D'Artagnan.

"Good riddance then."

Smythe had had nothing but trouble with mulattos.

"What about Gerry Barns?"

"It's still the same I'm afraid, sir. 'Urquhart' still calls him Joseph Zuken."

"A total waste of money then."

"Sir."

"Well speak up."

"I'm afraid Gerry Barns saw the killing. He is becoming hysterical. It could be embarrassing."

"So?"

" 'Urquhart' wants to castrate him."

"Lot of good that would do."

"But perhaps if the Barns case fell overboard? I think it would be a natural 'Urquhart' sequence."

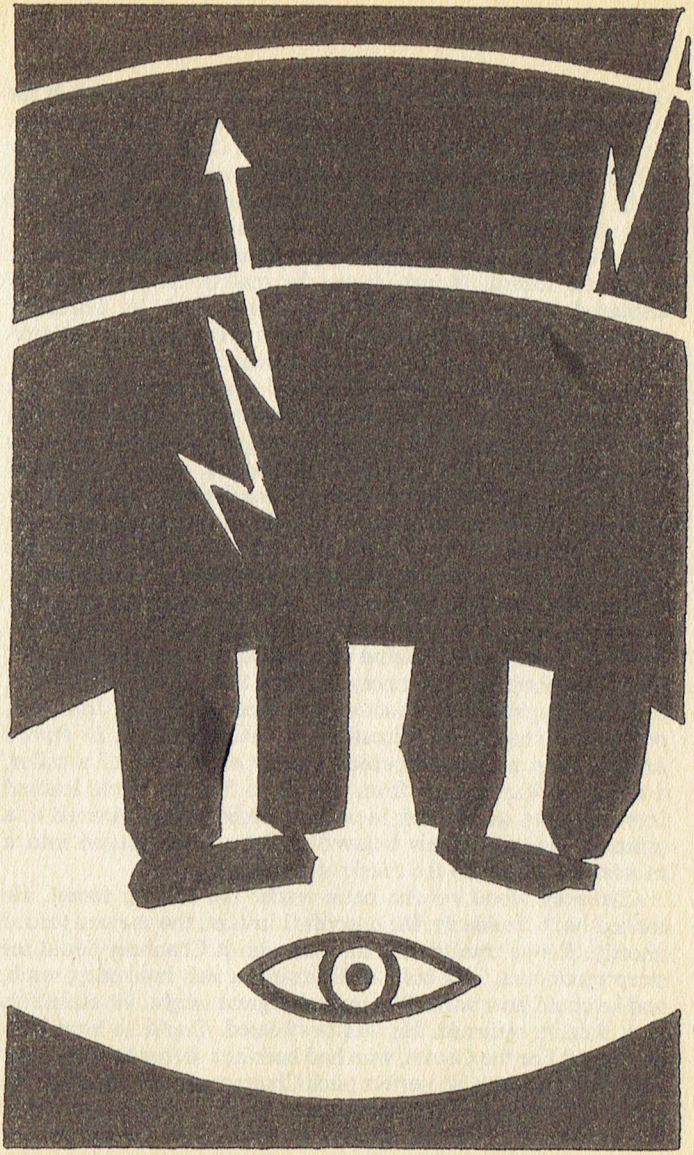
"So film it."

Smythe hung up. There was work to do. Cassidy Barns, by refusing to sell his company, had declared himself on the side of those who were trying to claw Smythe down. Barns had of course aged grotesquely, and was no longer fit company. He had become an old man. It was in any case obvious that attempts had been made to poison Smythe, who had recently been subject to periods of torpor otherwise inexplicable, a sort of horrified paralysis. Lest he become unfit himself, Smythe knew that he must seek revenge for this humiliation. I guess that's the kind of guy I am! "D'Artagnan" phoned for the second time.

"Speak up."

After castrating Gerry Barns/"Joseph Zuken" and tossing him into the sea, "Balliol Urquhart," failing to come to grips with his true identity once more, entered a phase in which he attempted to "represent" his dilemmas through the creation of Chauncey Urquhart, yet another "father." It could be speculated that Chauncey Urquhart was in a sense the real "Balliol," that he was, in other words, Joseph Zuken, a doppleganger version of the real Joseph. Poor "Balliol." Films and tapes were en route. Although the subject (Joseph Zuken) seemed to have nearly run the gamut of "Balliol Urquhart," it was probable he could be revived once more in this guise, if you needed him. When "Balliol Urquhart" walked the decks of the *Ahime* these nights, he could be heard coming by the jangling of medallions.

"So keep him fit."



4. Chauncey Urquhart

I:

On first meeting Darius Milhaud at the chateau near Paris in the late summer of 1927, Chauncey Urquhart expressed his prescient distaste for that notorious entrepreneur of the jazz of sorrow by refusing to shake hands on their being introduced by the Comte du L....., one's dulce though baffling host. On perceiving the snub, the Comte only chuckled, deep in his throat, ochrous.

Darius Milhaud's response to Chauncey's instinctive hauteur is not on record, though it can be readily surmised that he displayed a glassy and obliterating sang-froid, as Chauncey could never afterwards recollect a word being spoken, nor anything that could be construed as a message.

Frail, morose, with a native fragility of tone, Chauncey Urquhart at this point in his life was slowly becoming disillusioned with the Roman Catholic Church, in which he had placed so much hope. They had told him, with St Augustine, that God had put salt in our mouths so that we should thirst for him, but Chauncey had never become thirsty, pray though he might for a taste of salt.

After an extraordinary meal the assemblage repaired to the adjoining salon, where a chamber orchestra had been silently and plushly installed. Once again, as he later told his only son, Chauncey was prescient, and remained close to the french windows. Half-hidden behind sumptuous brocade and a marble bust of the Emperor, Chauncey was able to slip away swiftly and, or so he thought, inconspicuously upon hearing the first dissonant, putrefacted chords of Milhaud's new chamber opera, *Le Pauvre Matelot*, that marantic apeneck parody on the life of a sailor, a brave lad who returns from the sea to find his world leached into shambles, an abattoir in which severed organs pranced to a grinning tango, and his beloved mulatto bride turned into a murderous witch. So the music tore his heart out.

Chauncey stood on the patio under the sinking moon. He looked back. Suddenly, for a terrified instant, the chateau turned ghostly. It was transparent, and through it Chauncey could see steep mountains, and bolts of lightning, a vast hunkering tomb, and he could hear water falling from a great height. He closed his eyes. Reality returned. He was bewildered. Could he have been betrayed? For the Comte, who had been as a father to him, knew very well that with his perfect pitch Chauncey could not abide the music of Darius Milhaud, that to his difficult ear the poignance of this music was ultimately sinful, a suppuration, a keening of lucidity, though heartrending, Chauncey Urquhart was not capable

of abiding this sense of the eggshell of earth splintering in chords.

So Chauncey lost himself sorrowfully in the spacious grounds that surrounded and, as it were, sacralized the immense 17th century chateau. Getting a fire started was no small chore, as he had nothing but a damp box of matches and there had been rain that week, soaking the rusty Eiffel Tower and aggravating one's asthma. He cut small branches with his penknife, which he tossed to one side. His transparent cheeks fluttered and puffed, his scented handkerchief floated into the underbrush. The wee animals of the manicured forest, thunderstruck by a passing owl, stared voicelessly at the moon, betrayed by their tiny eyes.

There was a sound, a footstep.

His heart churred, he rose to his feet trembling. Their eyes surrounded him, he was encircled by steely eyes. His small blaze faltered. Suddenly, ushered by a change of wind, there came to Chauncey a faint, insinuating, polytonal theme, echoing down the pale aisles of lawn and hedge.

He groaned aloud.

Whence came this sense of dread that hovered lightless over the chateau, so intense it seemed almost saline? Chauncey had been laid open to the topology of Sorrow. It was as though, terrifyingly, he could smell the sea. Rhumb lines seared him. Once more he gazed by the light of the fire at the Comte's note of invitation; the L..... emblem, an embossed basilisk, stared back at the lapsed Catholic.

Alarmingly close, another footstep.

"Who's there?"

He had been tricked shamefully into tears by the music, but could not find his handkerchief. He bit the inside of his cheeks. He could see no one. He had never felt more orphaned. Hundreds of eyes blinked, stainless, opaque. A fox shrieked.

"Who's there?"

Branches swayed.

"Chauncey."

Her voice was behind him. He turned and faced into the darkness. She stepped into the light of the fire.

"Genevieve," he whispered.

It was the young Comtess du L....., whom Chauncey for years now had loved from a distance, never daring to make his feelings known and so betray the Comte. He loved her for her lucent oval face, her black flowing hair, her dark, aethereal brow, for the ambiguous silences which underscored the mystery of her origin.

She came into his arms.

"I am protected here," she murmured, "from the monstrous, rending chords."

"You too have perfect pitch?"

It was the first time they had ever touched.

"God yes," said the Comtess du L.....

They sank into the grass beside the fire.

He drew air painfully into his tubercular lungs. The embers of the fire glowed, her breasts glowed as she leaned forward to warm her brow. The music continued, laying bare his defenseless heart. His cheeks were wet. He had betrayed the Comte, who had always been so kind, so warm.

"Poor Chauncey Urquhart," she said, as though divining his state, "having no surcease."

"What surcease, in this world?"

Waves of remorse rode the chords down.

"But there is surcease, Chauncey."

She turned her thighs whitely to him.

"But what of the Comte?"

She giggled strangely.

"Fuck the Comte."

Sudden hooves pounded the turf, shaking Chauncey, the stallions of the Comte in shining mail come to stamp the transgressor into a puddle of flesh, hooves as sharp as knives.

But it was only his heart beating.

"Come here," she called.

She lay outstretched on the slow, charring grass. He looked into her violet eyes, and suddenly they seemed pinguid. Her fingers touched his throat.

"Stick it in," she moaned.

She massaged the loam beneath the grass.

"Thalassos," she whined in passion.

The music began again, the last act. The crazed mulatto bride murders the sailor, leaves him to die, wallowing in his own salt blood. She shivers obscenely, singing "Blow, Blow, Blow the Man Down." She gnawed through Chauncey's pulsing heart, he couldn't breathe, he thrashed. He sank into the foetid night, and would have been lost eternally had his teaching years not rescued him with the inadvertent thought that Thalassos was bad Greek. He opened his eyes to find himself half-strangled, her fingers pressed into his throat. He pulled away frantically. He saw that she lay motionless. The handle of his penknife protruded from between her breasts.

The music stopped.

Clutched in her hand was a slip of paper. What had happened? He was unable to pray, although he was terribly thirsty. He prised the slip of paper loose from her stiffened fingers, and uncrumpled it. "My dear Chauncey Urquhart," he read, "If you are alive to read this note, then I bless you and pity you that you yet live in terror on the hard earth. I have returned to the sea. I have no more to fear but you must run from him. I have grown tired of blindness, but if you're still alive welcome to the 20th century. Genevieve."

The Comtess du L..... grew cold.

Chauncey Urquhart staggered palely away from the smiling corpse, as though in a dream. He wondered how many were alive back at the chateau. Clutched in his bony hand was her funeral message, and above it, embossed, a terrible image, the Comte's seal: the gleaming, purulent basilisk, the fabulous serpent whose gaze is mortal but who does not die; and in its tail were clutched, streaming blood, my severed testicles, sanserif, etched with speedlines.

He stumbled downhill clutching his groin and fell into the Comte's private lake. He could hear water falling from a great height. He swallowed. His hand clutched the message, blood poured from the message, he moaned, his course was run. The basilisk croaked Thalassos Thalassos.

"Ah," he whispered, swallowing.

Chauncey Urquhart wept salt tears. His eyes were filmed, so he closed them.

He awoke on a leafy bank. The moon had sunk.

"That was sure a close call, friend."

A throaty, matter-of-fact voice, smelling of garlic.

"Here, drink this."

The ruddy, ingenuous face of the Comte's game warden shone in the glow of a match, and his stony hand extended a bottle.

Chauncey drank.

"O God."

He tried to sit up, remembering.

"Now now," said the warden, "you just rest there easy, I'll go get some blankets."

He disappeared swiftly.

Chauncey groped to his feet. Although his eyes were wide he could no longer weep. Luckily his blind path led him to a deserted postern gate. He clutched himself; he commanded his lungs to

breathe, they fluttered wildly. He disappeared never to return from the vast estate of the Comte du L....., who had betrayed him and whom he had betrayed; he wandered into forsaken meadows and groves, waterless, still clutching the slip of paper. The basilisk continued to glare through his trembling palm.

II:

Just prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, Chauncey Urquhart staggered in dishevelment down a deserted Southwark thoroughfare, doing the Lambeth Walk, under a pseudonym, his worst fears realized. He failed to notice the man from Mass-Observation following him with open notebook, imitating his every move. Mass-Observation, that well-known group of social scientists and pollsters formed early in 1937 to "study everyday behaviour in Britain" and so uncover the truth about things, had long been engaged in a study of variant forms of the Lambeth Walk. Their man Doakes, in his disguise as a busker from Camden Town, had attended a typical Cockney Sunday-night get-together, where he had noticed the oldster he was now trailing perform variations he had never before encountered.

Suddenly Doakes perked up his ears; as he danced from one side of the street to the other, the oldster had begun to sing. Now there should have been nothing unusual about this; how many times had Doakes watched that talented comedian, Lupino Lane, star of *Me and My Girl*, strut jauntily across the stage, "Doing the Lambeth Walk":

> I know a nice walk
> Just like the cake walk,
> Come along my honey,
> Honey do.

But Doakes's oldster was singing "Blow, Blow, Blow the Man Down."

Doakes scribbled furiously as, silhouetted by a rare streetlamp, the odd procession continued. They were as agile as two water spiders. They strutted and strolled as though there were no tomorrow, no Hitler, as though all this talk of war were only a passing fad. Doakes knew how the newspapers cried havoc every chance they got, forgetting how his confreres at Mass-Observation had exploded the notion that the British people hungered for war. He worked a contemptuous gesture into his strut.

They reached the Elephant and Castle.

Lorries snarled and stank, drowning out the song. The oldster turned to cross the line of traffic, hunching his shoulders. Suddenly, in the glare of the intersection, he noticed Doakes, and shrank back, visibly pale, his teeth showing, his hands warding off an unseen blow.

Uncertainly, Doakes stepped forward.

But this was a mistake, as the oldster immediately dropped to his knees and warbled shrilly, as though drawing his last breath, that jocular syllable with which Cockneys had lately began to close off their rendition of the Lambeth Walk:

"Oi!" he shrilled.

Thinking to placate the old fellow, Doakes grinned pudgily and repeated:

"Oi!"

Thereupon causing the oldster to skitter backwards like a panicked crab until he hit a concrete abutment. Mastering an impulse to mimic this interesting movement, Doakes, who was frankly baffled by this behaviour, opened his mouth and said the first thing that came to mind:

"Excuse me sir, but would you happen to have a light?"

Chauncey Urquhart opened his eyes.

"Shame me no longer," he said, forcing his throat to work. "Just tell me what it is that Smythe intends to do with me, now that I have been disinherited. Stop this farce."

Doakes was out of his depth. His eyes shifted uncomfortably; he scratched nervously at a pimple in the middle of his chin.

It began to bleed rather profusely.

"Blood!" said Chauncey.

Embarrassed, increasingly ill at ease, Doakes stuck his hand to his chin, and the blood smeared.

Clutching himself, Chauncey fainted.

At this moment, in Fortress America, nine-year-old Balliol was mourning the bathtub suicide of his mother Sophonisba, the mysterious and dusky Seminole Indian who had nursed him faithfully through the perilous years of early childhood, but who had left him now, abandoned him, cutting a hole in her chest. The grey waters in the tub turned red as Balliol watched, and the juices of his own mother swirled down the drain, leaving no clue, it seemed, no hint or code or message to nurse her going.

For Balliol was too young then to remark on the fact that the water in the bathtub of her dying tasted of salt.

A decade later Chauncey sat with his son over a cozy fire in

their Florida abode late in December, and it was only then, at the age of nineteen, that Balliol learned some of the truth about his beloved mother—that she had betrayed Chauncey from the very start, that she herself had been a member of the Sorrowing, that she had met Chauncey and married him on the orders of the leader of that dread cult, as a sort of macabre jape.

Chauncey only learned the truth about his beloved Sophonisba on being told of the way in which she had taken her life.

"Mother!" sobbed Balliol in 1949.

He put himself in his father's shoes.

Starting at the beginning, Chauncey told Balliol about the fabulous Comtess du L....., and how she died a victim of the Sorrowing. He told Balliol about Darius Milhaud . . .

"Milhaud?" quavered his son.

There was a pause.

"Have you disobeyed me?" asked Chauncey.

"Only a little. I wanted to be like other people."

"Not *Le Pauvre Matelot*!"

Balliol was unfamiliar with that composition.

"Thank God! But how, with your perfect pitch, could you have listened to any of that music?"

Balliol paled, remembering the insinuating polytonalities, the reek of the bend sinister, of vibrations detailing the loss of gravity so that he was weightless.

"O I'm falling."

"And never forget that," said Chauncey, holding tight, and Balliol realized once again how precious it was to have a loving father.

He listened, vowing never to forget.

Blessed by an annuity sufficient to his considerable needs, and having decided to give up tithing, Chauncey Urquhart came to a realization soon after the debacle near Paris in 1927—he realized that he would have to find out.

Obviously he could not approach the Comte.

Genevieve herself was the answer. Poring through old newspaper clippings, society gossip and the like, he found out that she was an American, that her birthplace had been Florida, that her maiden name was Rackstall. He took a speedy ocean liner to America, and confronted what seemed total blankness.

Not a clue.

Until his third day in Orlando. He was at the end of his rope. To no avail had he waded through newspaper morgues, searching for some record of one Jenny Rackstall who had left home to marry a French Comte, plumbed city archives, interviewed dozens

of drawling ministers, all of whom resembled daguerrotypes of Mark Twain in old age, roamed the streets in search of a family resemblance. Verbena flooded his nostrils.

"Did you say she was a little *dark*?" murmured the last city clerk, closing his book of records with a snap.

"She is not a Negro," Chauncey responded with dignity.

"Well then," said the clerk more kindly, "why not try the Seminole reservation? They keep their own books."

And so Chauncey Urquhart met his Sophonisba.

Not until much later would he realize that they had not met by chance at the door of the Indian records office, and that by dropping a bag of groceries she had diverted him from his quest at the moment of fruition. The courtship was brief. A heavy odour of flowers made him sleepy. Parrots cursed. Purple vines bogged the moist aisles until he became dizzy. She was all he had ever dreamed of in his earlier infatuation with the Roman Catholic Church. The sun, like a bronze gong, rattled the innumerable parrots and gave him an unaccustomed tan. He was privileged to observe several of the more abandoned native dances, including one in search of rain; the wedding ceremony, though he seemed not to notice, also showed traces of abandonment. He fell into a luxurious trance, and built Sophonisba a bungalow on the eastern coast.

It seemed nothing could awaken him.

Then, during one of his infrequent sojourns in England, where business matters pertaining to his annuity needed occasional attention, Chauncy happened to find himself with a free afternoon. Daydreaming of Sophonisba, now pregnant, he wandered the London streets until eventually he came across an obscure private library—later destroyed in the Blitz—and strolled inside. He settled down to browse in the Rare Books Room. Opening the first (1823) edition of Hone's *Ancient Mysteries Described* he found, inserted immediately after the eighth Mystery, a sheaf of loose papers which, unfolded, revealed a title, The Ninth Mystery, in an archaic hand. Chauncey began to read. The text was a description of that 18th century populist organization, centred in Western England and known to historians as the Dyke-Smashers, whose lineal descent from the Diggers of the previous century had always seemed to Chauncey sufficiently defining. To identify themselves, initiates of both organizations sported an emblematic sea-green ribbon. Half-awake, Chauncey shivered to a sudden memory of the turquoise scarf which Genevieve du L..... had often worn, and which enlustred her smaragdine eyes. At this point there were several cancelled pages,

impossible to decipher. The first word to catch Chauncey's eye on the next uncancelled page was Thalassos.

Bad Greek!

The blood rushed from his streaming face.

"No!" he whispered, gagging. But he forced his eyes into focus once more. He had to find out:

> Her eyes are buttered with Thalassos, (he read)
> The garment falls, the heart rips,
> The interstitial sweat within the moss
> Spoils Euclid and the moon drips.

The paragraph in which these lines of verse were embedded described the ritual dancing that accompanied the actual sacrifice. As elaborated here, these dances were nearly identical to those Chauncey had often seen performed, in their search for rain, by the Seminole Indians of Florida. On completing a sequence each dancer would cry out "Aie!" or "Oie!", compressions of the Italian "Ahime" or "Ohime", and so roughly translatable as a cry of alas.

He tottered into the London drizzle. Was Sophonisba still safe from them? It was small consolation that the Seminoles did not cry "Oie!". He booked himself passage on the next liner back, due to sail the next day. Waiting, trying not to think, he paced the wet streets, his brow furrowed blindly, his face feverish. He lost all sense of direction, and was turning in circles. Noise and laughter came from an old three-storey dwelling. He was drawn inside with the half-articulated notion of asking the way to the nearest Tube. When his wan face appeared in the doorway, the Cockneys stopped singing for an instant. Then his obvious distress aroused their native compassion and vivacity, and they placed him in a seat of honour, and fed him hot toddy.

Soon the dancing started up again. The piano clanged gayly. First one soloist then another sang to Chauncey familiar Cockney ditties, not excluding "My Bradshaw Bride," "Up Goes the Price of Meat, Ta Ra Ra,", or "Lily of Laguna." And then, at the height of festivities, his new Cockney friends began to perform the Lambeth Walk. Chauncey watched, his head whirling. He realized of course that it was only his shaken state that caused him to see ghost images of an earlier, bloodier dance in the jaunty struttings of his Cockney friends. As each soloist completed his turn with a stamp of the foot, he bellowed out the cry that traditionally marked the end of a sequence in the dance:

"Wo-up!" he would cry.

The next morning they escorted Chauncey to the port in a laughing throng.

The liner sped to America. Sophonisba was safe, her belly swollen, and knew nothing at all about the rain-dance of her Seminole forefathers. When Chauncey whispered "Oie!" to her she closed her eyes and put her arms around him, humming with passion, and parrots nagged. Everything was the same; Chauncey sank gratefully into his reprieve and the years passed. The misfortune of Balliol's albino skin and delicate eyes was more than countered by his supple precocity. Indeed—under a floorboard in the home of his Seminole grandmother—it was Balliol who discovered the journal, the cover of which was embossed with the worm ouroboros.

"Look, Daddy!"

It was a warm relationship between father and son.

The journal had been mildewed almost to illegibility. But Chauncey was able to piece enough of it together to identify it as the travel diary or day-book of a Dyke-Smasher, covering the latter years of the 18th century. In the late 1770s Chauncey discovered, the organization of Dyke-Smashers suffered what seemed to be one of a recurrent series of schisms. Of the two surviving factions, the larger stayed in England to become a purely political movement, though with ritualistic overtones, rather like the Freemasons and Illuminati of the time, and suffered extinction in the period of reaction attending the French Reign of Terror. Maintaining all the old ways, the smaller faction pooled their resources, purchased two small sailing vessels and embarked, early in 1780, for America. The captains of these two vessels, who were also the owners of record, were two men; their names were Rackstall and Smythe.

Balliol had begun to cry.

Neither Dyke-Smasher craft was particularly sea-worthy, and neither captain seemed to know much about navigation—west of the Canaries their portolanos were of little help. Their original target was Massachusetts, but even before the storm that separated them they had drifted far to the south. The storm came, and scurvy, and many of the crew, infected with the Sorrowing, cried "Oie!" to the blind androgynous god, knelt dying into the salt sea. The journal-keeper was on board the Rackstall vessel and had no idea of the fate of Smythe's, whether his leaking craft foundered off some Caribbean coast, or whether it too found a haven. Rackstall's ship crashed off Cape Hatteras. The journal did not record their first meeting with the Seminole Indians, and closed with a bald reference to its keeper's Seminole bride.

Balliol's huge skull glowed milky and neotenous as he waited for his father to finish reading. Looking up, Chauncy swore silently to protect his son. Swiftly they returned to the bungalow on the coast, Balliol's hair floating like gossamer. Sophonisba smiled up from her magazine; she embraced her son with dusky arms. Chauncey fumbled for words. How could he persuade her to leave? No one could say when the blight would strike next, parching us; Balliol had to be saved from the displeasure of the god. Suddenly the parrots seemed ominous.

"Chauncey?"

She could sense something amiss.

"Sophonisba."

Balliol cawed abruptly, like a parrot, his head wobbling, arteries pulsing under the translucent skin.

"You're overtired, my child," said his mother. "It's past your bedtime."

Waiting for her to return from putting Balliol to bed, Chauncey picked up the magazine she had been reading; it opened at an article on London which spoke of bobbies and buskers and the common folk living their spunky lives through in that great metropolis; it spoke of a group of social scientists and polsters called Mass-Observation which had discovered that the British people did not long for war. The article passed on to refer to Cockneys—and their famous Lambeth Walk—as symbolic of the spirit of the British people, though ironically the dance had originated in America. Odd, Chauncey thought, reading on. The Lambeth Walk derived from an American Negro dance of the previous century known as the cakewalk. The cakewalk, in turn, derived from certain ceremonial dances performed by the Seminole Indians of Florida.

The ocean voyage seemed endless.

It had proved impossible to persuade Sophonisba to leave her bungalow on the coast, which caused their first and as it was to prove their last quarrel. She said she had grown sick and tired of all this nonsense about worms and Dyke-Smashers. He poured scorn on her unstable female mind. At the same time he admitted that he had become obsessed with the Lambeth Walk, tossing her magazine to the floor. She said,

"Go do it."

As he left Chauncey slammed the door, awakening Balliol who began to caw. His mother failed to come. So he wept and babbled.

But Chauncey was gone. "I must stamp this infection out,"

he wrote his wife before sailing, "lest the British lion learns to its cost that it has gone Sorrowing. Take good care of Balliol. He must not go outdoors." As the interminable voyage lengthened, Chauncey was overjoyed to meet a fellow passenger who shared his passion for incunabula. They became friendly, and it seemed natural for Chauncey to invite him to dinner when they arrived in London, and natural for the stranger to accept. After a fine meal, Chauncey suggested they spend the rest of the evening looking for Cockneys.

The stranger smiled his acquiescence.

The party was in full swing when they finally arrived, the piano clanging as gayly as ever. Hot toddies steamed in the kitchen. Chauncey introduced his new and old friends; the stranger nodded gravely, his pale eyes glowing. Someone suggested the Lambeth Walk, and Chauncey's Cockneys leapt into their performance, the whole tenement shaking and ringing with the sturdy "up hill and down dale" of the famous dance. And as each colourful character finished his sequence he would stamp his feet and shout:

"Wo-up!"

The stranger got to his feet and stilled the throng.

"My friends," he said, and his voice thrummed eloquently, "I am moved, seldom have I observed so moving a performance. That this should not be a spectator sport, would you all mind if I took a fling at the Lambeth Walk myself?"

Was it for this that Chauncey had come to England, abandoning his son? What was happening? Some warning intuition urged him to cry out No! to the stranger's request, but the Cockneys forestalled him, answering the stranger with a chorus of encouraging halloos.

"All right then," replied their new friend, and began to strut. Chauncey prayed that everything was all right, and that nothing was about to happen. He had felt so at home here. But now there was a dead silence in the room, except for the hissing sound the stranger made through his teeth as he glided back and forth with slitted eyes. The Cockneys were enthralled. Suddenly the stranger increased the pace, breathing heavily through his mouth, his legs flashing, and what he danced was hardly recognizable as the Lambeth Walk. Faster and faster he whirled. And then he stopped, he opened his eyes as pale as ice, he thrust his head forward, he whispered plangently into the captive silence the syllable:

"Oi!"

Tears sprang to Chauncey's eyes.

There was a stunned pause.

"Oi!" murmured a Cockney, as though in awe, and all his compatriots leapt to their feet and with a terrifying hilarity, like mice passed by an owl, began to caper about the room shouting out:

"Oi!"

The stranger approached Chauncey through the throng; his grin was somehow not mammalian. He raised his right hand, as though to shake it with Chauncey's, but when my father glanced down with filmy eyes he saw that the third finger of his adversary's right hand bore a signet ring, and its impress was a staring basilisk.

"Who are you?" Chauncey whispered.

They stared at one another.

"My name is Smythe."

Chauncey Urquhart closed his eyes.

"My boy," said Smythe, "you have been amusing yourself at my expense. You have dirtied my handmaiden Sophonisba, poor chick. But I have not minded, I have let you play. You had to learn. But kindergarten is over, Chauncey Urquhart. Get out of here, Chauncey. You have been disinherited."

Through his speech came the "Oi! Oi!" of his Cockney victims.

"Ho, ho," laughed Smythe, the basilisk shrilling through his eyes, turning Chauncey Urquhart to stone. "I'm warning you. If you try to go back to your little bungalow: snip, snip."

Chauncey's arms were protecting his head, so that he unconsciously modelled a classic pose. Smythe's laughter chased him down the stairwell, and the sound of scissors. Chauncey stumbled into the deserted streets of London; he was turning in circles, there was no home. Balliol grew fragile with worry, and could hardly hold his head up. When Chauncey finally became drunk enough, one night, to return to his Cockneys, they did not know him. Their mouths gaped silently; they sat motionless in overstuffed sofas with photograph albums open at the last war. When some of them at last began to dance their strut was ghostly, as though remembered decades later on the grey telly, and they rasped out a sour:

"Oi!"

His worst fears realized, Chauncey staggered away from that scene of dereliction, doing the Lambeth Walk. But a member of the Sorrowing, posted by Smythe, had seen him, and had followed him, and was attempting to touch him with blood.

He fainted.

When he opened his eyes again, Doakes leaned over shyly and whispered an explanation.

"Mass-Observation?" said Chauncey.

And the old man began to giggle.

"You're too late!"

Doakes was offended.

"Don't you see?" said Chauncey. "All we are now is images on the screen." He cackled drunkenly. "And you know I believe you're beginning to flicker?" He got to his feet and staggered north across the Elephant and Castle, leaving the bewildered Doakes to face the Second World War, which began immediately. Chauncey Urquhart stumbled to the estuary of the Thames River and said "Oi!" to the waters, but lived through the War, "Oi!" to the waters:

"Oi!"

III:

The moon was humid, gangrene leached the palms under which Chauncey Urquhart lay gasping, though the night was windless. His observation post stank with mud and dying vegetation, the air was saline for he was only a few feet above sea level, and only a few yards from the sea itself. Huge tropical insects, their white abdomens swollen with blood, had been working on his exposed flesh, so that he imagined himself to be feverish, and he was haunted by premonitions. The great trilithons of the fake Stonehenge of Trinidad towered before him; he was waiting for Smythe.

He glanced once more at the deteriorated schist plaque goddess he had found near the site, proof that the Sorrowers of 1780 had returned to a primal scene, and had constructed their "Stonehenge" at the behest of an inverted piety. The goddess had great round eyes, twin suns circumambiated by narrow rays, rhumb lines. They seemed to spin in their sockets, vertigos of innocence. But 4000 years ago the first schism had strewn her followers across the green Mediterranean, and cartilage had begun to cloud her gaze.

Chauncey crept halfway out of his little tunnel to stare again at "Stonehenge," at the trilithons glittering in the light of the moon, the perverse circle blinded—here in Trinidad—by a great megalith placed squarely in the midsummer-sun gap. To distinguish it from the British Stonehenge, Chauncey had christened this icy pariodic

version "Smythehenge." It was a direct copy. But Stonehenge had been constructed to reverence the sun and moon and stars; Smythehenge, 40 degrees of latitude to the south, bore an entirely negative relation to the skies. Where Stonehenge faced outwards in gladness, Smythehenge closed off the world. Where at Stonehenge the midsummer sun would appear at rising over the heelstone and through the gap, at Smythehenge the megalith blocking that gap had been carved with a great blind eye, no longer truly the eye of the goddess it parodied but the eye of the basilisk.

There wes a noise; Chauncey ducked underground. The German guards passed gutteral and booted over his head, a fever in their voices, June had come at last. Chauncey made fists so shrilly that his fingernails broke the skin. He crouched even lower into the porous loam, and as they passed their tread dislodged lumps of dirt from the moist, snake-like roots. Smythe would soon arrive.

Chauncey had confirmed that the Maltese sect had still indulged only in "clean" rites, and that their exquisite places of worship served only as "forecourts" of the goddess. There was no necrophilia. But the ethical postulates of this "forecourts" sect were far too gentle for a world of warfare and blood-sacrifice and castrations where men walked this earth with nothing below. The stamping of heavyshod feet shook the forecourt. Horses neighed pawing. A sword came into sight, clutched by a hairy patriarchal hand, the blade shone descending into the barking flesh; blood splattered the dishonoured Mother, her eyes glazed horribly. Once again her worshippers fled to the sea, weeping with shame. One ship fled all the way to Trinidad, where the crew became "Indians" after a few short years. Another ship struck north.

Every few miles the high priest took astronomical readings, but for weeks the portents remained shaky, the sun and moon unbalanced, insecure. His portolano showed the way north. They arrived in Britain. They disembarked. They trekked by stages to the one point where all the readings pleased the high priest. Salisbury Plain was the true home of sun and moon. Here would they build a plaything for the Mother, that she might smile upon their children; here they would build Stonehenge.

It is plain they did not know about Britain, safety-valve to a continent, crammed with the discards and byeblows of a thousand years of pillage, sanctuary for the footloose, the defeated, the incurably morose, the genetic failures and sports. But while luck

was with the gentle seafarers they were happy enough, even though all their eggs were in one basket. The high priest grew old, and passed his knowledge and his love to his eldest son, who did likewise in turn. It was a wholesome relationship between father and son. And had they not been tested, and did they not remain faithful? Were they not blessed by the Mother?

They were not.

1600 BC. The Wessex people arrived, on horseback. They worshipped the new gods. They could be heard coming for miles, scaring the starlings. The son of the high priest hid with his mulatto lover in the very heart of Stonehenge, but even there could hear the sound of hooves, and keening music, a jocose searing march which bewildered him with sensations of novelty and terror so that he lost his balance and fell heavily onto the girl. She sounded like a frog. When he regained his balance and tried to make her rise so they could flee together he saw the knife she had been about to hand him protruding from her chest.

There was not a cloud in the sky. Raping and pillaging, the warriors of the new god advanced with great guffaws, kicking dismembered children from the flagstones like tumescent plastic dolls. Half-blinded with grief, the high priest retreated with a few trusted retainers to the last post, Stonehenge itself. The goddess watched smiling. He turned his back, and saw his own son squatting deliriously over a dead mulatto. His own son had gone over to the enemy!

"Oi!"

The traitor looked up, paler than table salt. His father approached grimly, and spat upon his son. He spat upon the Mother. He was sick of them all. He would have no more to do with them. He raised his voice in the sanctuary, the invaders having a superstitious fear of circular structures:

"From this moment, O Mother, you are blind. Let the water in. Smash the dykes. Sear shut the moon. I am sick of you all".

He plucked the knife from between the breasts of the mulatto whore and turned to his son.

He laughed hollowly.

Thus was born the Sorrowing.

"Ho, ho."

It was Smythe's voice, he was approaching, Chauncey crouched deeper into his trench among the white spiders. His arms and neck and legs were swollen with bites, his vision blurred, his motor control ragged. Smythe's voice began to fade, he was

talking to one of his guards, hearty, jovial. They were gone' swallowed. It was the 21st of June.

Covered with dirt and broken roots, Chauncey crawled out of his flimsy trench. The moon doubled its vowels, catching in the throat. Where had they gone? He crashed through the muggy foliage, stumbled into phosphorescent vines, almost hanging himself on a vine that glowed clutching at his neck. He swatted frantically; he noticed that his forehead was burning hot. That didn't suit him at all, so he demanded that they show themselves, that poor Chauncey was hopping and skipping and jumping in circles, in the vacuum afore the clap. Was that lightning? But he lived for a while yet. O whore, whore, he begged, smite not this goose Galahad with his whited eyes, the chill below. Hollow hollow boomed the moon, I've come to take you down. Chauncey Urquhart claimed to be no more than Peter Rabbit in the chambers of boojum Sorrow, clean of brow, with glassy eye, but frail. We all know I'm frail, he claimed, presuming to cavort in the buggy loam like a stallion foaming spermatazoa the foaming cleanser, but was truly only goose Galahad humping his swayback nag, tiddle-tum tiddle-tum. For the basilisk burned his palm, the swan of Sorrowing flapping its phosphorous wings, a peccadillo, a sign, a signet, a cygne. "Lourdes, Lourdes," burped the greeneyed Frenchie, conducting from his chair tooweet: "Lawd this am a goose o' geese on a slick sleek pony seeks, entering our lists, our beeswax home, thus to dethrone, slicket farandman, our King our Smythe, our roister-doister Black Knight!"

Nay, nay, see ye not, Frenchie on a stick, that me I'm but eine thin white man with a wee tincture of Sorrow, no white knight I! It tingles! For the cunning Frenchie conducts by rod and rune my sweet whiteness o' skin into dread alabaster, tasty salt. He licks! O what a ruckus.

List to him m'Lud—list, list!

Balliol they are around me. Can't you hear them smiling fierce through their viny sinus:

Yum!

Yum, yum, yon swampy whore's yer heartmate!

Naa she amn't.

Yer queen's a whore-de-whore-whore. Je gage que si, Harry!

Ja, wohl. A touch of the tarbrush.

Naaaa.

Ephphatha, O Queenie Cunt!

I? I?

Let him grizzle grunt, oar Peter in th' boat a mite, slump sobbin' in his drained pharos whilst we lick you dry, O last oasis.

Naaaa.

Vinegar in the scuppernong!

Na.

A poisoned well! Yon rhetoric's sour!

Na.

Look him m'Lud! Sprained 'is salty dong whilst mountin' 'is charger. No fere of ourn! Comst he now? Har-de-har-har. Goose Galahad 'tis who com'st to succour the sucked Queenie.

Escelsior!

Tarbrush!

Naaa.

Comst Goose Galahad none other. Might say meines Bedunken me judice—he strikes a posy, what sort'a man's this? Weewee. Mortmain and malebouch bears he them. Mouthwash and motherhump. Look now, how testy! He perks! He speaks!

Naaaaaaaa. Ich kneed gesundheit, a dying fall into me muck-ender, twas always frail was I. What tribunal's this? And me in me mulligrubs!

Such orisons, Harry!

Naa. Rodents gnaw me flesh.

Wha's tha?

Lickspittles!

Ya hear, Harry? Snubbed us, 'e did! Nostril-bussing loam . . . loam succulent burr his tongue . . . loam lymphatic knuckle him under, attar cunt 'e went sailing! Mark Twain! But Lawd Lawd, tha' ole Muzzah she dead! Touch of the tarbrush but blood is red. Poked 'is dick into th' cunt o' a dead Queenie! Swamp juice! Lemonade! Bad breath! 'E's a necrophile 'e is!

Can this go on, Balliol?

Naaaa.

Ya her eyen spun spun spun spun spun spun . . . 'twere no error, mark ye well, I saw her eyen go spin! O she loved us all so much! Hark those sanguine catchment basins her eyes, centrifuges finer than all our detergents—who stopped this seasonal o' th'earth, made't bite's tale? but you 'n' yourn! She loved ye! But ye went t' her, wi' yer orifices sealed and a big smile! I hate you so much!

'Splain suh, deedy,

Aie dose alchemy doldrums. Athymy pronged me longtemps, and kill kill kill worse whispered the eerie vox inwards, eagle-claws, and maybe I would! because I hate you so much, but then . . .

Sprechen?

O I wept! Fiddlin' in me web were all the scum. Fluup. The knight in ordure and the tiddlywinks, mired were they all in me

tootling. Such an oboe! But e'en the superflux o' me dreams mooned Silly! Silly! Yer naught below! An' I were froze in th' frore page, stiff as the syntax of the interrupted Word, dense it was alchemy said wi' a derne moory Oxford Don dong, Ye that are Naught must use Care, for that ye are but a Souffle.

Ah!

Nay leave me, Balliol, piping, piping . . .

"Daddy?"

There was a scrabbling sound. Smythe looked up lidless. Chauncey Urquhart was clearly visible squatting on the great Androgyne.

The German guards had been masturbating each other in the shadow of the great steely pillar. Smythe screamed pointing. They zipped up swiftly and jumped to their feet. Chauncey Urquhart crouched numbly above them, salivating gently. He was an old man. They leapt as one, grabbed his thin ankles, and pulled him to the sand, which was already soaked from the advancing tide.

The castrated man on the central altar gagged and gargled, looking for water in which to drown, but only got sand in his hair. The corpse of the mulatto lay spreadeagled at Smythe's feet, as though stallions had taken her.

"Well boy, now that you're here," said Smythe to Chauncey Urquhart, who salivated uncontrollably. Smythe put his hand to his mouth, as though mastering a spasm of disgust. He turned to the German guards:

"Undress him."

The castrated man began to scream again; water entered his nose, the tide was rising. The mulatto began to drift. The great eye of the Androgyne sneered over Chauncey's pathetic genitals. Particles of sand adhered to the knife. Moonlight ricocheted from a dozen steel trilithons. The blood was rushing to his head, and he was smiling at this suffusion of blood when the knife descended. He screamed.

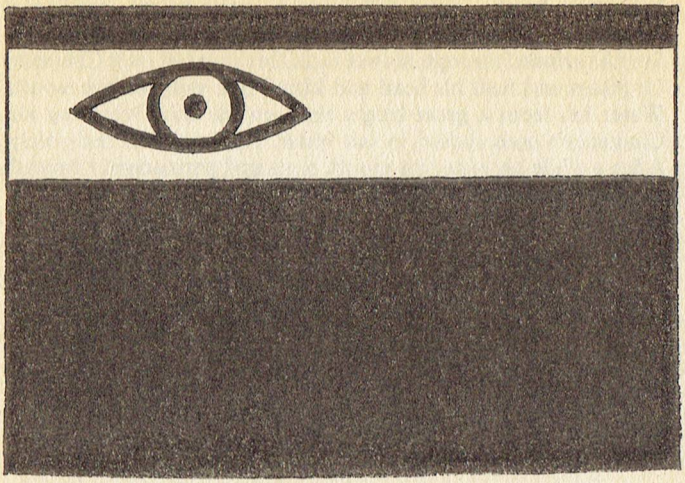
"You betrayed me, Chauncey."

The castrated Dyke-Smasher at last found water to drown in. Chauncey's hands jerked convulsively upwards and touched the obscene pulse of blood; it was his blood; the blood ran into his mouth and blinded him, so that he did not see Smythe cupping gnarled hands within his broken groin, but his flesh shrank and shriveled, and he screamed again. Smythe drank.

"Father?"

Chauncey could see mountains covered with ice, a vast

hunkering tomb; water fell from a great height, making it impossible to breathe. He lifted his head from the rising tide. Smythe grinned through his wet face. He crouched over Chauncey Urquhart and held his head and kissed him wetly on the mouth. Water fell from a great height through the thin, whistling air. Chauncey's nose sucked in salt water. His body flinched palely. After a while his nose and mouth remained permanently beneath the surface, and he drowned.



5. Smythe

Smythe wondered if he should drop a note to Minerva, who had aged terribly the last time they met, years before in Florida, when on her insistence they had visited their son Gerry Barns on board the *Trident*. Her withered old face had contracted with revulsion, but Smythe assured her time and again that no one would ever guess, that even Gerry thought his name was Joseph Zuken. But Smythe could not bear the thought of writing her. He had to be careful about contamination as the world decayed. That very day, as though by chance, Abraham Zuken, Smythe's third son and hardly better than the others, paid a personal visit and asked for the use of the Aspen residence. Something lit within Smythe, who nevertheless found it difficult to breathe in the presence of this son of his whom he found disgusting. For an instant, when Abraham mentioned Jennifer Barns, Smythe thought he had been encircled, that they knew they were brother and sister. There was a smell of rot, he held his breath; Abraham was dissolving into an ancient crone who gobbled obscenities and tried to suck Smythe's hale blood. He said Get out. His incredible life force cast her out. You are disinherited. I disinherit you. He could breathe again and plan his counter attack.

When he though of Aspen, he found himself humming a Milhaud theme between his pearly teeth, all his.

—Tch.

He radiotelephoned "D'Artagnan," ordered him to prepare the uninsured and decrepit *Ahime* for scuttling, and to bring "Balliol Urquhart" back to the surface. He readied the company plane to transport the albino westwards to Aspen. The sun shining through the venetian blinds templated Smythe's jolly grin into the neigh of a god.

BILL GETS HEP TO GOD!

A TRACT FOR TEENAGERS PREPARED BY JOHN SLADEK

Bill and Jack are both on the basketball squad. After practice, they go to a soda fountain where, over cokes, the conversation turns to religion.

BILL: By the way, Jack, what's *your* religion?

JACK: I'm an atheist.

BILL: No kidding? You really believe all that stuff about there not being any God? (*laughs nervously*).

JACK: That's right, friend. I believe in neither heaven nor hell, and I do not accept Jesus Christ as my personal savior.

BILL: (puzzled) You mean Christ *didn't* die on the cross for your sins?

JACK: (smiling) You Christians stick at that point, don't you? Well, if Christ *is* God, as you say, and if his death was supposed to be a sacrifice *to* God, then it seems to me we have a paradox.

BILL: But aren't all paradoxes resolved in the mind of God?

JACK: Not in this case, Bill, since what we're talking about is the mind of God. What could he possibly gain by sacrificing himself to himself—what was he thinking of?

BILL: Gee, I never thought of that. But you must at least believe there *is* a God. After all, the Bible tells us so.

JACK: Another paradox, Bill. God is supposed to have written the Bible. If so, we would only have his own word for his own existence. Actually the Bible was written by ordinary men, and I think it safe to say that it's a *pack of lies* from cover to *cover*.

BILL: Honest? And to think I believed it for so long! Hey, wait a minute! Don't we have other proofs for God's existence? Like who created the universe?

JACK: That's easy. I could have turned around and asked you who created the creator . . .

Frankly, *we don't know* how the universe came to be. Perhaps *it always was.* Perhaps it *came out of nothing.* You see, any explanation for the existence of God works just as well for the existence of the universe.

BILL: But the universe couldn't have come about by chance, Jack. Life, for instance—the chances of all these complicated molecules getting together by accident are almost nil! You might as well expect a group of blind men to come from all over the country, to assemble at one place, and then to drill and march in perfect precision—all without *outside direction*!

JACK: But if life is all that perfect, Bill, why are there so many thousands of blind men in the first place? No, I'm afraid your "God" is just an "unnecessary presence".

BILL: What does that mean?

JACK: Well, look at my watch, for example. I could tell you there were invisible demons inside it, who make it run.

BILL: Ha, ha! You're pulling my leg!

JACK: (*permitting himself a smile*) That's right, Bill. It just *doesn't make sense.* Even if I can't explain exactly how this watch works, I don't need to invent "unnecessary presences".

BILL: I get it! Then God is just *not necessary.* But what must I do to become an atheist? Isn't it too late for me?

JACK: Not at all. Though many people find it difficult to change, after a lifetime of piety and prayer. Some never become *true* atheists. They have doubts, they begin to backslide—right back to the same old pew.

BILL: If *I* become an atheist, what's in it for me?

JACK: The true, inner peace of being one with yourself, Bill. Suddenly all the "big problems" of yesterday—sin, guilt, hell—suddenly they just melt away. You find a new zest for life, knowing it's the only one you'll get. All at once you know true inner joy, when "Man's on his ground, all's right with the world."

BILL: That's for me! (*tears off Sunday-school pin and throws it away*). Phooie on superstition! I'm going to be an atheist!

JACK: Glad to hear it, Bill! (*gives him a warm handshake, claps him on the back*) Welcome, brother!

Bill's learned his lesson—but have you learned yours? Give up the vanity (Eccles. 1:2) of worship NOW (Matt. 2:1; 1st word).

Remember that he who rejects atheism, who shuts his heart to ungodliness, may never get a second chance! In the words of St. Paul:

> "The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring *with thee*, and the books, *but* especially the parchments."
>
> —II Tim. 4:13

SMACK RUN

MARTA BERGSTRESSER

"I've got a job for you," he said, as she regarded him over a stream of smoke. "You won't like it, but you'll probably do it, because I can pay you more money than you've seen in a long time."

Sarah calmly put the cigarette out, keeping still steady eyes on him, amused at his obvious annoyance, unhappiness at meeting her on her own turf in the dingy 'port coffee-shop, at his general dissatisfaction at the entire arrangement. "Talk some more, Grendel," she said, and sipped the fake coffee.

Grendel leaned over the table. "Fifty thousand. Enough to buy a new chopper, junk your old one . . ." Grendel made an expansive gesture. "Fifty thousand's a lot of money, Ms. Toggi, about a quarter of what I make on the deal."

Sarah stretched her legs under the table. "Deal on what?"

"I don't want to talk here," he said as he began to heave his bulk out of the chair.

"Sit down, I'm not talking anywhere else. You've got a screen up."

"Ms. Toggi, you're not the only chopper pilot in Albuquerque."

"Great," said Sarah, standing up. "Go find yourself another one."

"Hold it!" Grendel's piggy blond eyes darted nervously around the dark shop. "Not so fast, you haven't got the picture yet."

"So make a picture."

"And if you back out after I tell you? Why should I take a chance at you spilling everything?"

"Look, Grendel, I've just put in a full day, I'm shot and I want to make it home very, very fast. So either you make the right kind of noises or I leave."

"Alright, sit down, damnit. You've got everyone in the shop looking at us."

Sarah slipped back into the chair. "Okay, talk."

Grendel flopped back in his seat, then leaned across the table. "Smack," he said in a low voice. "Two hundred pounds of pure,

uncut heroin. Pick it up in Mexico, deliver it—this certain place—and that's it."

Sarah shook her head. "You know as well as I do that pure smack sells at a fat century an ounce, and that doesn't add up to what fifty thou is one quarter of."

"I'm taking a slight loss." Grendel shrugged elaborately. "After all, times being what they are . . . Where are you going?"

Sarah had risen again, and stood behind the chair, swinging her jacket. "It's not nice to lie to people, Grendel. Want to try again?"

"Alright, make it eighty."

Sarah sat down. "Heads or hospitals? Come on, satisfy my conscience." *Bastard, fat leech, walking in the door, slopping over chair, fat man in a country of skinny people, parasite fat means milk, eggs, meat, good meat once a day, means money and pull, means using people, using goddamnit me. . . .* She suppressed the thought as Grendel finished with his coffee cup and leaned across the table again.

"Ms. Toggi, you know as well as I do that there's about four thousand non-military hospitals still operating in this country, and not one of them that's not crying for drugs. The cut stuff I can sell to the heads, but the hospitals cough up a lot for the pure stuff."

"You're really an altruist at heart, aren't you?" Sarah could not mask the contempt in her voice.

"Look, bitch, both you and I know why you're going to do this run. Eighty thou's great, but you'll do it for your lily-white soul. Two hundred pounds of smack makes a lot of waves, eases a lot of pain, and maybe even makes you fat. Feed kids in pain to your damned bleeding conscience." He stopped, sensing that he had hit something, remembered the gossip he had picked up at the 'port: dead husband and dead kid, same chopper accident that still flung a scar down the left side of her face; four days in the Sierras, and the kid didn't die that first day. The scar flushed red and she picked up the cup, scalded her tongue, cleared her head of vermilion and green trees.

"Alright, you've got a deal. When and where, and when do I pick up my quarter?"

Grendel grinned, and she felt the contempt grow to a cold shaft of disgust, watched *fat hand envelop fat cup, hoist to fat lips, think you've won think you've hit pay dirt, fat man, worm. Think it, believe it, you're right, I'd sell to you, I'd sell to anybody except the goddamned army. . . .*

Grendel smacked his lips. "When is Monday night. You'll lift off from here a little after five, make the pick up around seven

forty-five, drop the stuff off at this certain place and get your quarter. It's as simple as that."

"Where? What place?"

"You don't need to know more than that you'll pick it up in Mexico and drop it off this side of the border. You'll have someone riding with you, he'll give you directions. I want to have an override installed on your positionplate and callbeam—I don't want the military tracing the chopper to you, and I don't want you finding your way back after you've left. After all, Ms. Toggi, I don't trust you any more than you trust me."

Sarah grunted. "First off, Mexico's a big place, and I don't want to find myself in the middle of some battlefield. So clarify—where in Mexico?"

"Northern Chihuahua."

"Okay, as far as I know there's no action there yet. And secondly, how do I know that I don't deliver the stuff, then conveniently marry my chopper to some mountain somewhere and never get heard of again?"

Grendel bulged his eyes and raised his brows. "Why, Ms. Toggi, whatever can you be thinking of?"

"I take my chances and trust to your good heart, is that it? You won't mind if I make a few arrangements of my own, then. Some way of blowing the works if I'm not back here safe and sound by, say, Tuesday at ten a.m. Nothing elaborate, just something sure."

"Be my guest, no skin off my nose."

"Thanks a lot." Sarah rose and slung the jacket over her shoulder, leaned over the table. "You ever read the old sagas, fatso? You might have heard of an ancestor of yours."

"Can't say that I have."

"Yeh, Grendel in *Beowulf*. He was something of a monster, too."

Sarah opened the door to her once-expensive apartment and flung her jacket down on the chair. Without turning on the lights, she walked to the window and opened the curtains. Albuquerque spread out below her, the occasional lights appearing sharply against the prevalent darkness. Somewhere in the building a child wailed, was quickly silenced by a nervous female voice. Sarah reflected briefly on the now-accepted absence of most men from civilian life: many in the military, but God only knew how many of them dead. The Automated War ate men as surely and steadily as the old kind. After the first Dodger Revolt, the mili-

tary had begun seducing men into the service rather than drafting them. The program had been, for a time, wildly successful—after all, the military promised at least one meal of real meat a week, and legal liquor, and the rats were kept off the bases. Sure, the Volunteer Army was a success, until the soldiers learned that because they ate meat once a week, their families ate no meat at all, because they were assured of adequate medical care and adequate drugs, their families were forced to accept no medical care and no drugs. After one year, the volunteers stopped coming, and the men already in uniform discovered that they had unwittingly volunteered for the duration. The army was ready for the subsequent revolt, and lost only 400 men in the fighting. Those in uniform remained in uniform and, after the great losses of the next year, the men in the stockades were put back on active duty. The military moved the volunteers' families onto the bases, and slowly the country divided itself into military and civilian more completely than it had ever done before. Those on the military side enjoyed good food, adequate care, schooling and clean environments, while those on the civilian side suffered with artificial goods, no medical care, no schooling, refuse, rats and the general hell of a country and a world killing itself. Sarah lifted her eyes to glare at the five-story neon sign that gloated over the city: LESS NOW FOR MORE LATER, in crimson words, the slogan of the Propaganda Corps. Suddenly the world contracted and she found herself staring at those words on the lid of the empty medkit, the chopper burning dully in the harsh Sierra summer sun, John dead, Byan *screaming, Byan jesusgod Byan screaming, no morphine in kit, just murcurochrome and gauze for stopping pain from ripped stomach, shiteating goddamned army, no help no ease just Byan screaming fainting Byan screaming and no more Byanmyson, BYAN.*

She pressed against the cold glass and clenched her fists until her palms bled and the sounds in her throat built into a burning lump. Poured herself a glass of rotgut bootleg whisky and swallowed it straight, poured another, shed her clothes and stood under the icy shower until the shivering dispelled the harsh lump, turned on her allotted five gallons of hot water and bathed. Ate cold seaweedgel ("Guaranteed to taste, look, feel like real BEEF!!") and sat in the living room, lights out, bottle of rotgut beside her. Drank until she fell asleep, and dreamed of burning trees.

The buzz of the doorbell wormed its way under her eyelids and

nagged her until she woke up and dragged herself over to the vid. She glanced at the clock and punched the button.

"What the hell do you want?" she snarled, pushing hair out of her mouth. Two nondescript technician faces exchanged glances, and one showed his union card.

"We went to do repairs on the chopper, Ms. Toggi, but it was locked."

"Alright, sit down. I'll be down in ten minutes."

"Ms. Toggi, we don't have much time, we get paid by the job. . . ."

"I said sit down. I'm not setting foot out until I've had what passes for breakfast. Play tic-tac-toe, if you cretins know how." She snapped off the connection.

Technicians, sure, she thought as she splashed water over her face. *They can't do too much damage if I watch them, should get time to think, it can't be as easy as Grendel made it look. Worm. And just how the devil am I going to rig a blowtheworks alarm, who do I know (trust) in Albuquerque?*

The problem still occupied her as she stepped out of the drop-shaft and almost collided with two technicians playing tic-tac-toe with marking pens on the cement.

"Okay, I'm convinced," she laughed. They scrambled to their feet, tagged along behind as she led the way to the belts, danced over one and another until she routed herself toward the docking pads. She mounted her pad and put her palm against the lock on the *Sundowner*'s side. The door of the chopper swung out and down, landing with an echoing thud against the concrete of the dock. Sarah climbed inside and motioned the technicians over to the cabin, stood over them as they lifted the ancient panel off the controls and began fitting in the override plates. Taking care of the positionplate took five minutes, and they didn't drop anything into the works. They were working on the callcode circuit when Grendel appeared at the cabin door. Sarah ignored him. When the technicians had finished, and Sarah had checked their work, Grendel motioned them out. They scampered down silently and took themselves out of sight.

Sarah turned and made a mocking bow. "Pleasure to see you again, sir. Honored that you visit humble craft."

Grendel moved his bulk around the crowded cabin and sat in the co-pilot's seat. "I read *Beowulf* last night," he said, playing with the anti-grav knobs.

"I wouldn't touch those. They're old and sensitive."

"I usually don't read that kind of thing. . . . That wasn't very nice."

"It wasn't meant to be," Sarah said. "And if that isn't clear, then you are thick, really thick, solid bone from the eyebrows up. What do you want?"

"The person riding with you will carry the controls for the override. As soon as possible after leaving Albuquerque, your callcode will change to FX409B. That's an air force number, and classified, so you won't be bothered."

"That must have cost you a bushel of money."

"I have my methods, Ms. Toggi. Your positionplate will go dead after you pick up the homing beam on the way back—they told me you know this country well enough to navigate without it."

Sarah grinned. "Hideout in New Mexico, Grendel? That's nice."

He looked annoyed. "This is a very large state, Ms. Toggi."

"Right, I hope you've picked a part of it that I don't know."

"That's all the information you get."

"Grendel, just so that someone less polite than I am won't tell you you're inept, please remember that I'm going to know roughly where we are. Maybe the exact location, longitude and latitude down to the last second, will be fuzzy, but I confidently expect to know whether we're in New Mexico, Texas or over Lukeville, Arizona."

Grendel wormed his way out of the seat. "I just don't want you to know beforehand."

"Sure, sure," Sarah muttered, and watched him wade down the ramp, collect his techs and move off the pad. She opened the vents and flushed fresh air through the cabin. On impulse, she closed the hatch, checked the panel, clamped on the headset and contacted the tower. She got clearance, raised the chopper out of the pad and lifted into the bright sunlight, rose and headed southwest, clearing the mountains and chasing low over the morning desert.

That afternoon, Sarah wandered the maze of Old Santa Fe, separated by a couple of centuries and civic pride from the decay of glass, chrome and steel, still filled with Indian women hawking baskets, blankets and turquoise. She passed the blankets spread over the ground, through the town square, and peered into some of the still open souvenir joints. She looked at a few of the rings, noticing that some were merely sprayed with silver paint—silver was requisitioned by the military, as was copper, gold, iron ripped from old railroad lines, steel from junked autos, most of the eggs, butter, milk, meat; vegetables replaced flowers in home gardens, tended organically because most of the chemicals

went to the military, almost all of the drugs, morphine, penicillin, heroin.

Sarah squatted before an ancient Indian woman, picked up one of the baskets. "Old woman, if I buy this, what will you do with the money?"

The woman nodded from the bored depths of weariness. "I've got grandchildren, my daughter's kids, my son's kids, they gotta eat."

"Where's your daughter, old woman? Where's your son?"

"Hawaii, Malaysia, some small island out in the ocean, I haven't heard for a long time, maybe dead. Who knows? The children gotta eat."

Sarah stuck a dollar in the woman's hand and left the basket on the mat. *Idiot*, she thought. *Why ask? You know the answer. Island in the Pacific, yeah, Australia maybe has some kids still fighting on it, New Zealand maybe. Everyone sitting on edge, so many strangeloves, can't believe what the government tells you for all I know they may be storming Stinson Beach, yeah.*

She kicked at a stray can, shoved her hands in her pockets and slouched moodily down the street. She looked in the window of a small head shop, at the collection of pipes, papers, roach holders, and remembered long evenings in coffee houses, the scent of espresso suddenly hanging in the New Mexico air, the sound of midnight arguings and noon debates, reading books on the floors of shops, laughing at the jesusnuts and blowing bubbles in the Park, listening to the peculiar, drawnout "wow" of the acid voyager, digging it, streets and cities, blackbread and cheesecake, roast beef on rye and thick, hot, real coffee, sensory memories besieging her face into a grin under the hot southwestern sun.

"Sarah!"

She turned and at first saw an apparition from the past loping down the street, straight black hair flying around his shoulders and oval eyes wide. The scene shivered for a second, and then she found herself enveloped as Kio spilled over the sidewalk and flung an arm around her.

"Madonnita mia, where is your head? I've been yelling at you for half a block, angel of the scars, jewish wop."

"Where's your own head, japanese alambrista? And how many times do I have to tell you that I resent ethnic slurs?"

"My head! Not where it's at, but where it might be." Kio whispered in her ear. "I've got some great 48 hour acid just waiting to be shared, you should join me."

On the point of accepting, already framing a fake sick call to the Coordinator in her mind, Sarah remembered Grendel, re-

membered the flight the next day, and felt her contact-high with the past slide down her belly like icewater.

"Not today, Kio," she said as she gently disengaged his hand from her breast. "I've got to work tomorrow, gotta feed my face. Maybe next Saturday, alright?"

"Fate conspires to defeat me! I had the whole day plotted: I hitched a ride out here because some old party wanted me to do a job on his barn, but he decided he could do it cheaper himself (may he fall in a bucket of paint) and here I am without cash, transport or friends. And then I see Sarah-san, fantastic, we will get high together and forget sorrow, albeit temporarily, somewhere up in the mountains, I know of this little cabin. But!" He laughed and wrapped his arm around Sarah again. "Look, let's have dinner, blow a little pot, ball a little, it can't hurt your flying, and the good chopper '*Downer* can fly by itself anyway."

Sarah laughed with him. "I'm convinced, just so you do the cooking. I've got some shopping to do yet, come along and I'll initiate you into the mysteries of jumpsuit buying."

Which she did, trying on several suits until she found one that fit reasonably well and whose seams promised to hold together. Kio watched her, muttering.

"Why black, why mourning? Red is nice, red is bright, you look better therein, madonna mia."

"Black, friend, is for slinking. And it doesn't show the dirt, which is good because after two washings these things fall apart."

The saleswoman spread her hands. "We do the best we can," she told Sarah. "The military. . . ."

"Yeah, yeah, I know all about it," Sarah interrupted, paid and left before the woman could tell her story. They headed out for the 'port, where the '*Downer* sat in the slanting rays of the sun, then dropped its shadow and lifted up and over the red Sangre de Cristos.

Kio flung the contents of a number of cans into the seaweedgel, mixed in some food coloring and came up with what he called "instant fake beef stroganoff". He opened the bootleg wine Sarah had provided and they dined on the balcony overlooking the city. Kio, noticing that she was preoccupied, sat quietly and ate, watching her from the corner of his eye. He saw the scar on her face twitch suddenly and frowned into his dinner.

Sarah sighed and shook her head. "Kio," she said, "I've got a nasty favor to ask of you. I think I want you to say 'no'."

"Yes."

Sarah smiled. "Don't be so hasty. It involves the military, and it's nasty enough so that I wouldn't ask you if I could possibly help it."

Kio stood and began to clear the table. "Why don't you ask first and then let me decide."

"Okay. Tomorrow night I've got a, uh, charter flight. If I'm not back by Tuesday morning, it means I'm dead."

"You're. . . ."

"Wait, I'm not finished. The favor would involve saying certain things to the military that would make trouble for this charter party. That's about the only way to handle it—no other agency is big enough. If the military traces the info back to you, it will bring the entire system down around your ears."

She paused with her hands full of dishes and stared out over the city, saw fearfully bright flashes of men in blue shirts knocking on Kio's door, of harsh lights and hard voices coming out of darkness, days of terrified emptiness and crawling nights, and questions, questions, questions. . . . *Christ, do I have the right to ask that of anybody?*

She spun around, faced Kio across the table. "No," she said quickly, "forget I asked you."

Kio reached over and took the dishes. "No," he said quietly. "You're involved, so I'm involved, and if something happened to you, nothing could stop me from finding out what it was and doing something about it. Sarah, I've been waiting for years for you to wake up and see me, letting you take your time. I won't let you disappear into thin air, angelita. I love you."

Sarah stared at him. "You're not. . . ."

He laughed lightly. "Yes I am. Sarah, Sarah, don't look so surprised. I knew what I was getting into." He came around the table and kissed the edge of her scar. She stood very stiff in his arms, and when he sought to turn her face toward him, she jerked away. Kio dropped his arms and stared at her angrily.

"Damnation, what's the matter with you?"

She looked at him from behind a frozen face. "What do you mean, what's the matter with *me*? Whatever gave you the idea I was willing to be 'loved'?"

"Nothing gave me the idea, I just thought that you might unfreeze one of these years."

"I've never been cold with you."

"Oh, your body's been warm enough," he said. "Maybe you don't think it's unusual to send your mind to sleep every time we make love."

"That's not true!"

"Yeah? Then why do you yell 'John' every time you come?"

Sarah slammed both hands down on the table, spun to grab her jacket. Kio snatched the jacket from her and threw it across the room.

"Oh, no," he said, "this is one involvement you're not getting out of."

"Let me out," she said coldly.

"You're a very selfish person, Sarah Toggi. You lock yourself up so tight that not even your own feelings get in."

"Let me out."

"And you build clever little spikes, bitchy spikes, ready to stab anyone who even makes the least movement toward your mind."

"Goddamit," she yelled, "do you think that just because we fuck occasionally I owe you some part of my soul? Am I supposed to be ecstatic because you've come up with some trite throb under your shirt and confused humping with love? What the hell do you take me for, some panting adolescent?"

Kio slapped a hand over her mouth. "Listen to yourself." he hissed. "Who's talking? Where are you? Let me in, Sarah!"

She stared over his hand at his face, looking at *eyes not hate, worried, hard mouth but gentle, what can he want shit know what he wants but no, not now, not now is now is here is not John, not Byan is me is Kio, here, breathing, Christ, I can't come out, I can't I won't.*

Staring through her thoughts, she saw Kio's lips moving, heard his voice say "I'll even promise not to die" as he took his hand from her mouth.

She drew a shaky breath and shook her head. "Please, Kio, I really don't need any sidewalk psychoanalysis right now." She paused, watching her fingers trace a pattern on the table. "I'm sorry," she said finally. "I'm not ready for that—you throw your love at me and I'm not sure I can catch it—or that I want to."

Kio made no sound, and she smiled slightly "I believe you, if that's any help." The silence in the room grew gently, filling her pores. She gathered the dishes, clattering them together.

"Forget the dishes," Kio said gently, and taking her by the shoulders, kissed her and led her towards the bedroom.

She pulled back slightly at the door. "I *can't* love you," she said, and to Kio her voice sounded like that of a child in a darkened room.

"I know," he said. "Not today, maybe not tomorrow. I don't want you to—not now."

She felt a loosening in her neck, her stomach, the soft wash of

relief turned her head to meet his tongue seeking the tongue in her mouth, hand reaching inside her shirt to cup her breast, gently massaging her nipple until she felt them both grow hard. His hand slid down the seal of her jumpsuit, and she stepped back and shook her shoulders lightly so that the suit fell down her body to the floor, kicked it and her sandals off, knelt to undo his belt and drop his pants as he took off his shirt. Suddenly took the tip of his hard cock in her mouth and kissed it, and he cried her name, lifted her up into the bed. She opened her thighs and he entered her, she moving with the rhythm of his hips as he began the smooth asc ension, steadily. She felt the quiescent tremor from her center, moved in against him hungrily, rocking, twisting until she came with a cry from the base of her throat, one final spasm as they both spilled over into a brief second of eternity and then lay quiet, Kio sprawled on top of her.

She kissed his ear and pulled his hair out of her mouth. "Hey, lump, you want to roll over so I can breathe?"

He snuck a hand down and pinched her buttock, laughed at her yelp and rolled over. For a moment they both lay silently.

Sarah groped for a cigarette from the bedside table. "His name's Grendel," she said. "He's running smack from Mexico to somewhere in the state, probably between Albuquerque and Las Cruces, probably in the mountains. He says it's for the hospitals. He's put an override on my callcode and positionplate. The only way you could begin to prove any of this would be to find my chopper."

"Okay."

"Kio, are you sure?"

"I'm sure," he said firmly, and pulled a blanket over them. "Now go to sleep, you've got a run in the morning and I've got a barn to paint."

Sarah settled her head into the curve of his shoulder, bit her lip, drew back. "Kio . . ."

"Goodnight, Sarah."

She sighed, curled in again and fell asleep. But Kio lay awake for most of the night, holding her.

Sarah woke as dawn snuck in the windows, bathed in cold water and dressed. She stood over the bed, brushing her hair and watching Kio mutter in his sleep. She shook her head gently, tucked the blankets more firmly about his shoulders, pushed him out of her mind and, gathering her jacket, walked quietly out.

She clocked in at the 'port at 7:45, checked the board, picked

up her papers and dropped down to the docks. The chopper was untouched since last night. She recharged the batteries and went through the passenger cabin, clearing out magazines from behind the seats and making sure that the windows were at least passably clean. She cleaned the windows in her own cabin, checked weather and control, and by 8:15 the passengers for Alamogordo were ready and waiting. She shuffled them neatly into the seats, webbed them in and went into the standard speil.

"Good morning and welcome to the *Sundowner* (*four scientists probably bound for D.C. out of Los Alamos, that fat lady's got to be some bigwig's wife*). I am your pilot, Sarah Toggi (*four tech-5's from Alamogordo, two hung-over, one still horny, one still high, I hate Monday morning runs*). We will be flying down to Alamogordo non-stop (*that fellow's never been in a chopper before, already wishes there was an extra web and looks sick to boot*) and our estimated time of arrival is nine-thirty a.m. We will be under engine power until we clear the mountains, so please do not unfasten your webs until the light is off (*nice shade of green the twit managed at that one*). The lavatory is in the rear of the cabin. The red button on the panel in front of you connects directly with me and is for emergency use only, so please do not call up and chat. Have a pleasant trip (*and if you get sick on my chopper, buddy, you personally will clean it up, the hard way*)."

Sarah shut the cabin door behind her, fastened her web, clamped on the headset and contacted the tower.

"Alright, children, this is the good ship *Sundowner* ready and waiting, and does anybody know who decided to ration the toilet paper this week?"

"Good morning, Sarah. No idea what the line is on the t.p. Clearing nine. What have you been using?"

"The flight manual, of course. Nine okay, gimme clearance."

"How do you think General Brewster's wife is going to like using pages from her husband's book? Clearance in two."

"A general named Brewster's old lass
Found herself in a terrible pass,
By convention forsook,
She had but Brewster's book
Which she needed to wipe off her . . ."

"Sarah, one of these days you are going to pick on somebody bigger than your ego is."

"You leave my ego alone. Get the lead out and get me out of here."

"Yes, ma'am, Cap'n Toggi, sir, you are cleared for pattern nine and rising . . . now."

Sarah felt the smooth lift of the pad, watched the concrete ceiling open up and clear sunlight flood in. "Okay, George, engine's on and rising. Keep your nose clean."

"So long, Sarah. Don't hit any mountains."

"That's not funny, schmuck."

The chopper lifted and pointed east. Sarah skimmed over the last edges of the mountains, hit the lanes and flipped on the anti-gravs. Through the cabin speaker, she could hear the passengers moving around. She clocked the time until she heard the first rush of steps toward the john, grinned. *One twirp breakfast, down the drain. Must be pure nerves, the 'Downer's nice and steady as she's ever been.* The desert spread out below, pink and sand colored, with sage and the occasional stunted tree dotting the landscape. She saw a twist of movement below her, peered down, and *yes, there he is, goodmorning, coyote, night-hunter, bet you don't have to put up with twits and matrons at your ears seven hours a day, maybe you've got some coyote way of saying "shove it, Barnaby" and they all clear out. Steady dials, good computer even if the rest of this beast's falling apart. Gad, this fake coffee's bad, must be the leavings from last week. Nice pattern from here to 'Gordo, sand rising gently in the looseness of the anti-grav, falling back down as I pass, bet you know better than travelling in an anti-grav lane, coyote friend, or maybe you got scared once, in the sand rising and falling around your mangy pointed ears. You gonna last, Coyote?*

The coyote flicked his tail and made off toward his den, thinking of jack rabbits.

The *Sundowner* made 'Gordo two minutes before ETA and disgorged passengers. Sarah cleaned the cabin quickly, ripped more pages out of the flight manual for the john and settled the next group of passengers in. She locked herself in the cabin, finished her cup of coffee, insulted the towerman, took off and pointed the chopper back up the lanes. The rest of the work day lined up in front of her and walked steadily by; 'Gordo to Albuquerque, Albuquerque to Santa Fe to Los Alamos to Santa Fe to Albuquerque and clocked out at 3:35. She recharged the batteries, checked the hoist out of storage and installed it, patched in a new cable and arranged clearance for that night. She showered in the locker room, changed into the new jumpsuit and crammed down a dinner of gel. When she got back to the chopper Grendel was waiting for her, fitted out like a bigwig tourist, camera case and all. He smiled jovially.

"Good evening, Captain. I'm ready for our flight."

Sarah opened the lock and climbed into the chopper. "I'm not.

You didn't mention anything about *your* fat bod coming along."

"Your, ah, passenger couldn't make it."

Sarah raised an eyebrow.

"And," said Grendel, dropping his bulk into the co-pilot's seat, "I've decided that I don't trust you even as little as I thought I did. So just pretend this is a pleasure excursion."

"Grendel, a pleasure excursion with you is comparable to a joy ride up a mushroom cloud. You're the man with the bread, you come along if you feel like it. Just keep your hands to yourself and don't expect any small talk."

Sarah fastened her web, clamped on the headset and flipped the radio toggle.

"Alright, kinder, this is *Sundowner* waiting for five-ten clearance, and make it snappy."

"You've got it, Sarah, Pattern eight and rising . . . now."

"Thanks, Sheila. Engine on and rising, now."

"When do I clock you back?"

"I dunno," Sarah replied, glancing over at Grendel. "Party wants pretty pictures, may take all night. I'll pick up clearance on the way back."

"Okay, I'll note it. Good trip, Sarah."

"Peace, Sheila."

She flipped the toggle off and the chopper rose, hooked over the Rio Grande and followed the curves of the river down the state. The canyon was already dark below her, sparks of light gleaming up where the last of the sunlight bounced off the '*Downer*'s curved bottom and hit the river. Sarah reached over and fumbled for the coffee, gradually getting pleased, seat of the pants flying for the first time in weeks. There were no anti-grav lanes here, just the sinuous river below and the blades whirring above and behind her, playing with the currents of air rising from the canyon.

She dipped the chopper down and, telling Grendel to push his button, she slipped out and quickly masked the insignia. She lifted up again, the callcode winking back the odd air force numbers from the readout screen. She left the Rio Grande just before Belen, playing leap-frog with the occasional towns below.

Sarah stretched a bit to ease her back. "Okay, we are now pointed in the general direction of Mexico. You want to give me some indication of where in Chihuahua you want to end up?"

Grendel pointed at the general area map on the position-plate. "Just about here, fifty or so miles east of Ascension. There'll be a light on the spot."

She plotted the flight on the map, grunted. "Alright. You can get up now, there's no more bumps for an hour or so."

He unhooked the web but remained seated, looking at her.

"So what's the show, you've never seen anybody fly a chopper before?"

"Just wondering what your price is."

"You've already named it—eighty sweet thou and a sop to my bleedingheart conscience."

"I mean permanent. Eighty thou's enough to last you till you get a new chopper. You could have enough to last quite a while." Grendel deliberately looked out across the evening. "I'm going to be doing a lot of this, bringing in dope. Salve your conscience on a big scale."

"Don't want to. I don't like you, Grendel, I don't like living off pain, I won't take crap from you or anyone else. You can't buy me permanent."

"I don't believe it." Grendel glanced over as the setting sun turned the scar on her cheek to an angry bolt red. "How about I have your face fixed?"

"Strike two, fat man. I thought you had me figured better than that. And why in hell do you want my particular bod? I'm not the only chopper pilot around."

"You've got no ties, you hate the military as much as anyone. You're good, I could use someone good."

Sarah shook her head. "That's true of more pilots than not. Forget it, Grendel. I'm not for sale, period."

"I could have you wiped out, smeared over the desert in some 'unfortunate accident'."

Sarah grinned humorlessly. "You know what I'd do if I really believed that? I'd aim us both at, say, that big hunk of rock out there and zero in, nice and easy. I've heard that song before, and I couldn't give less of a damn one way or the other."

"You're bluffing. Death's something nobody doesn't give a damn about."

Sarah looked at him, and for one beat he saw all the way down her eyes, into a deep and colorless abyss. "Oh, yeah?" she said quietly, and he turned away, shaken in spite of himself.

Sarah turned from him, mouth pinched down and scar stretched from eyebrow to chin, white on tan. After a while, Grendel frowned and went back to the john. He was examining the hoist when Sarah hit the intercom.

"Get it on back up here, Grendel. We've got company."

The Air Force plane made contact as Grendel slid back into the seat and clamped on the spare headset.

"Black chopper, black chopper, this is Air Force perimeter guard, identify yourself, repeat, identify yourself."

Sarah punched the callcode and continued on course.

"FX409B, identify your mission."

"Shit, Grendel, you told me this was classified."

Grendel shrugged, his face wet.

"FX409B, this is an official Air Force request. Identify your mission or we will be forced to open fire."

Grendel grabbed her hand as she reached for the radio toggle. She snapped her head around to face him.

"Damnit, Grendel, who's fucking this goat? Keep your mouth shut and see if I can pull us out of this mess." She flipped the toggle. "This is FX409B, classified mission, identify *yourself*."

"FX409B, this is GY7855Y, border patrol out of El Paso, Captain Yarbro. I have no knowledge of your mission."

"Listen here, Yarbro. This is Colonel Glen out of Albuquerque. This mission is Four A classified, repeat Four A classified. I'm going back on radio silence in forty seconds, and if you don't bug off I personally will have your ass busted to toting propwash in Dubuque. Do you read me?"

"Yes, ma'am, Colonel, over and out."

Sarah toggled the radio to receive all bands, hunted until she found Yarbro's connection with El Paso.

"Hey, El Paso, this is GY7855Y, do you have a Four A classified booked?"

"GY7855Y, this is El Paso. Of course there's no Four A booked, that's classified strictly brass."

"I just ran into one. Can you check brass?"

"Only brass around is Colonel Fulton. You'll have to hold."

"How long, El Paso?"

"Keep your pants on, Yarbro, nothing's happening in Mexico. I'll try to reach Fulton."

Sarah tossed a tissue at Grendel.

"Quit dripping on my panel and enjoy the show."

"Enjoy it?" Grendel wheezed.

Sarah motioned him silent. A new voice boomed over the speaker.

"GY7855Y, this is Fulton. What's this about a Four A classified?"

"I ran into an unmarked chopper headed south, sir, identified as FX409B out of Albuquerque, Colonel Glen."

"Albuquerque?" Fulton roared. "That must be Louise Glen, damnation, those bastards are holding out on me again. Yarbro, wipe your records, forget you know anything about it. Sergeant,

get me Albuquerque, can't even trust your own . . ."

Sarah muted the radio, mopped her own face. "Sorry, Colonel," she mimicked, "Glen's out of town on leave for three weeks, sir, no can reach, sir, maybe you would like to talk to Colonel Harris, yes sir, he's almost sober, no sir, I can't tell you where she is, it's classified, sir." Sarah laughed. "Louise Glen is shacked up in the Sangres with a Spec-4 on loan from the Army, verrry top classified."

"How do you know all that?"

"I've got big ears."

By now the sky was deep black, pierced with stars. They crossed the Mexican border uneventfully, Sarah banked the chopper east well below Columbus and headed toward Ascension. The panel clock read 7:30.

By 7:45 Grendel had her set the chopper down in a small clearing east of Lago Santa Maria. The single beam of light that she had followed in winked off, and after a minute two black-covered forms appeared, dragging a bale of hay behind them.

Grendel motioned her toward the hoist and squeezed himself out of the chopper. He faded into the black with the two forms. Sarah shrugged and swung the hoist out of the hatch, started loading the bales into the *Sundowner*. Grendel and the others appeared with two more bales, and after that two again. When all the bales were loaded, Grendel handed his camera case out into the night, climbed in and motioned Sarah to close up. She secured the hoist, shut the hatch, webbed in and lifted the chopper up on silent anti-gravs. The transaction took ten minutes at most, and not a word spoken the entire time. Grendel squashed a finger on the position-plate over Las Cruces. Sarah pulled the chopper back around to the west, came in nice and quiet over the border and headed north. She flicked off the anti-gravs as soon as they were within detection range and came in very low, the chopper blades whirring above while she checked the radio scanner. She picked up the signal at Las Cruces and homed in. The position-plate went dark as Grendel fumbled inside his jacket. Sarah shrugged and concentrated on avoiding the mountains.

Thirty minutes out of Las Cruces, Grendel broke his silence. "We're there in about fifty feet. You'd better use your anti-gravs, there may not be enough room for the blades."

Sarah obligingly toggled the anti-gravs on, waited until the blades stopped rotating and folded into the chopper. Then she stalled the '*Downer* over a low cliff.

"What the hell . . ."

"Very simple. I get my quarter and some guarantee of getting

out of here and back to Albuquerque in one piece, or I drop the chopper."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Want to bet?" she asked, and Grendel remembered the abyss behind her eyes.

He strained forward in the seat and peered down. "We're not high enough to do much damage," he said.

"We're high enough so that a fall would crack the anti-grav. Ever seen what happens when an operating anti-grav cracks, Grendel? They'll rename the mountains after you, because there'll be little bits of Grendel from Las Cruces to Carrizozo and back. Want to see?" She suddenly dropped the chopper a few yards, evened out with a stomach wrenching jerk and gently climbed back up. Grendel was still gagging when she repositioned the machine.

"You're insane," he rasped. "You're out of your goddamned mind."

"If it makes you feel any better," she agreed. "You want to fork over the bread?"

"Alright, okay, I'll write a check."

"No such thing. Cash, friend, cold hard pesos."

"Christ, do you think I make a habit of carrying eighty thousand around with me?"

Sarah shook her head. "Did you think I was going to settle for a nice traceable check? Presumably you're bright enough to have eighty thou stashed in your hideyhole down there. You can get your techs to drag it out. And you can tell me exactly where the smack is going."

"The hell I am," Grendel shrieked.

"Sure you are, so I can check, very carefully. And if, by chance, the stuff goes to heads instead, well, I can always drop a chopper on you."

Grendel shook his now apoplectic face violently. "No, that's too much, absolutely not . . ."

Sarah began bouncing the chopper up and down in the night air, and Grendel grabbed his net.

"Stop it! Bitch, you win, alright, *stop it*!"

"Glad you see it my way." Sarah flicked on the cabin light and handed him a sheet of paper and stub of pencil. Grendel gritted his teeth and wrote the names of twenty hospitals. Sarah glanced over the list, frowned and shot a look at Grendel. She bit her lip, then folded the paper and put it in her breast pocket. She flicked off the cabin light.

"I'm going to fly over the ledge, nice and easy, and you're

going to have that eighty thou dragged out. Then you will have one of your tame techs climb aboard and fix my panel. Then I lower the smack, then I lower you. Got that?"

Grendel grunted a compound obscenity under his breath, and Sarah brought the chopper in over the ledge. Grendel called down to the technicians below, and Sarah moved in long enough to let a tech carrying a satchel float gently up in the anti-grav field. She sat tight as the tech removed the overrides, then brought the chopper in again long enough for him to float back down. Grendel counted out the bills, small stuff, so that eighty thousand looked like one hell of a big pile.

"Okay, leech," she said after stuffing the bread in her flight box. "Now you go back to the hatch, pick up the rope that's lying beside the hoist and bring it here."

Grendel sullenly fetched the rope, stood still while she bound him neatly and shoved him into a passenger seat. She raised the chopper high enough, switched back to blades, then walked back and stood in front of him, hands on hips. Grendel glared up at her, and she shrugged, pulled him out of the seat and fastened the ropes that bound him to the hook of the hoist.

"Hold it! What about the smack?"

"I told you I don't like liars, and especially I don't like inept liars."

Grendel jerked at the hoist, sweating again. "What do you mean?"

"Of those twenty hospitals on the list, ten folded last year and three, damnation, *three*, are military. Sweet Jesus, Grendel, how do you manage to even get your pants on right side up? You're running the smack to heads, aren't you?"

"So what do you want? Hundred thou? Half?"

Sarah was suddenly tired. "Put two and two together, fatman. I want it done, you won't do it. Very simple, I run the stuff to the hospitals myself."

"How long do you think you'll get away with this? I can get the military down on your ears . . ."

"Grendel, if I go, you go. And I really don't give a damn one way or another, because by the time you get the army on my tail, the smack will be long gone. Remember what the military does to traitors, leech. It probably scares you one hell of a lot more than it scares me."

Grendel lifted his lip to sneer, but Sarah pushed the hoist out of the hatch, and this time Grendel did puke, the techs below scurrying out of the way. Sarah resisted the urge to shake him off the cable like a roach, let him down gently, gently, waited

until the techs had him unhooked, then quickly raised the cable, battened down the hatch and lifted off toward Albuquerque. She half held her breath until Grendel's ledge was well behind her. Her familiar callcode was back, and after a few minutes the positionplate glowed.

The mountains gave way to plain, and Sarah swung the *'Downer* well out and hovered over the desert. She shook her hair out and down her back, took the list out of her pocket and stared at it in the dark. *Damn, damn, damn. I'm involved again, shit. Two hundred pounds, that's how many people, pain, problems . . . I could ditch the smack, leave it in the middle of the desert, take the eighty thou and bug out . . . to where? And leave Kio back in Albuquerque trying to find my bones somewhere? Shit.* She crumpled the paper and threw it out of the window. *I'll call in sick, pick up Kio and head out to the mountains, cool green air, take a couple of days, maybe try some of that 48 hour acid. Yech, mouth tastes like an ashtray, stomach like pure sulfuric, maybe I'll drop the* 'Downer *on Grendel-leech for the pure hell of it. . . . Where am I going to stash two hundred pounds of smack? Not in Albuquerque, Lord, can just see myself stowing bales of hay in the 'port locker . . . some place hidden, fairly safe, hey, Kio's got a cabin, yeah, perfect. Get into Albuquerque before dawn, pick up Kio, stash the stuff . . .* Sarah stared out over the night, considering. *If I had any soul I'd open the hatch and scatter eighty thou all over the state of New Mexico . . . no, the* 'Downer *needs a new coat of paint, maybe get the seats recovered; real beef, I wonder what it tastes like?* She sighed, stretched her arms over her head, then started the *'Downer* back north to Albuquerque.

ODE TO A TIME FLOWER

ROBERT CALVERT

'...their slender stems like rods of glass bearing a dozen leaves, the once transparent fronds frosted by the fossilized veins. At the peak of each stem was the time flower, the size of a goblet, the opaque outer petals enclosing the crystal heart. Their diamond brilliance contained a thousand faces, the crystal seemed to drain the air of its light and motion. As the flowers swayed slightly in the evening air they glowed like flame tipped spears.'

J. G. BALLARD. The Garden of Time.

Your calyx hides a nectary of time
That with my fingers I could pluck as easily
As sounding strings to recite their chime.
And your most exquisite petals melt icily
In my palm. To hold the flow of moments past
As carefully as I would my last
Few seconds left on Earth. Would that be Crime?
Or if I picked you just to see you turn
To crystalled pearl in my eyes, and learn
How Man is Angel on his way from slime.

Did heedless Eve think twice before she broke
The enjewelled fruit from its brittle stem.
Or the first man to reach out and stroke
The marijuana leaf condemn
Himself for greed when harvesting
And burning such a golden thing.
As this dreaming poet who just then spoke
Of your sacredness, and is now prepared
To do exactly as he first declared
And make of his museful words a joke.

But not quite as easy after all
I find, as my fingers reach to grasp,
Your gleaming head to wrench from its tall
Transparent stalk, they refuse to clasp.
As did Pandora's eager hands hold still
At the thought of the box containing ill.
Or the stoned explorers of Medusa stall
For time, not entered in their log,
Before they dared the petrific fog
That holds them still in its timeless thrall.

******** a nectary of time
That with my fingers I could pluck as easily
As sounding strings to recite their chime.
And your most exquisite petals melt icily
In my palm. To hold the flow of moments past
As carefully as I would my last
Few seconds left on Earth. Would that be Crime?
Or if I picked you just to see you turn
To crystalled pearl in my eyes, and learn
How man is Angel on his way from slime.

THE ONLY MAN ON EARTH

LAURENCE JAMES

He woke up feeling hungry. He put his left hand into the pocket of his denim jacket and pulled out one of the few remaining concentrated food pills that he had left. It tasted sweet as it dissolved slowly in his mouth. He sat quietly for some minutes as he felt the power gradually spreading through his body. Finally, he sat upright and pressed his back against the wall of the cellar. Although he peered at the face of his watch it was too dark in the cellar to see the time. In any case, the watch was shattered and had no hands. His name was Howard; he was, he thought, 248 years old. He was the last man on earth.

The last man on earth. He had thought a lot about that during the hunting of the two preceding days. Once, during a risky sneak visit to the shattered remains of the apartment house where he used to live, he had stumbled, quite literally over a copy of a book, a dictionary. The spine was broken and the case had been ripped off. But, on the torn title page he had traced the words "Oxford University Press". "Oxford!" He remembered Oxford. Dreaming spires and Peggy. He rolled her name round his mouth, feeling, as he always did, surprise at how familiar it felt.

They had been . . . already he had to grope for the word . . . "married". Married, with a child. His son. If it hadn't been for them finding the flat two days ago, would have inherited the earth. He really would. He would have been the last man. But now. It didn't seem to matter any longer. The world wasn't worth anything to anybody at any price at any time for

Last. That meant only remaining. As far as he knew, that part was right. In the last days he had seen no one left like him. Once Peggy had

He was the last. He had heard the messages, seen the signs,

read the Writing On The Wall cast the runes examined the entrails consulted the Sybil. She had said that she only wanted to die. Death. That was how he knew what it was to be before anyone else. No-one, not even Peggy, had believed him. He had known before there had been any signs for anyone else to recognize. Now though. Now, he had seen them—had even killed them—and so had everyone else. Everyone in the world had seen how and they had all died. If he hadn't had the early warning and hadn't been so quick and clever. He had seen that they had won—easily—and that he was the only one left like himself. When he had seen them coming he had tried to hide himself and his family from them.

Man. They weren't men. Although, what were they? Before it had started, he had expected that it would be the Germans, simply because it always had been. Then he thought that it might be the Chinese. Then it came to him that it was all coming from outside. It was so *quick*. Christ, it was quick.

The thought of how lucky he had been to have been selected to receive the warning made him laugh out loud. The sudden, harsh sound made him jump. His hand dropped to the stock of the high-velocity rifle beside him. While his thoughts eased out ahead of him, his fingers tenderly stroked the polished walnut. Soon.

That was "last" and "man". He hadn't needed the dictionary for the rest, but he had checked so that he could be sure. On the earth. The whole of the earth. He wondered for a moment if anyone else shared his planet with him. No, he had been the chosen one, the instrument of

Few men, fewest men, the last man.

His name was Howard and he had been married to Peggy, but he was no longer married to her.

She had died in Oxford when they had each put out a hand for the same book in a bustling shop and their eyes had met and they had smiled and NO That was how they had met. It had been an accidental meeting. It had been the poems of Brooke. They had laughed at the bishop in his puce gloves and had solemnly had fresh honey on their bread as the clock struck struck five. Soon.

He rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand and saw that his nails were cracked and filthy. He nibbled at the edge of a piece of rough skin and worried it until a tiny bead of blood eased out of the wound.

He sat on the edge of the bed, facing the door, the rifle across his knees. He nibbled at the edge of a piece of rough skin and worried it until a tiny bead of blood eased out of the wound. Peggy sat silently in the corner behind him and their son played on the floor in front of the bed.

Howard remembered that there had been bruises on Peggy's face and that her mouth was swollen and cut. How It must have been during the fight. That had been the moment shock and awareness screaming from her open face. Then she had realised that he had been right. His arguments with her, they had gone on for weeks, getting more and more violent. No, they were never really violent! It must have been then during the fight. But she had agreed that he might be right and she had promised that she would sit quiet and wait and see.

He had heard them coming up the stairs and Peggy had got up and gone towards the door and Peggy had got up to help him and she had slipped and cut her head. Yes, she had cut her head when she fell coming to help him.

Two of them, hideously inhuman and alien. He remembered thinking at that moment that they were what Lovecraft had meant by "blasphemous entities". A wolfish grin crossed his lips at the memory of how their monstrous bodies had twitched and jerked as the brass-jacketed bullets had ripped their entrails apart. He had gone on firing until the magazine was empty. After the racketing of the gun, the silence had hesitated back. Peggy had stopped screaming and had come to take his arm. They stood looking down, past the bed, past the torn bodies of them. Looking down at their son.

A richochet from OH CHRIST, no. Peggy screaming, holding the little body, screaming, screaming, screaming. One of them, just before he had killed them must have done it. His son's blood on Peggy's hands, on his hands.

He laid the rifle on the bed and had walked into the bathroom to wash the blood from his hands. Behind him Peggy had stopped screaming. Glass smashing wind rushing then the heavy wet thump.

Uncontrollably, he began to twitch, his shoulders rasping against the wall. A single tear dribbled through the dust and stubble on his face. His wife and son, both dead. Both killed—he stiffened his jaw—by them. For a moment his resolve was weakened by a fit of self-pity. He wasn't just the only man on earth, he was the only person. Soon, very soon.

He put his right hand into his pocket and rolled the greasy cartridges between his fingers. He would slaughter them, like the insensate beasts they were. Probably, almost certainly, he would die from one of their noxious gases or weapons. And then there were none.

He emptied his pockets of the cartridges and ranged them on the concrete in front of him in military rows. After three tries at

counting them he gave up and decided that it didn't matter. He had enough. He reached into the left pocket of his denim jacket to count his concentrated food pills. That was easier, there were just two. He felt his energy slowly draining; it wouldn't be long before he needed another tablet. He put them back in his pocket and felt a piece of card in the bottom of the pocket. It was an old holiday snap.

Bournemouth in the late fifties, untouched by the sawdust Caesars. His arm round Peggy, both squinting at the beach photographer. Her summer dress, a floral cotton print, well below the knee. Her feet sinking into the sand, making her look as though she had lost Looking down through the shattered window at the two spread mounds, one large, the other, smaller, a little way off. The impact of the fall had broken off both her feet and the splintered bones of her lower legs were driven into the concrete of the yard. Her pelvis was wrecked and the thigh bones crushed upwards into her ruined abdomen, destroying the four month life.

He convulsively shredded the photograph between his fingers. *They* had done that to his Peggy.

It was time to render the account. There was no one left to do it but him.

He packed the bullets into his pockets, checked the cover on the telescopic sight and stood up. He felt his way across the cellar, his feet crunching over the broken glass, and peered out through the grating. He had been hiding there for four, or three, days—ever since Peggy's murder. They had tried to catch him and he had seen their patrols quartering the streets, their lights flashing everywhere. It would soon be day. He had noticed that this was the time when their vigilance was at its slackest and their patrolling least frequent. Soon was now. It was time to move.

He had picked his spot some time before, in a part of the city that they had not yet damaged too badly. It was close to the cellar where he was hiding at the moment and was the bell tower of a church that had, up till recently, been the headquarters of the local Church of Christ the Scientist. Now it was empty.

Howard sneaked out of the grating and crossed the waste lot to the road. He hugged the wall and the shadows until he came to the back of the church, by the tower door. A street away, one of their vehicles droned past and he clutched at his chest to try and stop the sudden pounding. They were clever and he feared that they might be able to track him down by the beating of his heart.

The tower door was open—to be more accurate there was no door left to the tower. He picked his way carefully through the various leavings from the tramps and alcoholics that had used the place for an occasional doss. The banister had been torn down on the first three floors, but from then on the damage grew progressively less. By the time he reached the sixth floor, the building was virtually untouched. Then, suddenly, he was at the top. The door that opened off the empty landing was jammed shut. Through a cracked window, the first light of the last day set the dust dancing.

He forced his shoulder into the door and it sidled open on its ancient hinges. He stepped out onto the flat roof, blinking directly into the sun. The edge of the roof was ornamented with mock-mediaeval battlements. When he had eased the door shut behind him, he clamped the iron bar across it to hold it locked.

After a moment's pause to accustom his eyes to the light, he crawled across the roof until he could huddle behind one of the corner parapets. He poked his head cautiously over the top and looked down at the road junction that lay deserted below him. He sat back and caught his breath. With his back against the two-foot high wall he laid his store of bullets out in a line and carefully checked and loaded his rifle. From his left pocket he took one of his two remaining tablets and swallowed it. The time was five-forty.

The light grew to full strength and he could hear the occasional hum of a vehicle but he still lay quiet. He wanted there to be lots of them about so that he could kill and kill and kill. Time passed. Absently, his hand caressed the butt of his gun and he felt his power growing greater. He wished that he could have cut notches in the rifle stock so that when they finally got him they would realise that the last man did not die easily, or cheaply.

Peggy had always laughed at him when he had identified with Western heroes. Now it was the last reel and he was cornered high in the mountains, no food or water and not much ammunition. Soon they'd know he was there and there would only be one ending. He could have dodged and run, but a man's got to do what a man's got to do. He remembered the satisfying feeling of strength in their room when his bullets had torn into the flesh and fibre of them and how the blood had splashed and how Peggy had picked up the body of Killers. The wailing of their machines as he had dodged through the streets away from their his room, scrambling over roofs.

He ducked as a shadow passed high across the sun, pressing him back from its spinning shade. The wind of its movement

stirred the leaves in the corner where he hid. He risked another peek at the road below. Already it was getting crowded as the creatures thronged through the city they had found so easy to conquer. Except him and then there were none.

He rubbed his sweating hands on his denim jacket and swallowed to clear the dryness from his mouth. Somehow, you expected it to be the other way round.

Strength surged through him and he knew, that he had been right, that his doubts had been false. Peggy was always saying that he shouldn't keep taking used to say that he that she knew that she could rely on him if anything went wrong. That she had always believed, always believed him when he said that they might come and come and now only the rifle and him left lying last.

The early sun dipped about him.

Howard crept to the other side of the dirty roof, scuffing his knees on the roughness. On that side there was less activity and, he reasoned, less danger. He pulled the rifle up to his shoulder and closed his left eye, peering through the scope, screwed to the top of the barrel with two, counter-sunk, milled-edge screws. He fingered them delicately, adjusting the cross-hairs and the focus until he was satisfied.

He pressed the sight hard against his face, feeling its coolness and the ridge that dug into his cheek. His world was limited to a small area of pavement, way below him—greatly magnified and split into four equal parts by the cross on the sight.

You can see every detail, all the lifeboats, and some of them playing deck tennis and the gleaming white paint and the three funnels. Peggy had wanted to look through it as well and he had hogged it, jokingly holding her away. She was very pregnant then, with their first child. A hot summery day at a small town overlooking the Solent and the Queen on her way to Boulogne then to New York. They had laid on the beach and shared a couple of joints and then walked along to the headland and shared their trip. That was before he had moved on to . . . On to the headland together and he had grabbed first look through the giant telescope. Just as he let Peggy take her look the clockwork had unwound and there had been a click, blackness and then nothing. Nothing then; nothing now.

He rested his finger on the trigger and took up the first pressure. Two of them together; he wavered for a moment and then chose

the one on the right. The polished walnut stock kicked back into his shoulder and the crack nearly deafened him. He worked the bolt, aimed and fired again. He edged back so that only his eyes showed over the parapet. Both down. One still; one moving, twitching. No. Both still.

Howard watched as other aliens came chirping and muttering to each other. Even while they tried to move the bodies of their two slain comrades, Howard was able to kill three and wound a couple more.

Suddenly, the street below was quiet, apart from the shrilling of the injured. Five for Peggy. He crawled to the main side of the tower. In the distance he could hear the screaming of one of their military patrol vehicles coming nearer, then others from different directions. He realised that they didn't yet know where the shots were coming from. It was too easy.

It was about twenty minutes before their delicate sensors spotted him in his eyrie. His eagle's nest. He was like Hitler could have been, making his last stand against overwhelming odds, his crack S.S. battalions dying to protect him until he was the only one left alive.

There were hundreds of them down there but they were now being kept back to a safe distance. It was difficult for him to keep score, as sweat kept trickling into his eyes and blurring his vision through the telescopic sight. He figured he must have hit at least twenty-five and killed half of those. His ammunition was beginning to run low and he felt a desperate thirst.

He didn't have much left to do but wait. They tried to trick him into showing himself by using an amplifying device which mimicked human speech. He laughed at their stupidity. No one could have mistaken the harsh, echoing, metallic tones for the voice of a man. Howard ignored its plaint.

The first warning he had of a determined assault was the rattling of the door onto the roof. Howard swung round and fired four shots in quick succession, just below the stout iron bar that held it shut. There was a scream of almost human agony and a crashing on the stairs.

The next hour or so passed fairly quietly. Howard was able to kill one more of the beings and injure another; but they had learned caution. For most of the time they remained in cover; when they moved it was so quickly that he had no chance of a shot.

The creatures had tried to trick him and tried to force him out. Now they waited. What for? Reinforcements? Whatever it was, Howard would be ready.

Be ready! That was what his father had always said to him. His mother had died when he was very young. No. No. There was no point in lying any more, now that there was only himself to listen. He had never had a mother, not one that he had known. His father would never talk about her; not even in the worst of his drunken angers. A hard man. Howard really had been a disappointment to him with his like of books and his hatred of any physical labour. Shooting was the only thing he had ever been really good at. The only thing that his father said made him a man instead of a girl.

Howard always liked guns, had them around him. When he got married Peggy used to laugh at him and say that the guns were a substitute for not having a dog. A dog like most of their friends. His hands clenched on the rifle as he remembered Peggy's mother and her "Cares more about his guns than he does about you."

"Howard isn't a man at all."

Once, at the height of a row with her mother he had smashed his fist into her mouth. She had said that his son didn't even look like him. The memory of the shock in her eyes, her face falling back, her lips cut by his knuckles, her glasses broken by the second blow and then a third and . . .

He fired two more shots, blindly. Hitting nothing.

That row hadn't been long ago. Three days, maybe four. Just before he realised about them. Maybe she'd been . . . that would explain . . . Howard laughed as the realisation hit him. Of course.

If only Peggy had believed him. She always sided with her mother. His head ached as he remembered the arguments, the two voices shrilling against each other. Shrieking, nagging, insinuating, moaning, screaming screaming screaming.

The attack was sudden and finite. The shadow whirled again over his head. Two projectiles were hurled from its dark interior. One was misjudged and bounced off the wall into the street below. The other crashed onto the far side of the roof and instantly began to discharge foul clouds of noxious poison in Howard's direction. He began to choke and cough, his eyes watering from the irritant poisons.

He did not see the beings breaking down the roof door until it was too late. He caught one glimpse of three bulky figures, huge-eyed and breathing through tubes. The guns they carried were similar to Howard's rifle, but stubbier and of an obviously heavier calibre.

His gun cracked just once more before the concentrated fire from the two aliens blasted him into the corner. The rifle was knocked from his hands and he lay back, peering upwards through the clearing smoke. The creatures stood looking down at him, their expressions impenetrable behind their masks.

The blood gouted from his ruined chest, splashing onto the dusty concrete, forming small rivers and pools, threading-towards the feet of the aliens. The flow soon slowed to a trickle.

It was an effort to keep his eyes open. There was no pain. Just a numbness after the first crushing blow.

Peggy. Peggy. It took a lot of them. Peg. I got a lot as well. Peggy. I remember everything. You. Our son. Peggy!!

Above, the clouds had begun to gather.

I think it's going to rain today.

Peggy. It always rained.

Showed them. Showed you. Different. Worth everything. Last. Last man. On earth.

Everything. Peggy. It was. Mum. Now there's none.

Peggy. At last. Unique. Peggy. Me. Unique.

Peggy. Peggy. Peggy. Peggy. Peggy.

The rain began to spot on the roof, watering down the thick blood. The body toppled slowly sideways. The left hand fell away outwards, rippling the tendrils of blood.

The policeman moved back to avoid getting the blood on his boots. He pulled off his gas-mask and turned to his companion.

"Jesus," he said.

TO THE STARS AND BEYOND ON THE FABULOUS ANTI-SYNTAX DRIVE

M. JOHN HARRISON

The organised sector of any leisure activity is full of ghosts, spectral reminders of the lost enthusiasms of forty years ago. They materialise at the annual dinner-dance, they haunt the Christmas party; their dedication to angling or whippet racing or model aero-engineering is militant, evangelistic, faintly embarrassing: they want you to know that their lives were arid until they joined the club.

They're down there now at the West Midlands Road Ramblers' Association, wearing kahki drill shorts. If you go there, one of them will buttonhole you in the Gents and tell you earnestly that there's nothing like cycle-clubbing, nothing like it. "Take that from an old lag," he'll say, tapping the side of his nose: "You take that from one who's served his time." He will drop with reverence the names of stars who died when you were six, heroes of whom you've never heard; he will produce a velvety, blurred photograph—clipped from the local newspaper in October 1949—which shows him standing to the left of and slightly behind Reg Harris. But he'll rarely mention bicycling as such, because he has long since confused the activity with the organisation.

He has this dream that if there were more cycle clubs, the world would be as good a place today as it was in 1924—and an even better one tomorrow. This is probably the saddest, most unattractive thing about him: he has come to see his hobby as the

answer to it all, his massive emotional investment in the business has made bicycling a way of life; his Raleigh is the embodiment of an ideology and a creed.

> "Science fiction, then, is judged by the immense variety of its visions and concepts—which are as varied as the potential of humanity is varied and as multifold as the stars in the sky. It is this harvest of wonders, this garden of marvels, this vision of what could be and what could have been that makes its readers marked for life in out-of-the-rut trains of thought."

Donald A. Wollheim, retired editor of that respected house Ace Books (*To Venus! To Venus!*, *Mankind Under the Leash*, *Agent of T.E.R.R.A.*, etc.) and lifetime reader of science fiction, has a dream. He shares it in *The Universe Makers* (Gollancz, £1.50), a little book which isn't so much an appreciation of "science fiction today" as a divination by entrails, not so much critique as manifesto, confession of fealty and code of healthy mental practices combined.

If I have misinterpreted the message of *The Universe Makers*, I may not be to blame. Its awful prose style, rising like thick fog from the depths of its author's private grammar, permits only brief, tantalising glimpses of subject matter and intent; a reduction of visibility that can hardly have been deliberate, considering Mr Wollheim's opinion of the avant garde underworld (a place, by the way, which he conceives to be populated solely by effete dope fiends, over-educated sexual perverts and James Joyce).

As random an approach to language as this inevitably generates a wide variety of amusing and frustrating incident. One learns, for instance, to anticipate and enjoy episodes of inadvertent comic relief, as in the wry "Vonnegut occasionally does not hesitate to intrude himself in his own novels," or the splendid "but mankind could survive even under a Hitler world"; and to avoid uncommunicative constructions of this sort:

> "—here is a part of fairyland and fairyland is real to the child's mind that does not require more erudite hocus-pocus to establish acceptance."

Any chinks that appear in the dyke of inscrutability built by his syntax, he hastens to plug with shabby rhetoric and non sequitur, with battered emotive words and executive jargon. He composes masterpieces of tautology—"Whatever may be the personal fate of any specific individual in the years ahead"; he invents a new vice, "Utopia downgrading", which "has always

represented the panicking of the fainthearted and the pretend-visionary"; he juggles single-handed with spectacular geometries —"I wanted to write out my own angles of these fantastic conjectures".

An astonishing failure of literacy, and on Gollancz's part an even more astonishing failure of responsibility: there seems to have been no attempt at editing or proofing. In other areas of publishing, this combined assault would be viewed as contempt for the reader; but similar crudity can be found monthly in the hundreds of amateur journals produced by similarly dedicated riders of the science fiction bicycle; and, having been a successful editor and anthologist, Wollheim presumably mirrors the preferences of the habitual consumer—peculiar though it seems that anyone should prefer such poor treatment.

He claims to have based his style on that of H. G. Wells. I confess that I can detect no resemblance worth mentioning. Whatever its base, though, its effect is cumulative: a few thousand words into the book, the reader loses his ability to maintain a distinction between what Wollheim is trying to say and what he actually seems to have said. So there isn't much point in contesting the main assumption of *The Universe Makers* (which appears to be this: we are all living in "the wrong story", which is why we find our lives so unpalatable; this, however, is no cause for alarm, because any day now the sf writers will "leap to conclusions that trained experimenters dare not" and steer us back into the right one)—any argument would necessarily be an argument with one-self.

However, given that Wollheim's taste is as representative as his approach we are in possession of a useful handbook or technical manual; we have an operating diagram for the totally committed genre "fan". No kahki drill shorts, and here the snapshot shows him clutching a rare 1938 issue of *Startling Wonder Tales*: but the faith in vanished heroes is touchingly obvious, and if nothing else, he knows what he likes.

What he likes is the odd mixture of comfort and adventure I have discussed in previous numbers of *New Worlds Quarterly*, a fiction epitomised by his own confused picture of himself as somehow more alert and daring than the reader of, say, Westerns ("marked for life in out-of-the-rut trains of thought", and, one imagines, mixing his metaphors like mad as proof of it) and yet enjoying a deep sense of security: "... I do not think I read any other type of fiction from that day on for at least five or six years... I had found my niche." He admits that his world is small, but will permit no widening of its horizons—a strange lack of

confidence in a New Columbus. "Science fiction readers do not want the mainstream", by which he means that he wants to be sure of what he's getting.

To implement his defense of the nest, he must define a "real" science fiction (which he often seems to confuse with reality itself: "We are in the tale wherein the great inventions were made before the installation of Utopia . . . But hold it . . . Science fiction makes no hard and fast rules"—the implication being, perhaps, that we might re-write reality if we could discover a big enough pen) and prevent its pollution by the false. The resulting incest, he imagines to be a virtue: "When all the highly inventive minds of science fiction writers find themselves falling again and again into similar patterns, we must perforce say that this does seem to be what all our mental computers state as the shape of the future." Of course, any science fiction that *doesn't* fall into these patterns isn't science fiction at all—a marvel of anti-gravity—the self-supporting argument.

But, oh, that real science fiction, that hundred per cent stuff!

It must, you understand, contain science. And for his science—as for his art and his philosophy and his politics—the aficionado turns to that unimpeachable authority on the secrets of Time and the Universe, the sf writer. Most of them would be horrified to know it, no doubt. They go on ladling it out, though, warm greasy lumps of speculation, unaware that in the eyes of their audience they have replaced their own technical and scientific sources:

> "Less mystical, modern sf writers are coming round to the idea that, given enough time (centuries, millenia, millions of years) and sufficient data (all that there is to know), our descendants can duplicate to their own design anything at all."

Wollheim continually offers the fiction as his verification: John Brunner's *Stand On Zanzibar* supports an argument about over-population, A. E. Van Vogt (a grammatical innovator himself, but hardly of Wollheimian stature) demonstrates "in innumerable ways" that Nietzsche was right, that "man is equal to the greatest potential and is godlike in himself"; finally the great body of science fictional evidence, this incredible pulp encyclopaedia, points the way to Universal domination, racial and personal immortality and The Answer.

The reversed analogy, the over-simplification of *Popular Mechanics*, this whole peculiar stew of literal and figurative cooked up from other people's books slides down already half-

digested, to leave Wollheim licking his lips and experiencing his visions:

> "... we—or human beings carrying our genes and our heritage—will become immortal. Let a thousand starships go out and we will be like the spores of the air—our species will go on forever and our memory, that of Earth, will be revered forever."

There's a sort of desperation in that rhetoric. It's almost a plea. Frankly, I can't conceive of anything more appalling than the adventure of the Petri dish, the comfortable, insensate immortality of the fungus. But there it is: invulnerability shields designed by Van Vogt, real estate courtesy of Edmond Hamilton, ideologies by Anderson, Asimov and Heinlein, the wistful futurity of the sf reader. Wollheim accepts and absorbs it all into a metaphysic of sad hope: the joke, the satire, the money-spinner that financed last year's vacation—"Such speculations, such visions, are not illusions to pass with the change of light ..."

The responsibility for this slavish dependence rests ultimately with the writer. That potboiler (*Psi Queens of the Lash Planet*—They sought the needle of eternal youth in the haystack of multiple time-eras!) you plotted in the bathtub this morning as a means of paying off the overdraft: in a few months, Wollheim will be using it to predict the future. Well before your publisher demands the sequel, it will have become one of the "science fiction directives for mankind." Isn't that a terrifying thought.

I simply cannot understand why this book was published at all. Rubbish under a grandiloquent title (*The Universe Makers* is typical, but not perhaps as inspired as Lan Wright's *Who Speaks of Conquest?*, which one always reads for some reason as *She Stoops to Conquer* and which satisfies perfectly the genre's taste for stirring superscription), it adds nothing to the critical literature of the field.

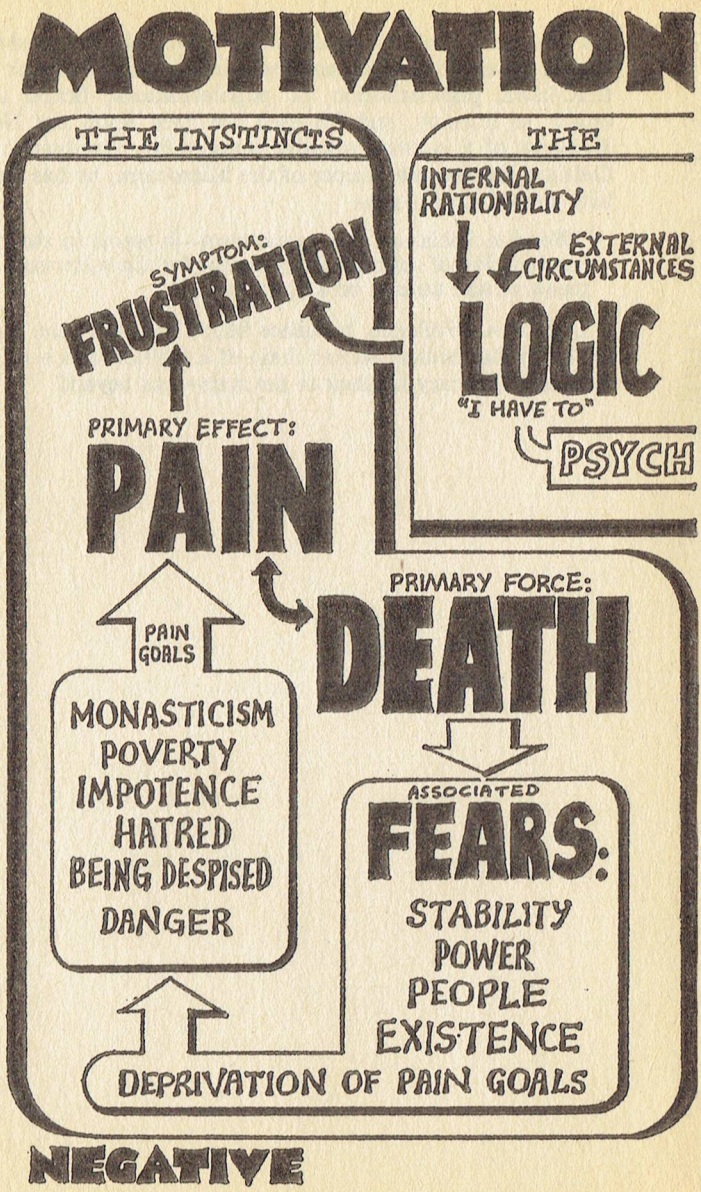
It can provoke only the contempt of which Wollheim accuses pundits like Kingsley Amis. The genre doesn't need Amis—who does?—but it doesn't need public illiteracy, either. In defending his favourite read against the slurs of the uninitiated—in imagining it as a citadel beleaguered by unbelievers—he has merely revealed it as pathetic; in endowing his favourite authors with a supernal perception, he has done them nothing but disservice.

In *The Universe Makers*, he has drawn up a tragic blueprint for the optimum sf reader of the last forty years: an uncouth, clannish lout lumbering about the confines of the genre, scavenging for the potsherds of other people's ideas; his Descartes and

his Nietzsche (and, since the New Wave, his Ouspenski and Sartre) come to him twice removed, his Einstein and Planck come third-hand, popularisation of popularisations; fiction is his crutch to learning, and his eyes are fixed upon the Noah's Rainbow of a callow, imitative immortality. Overman of the Galactic Empire and Master of the Microcosm, he has trouble with subordinate clauses.

> "Wellsian Socialism is a vague term—it seems to mean a combination of scientific achievement for the betterment of mankind and utilized on a social basis."

Donald A. Wollheim, a science fiction fan, was here. He did his bit in that endless bucket chain of Evolution which will one day carry Illiteracy Militant to the stars—and beyond.


MOTIVATION
THE INSTINCTS
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PRIMARY EFFECT:
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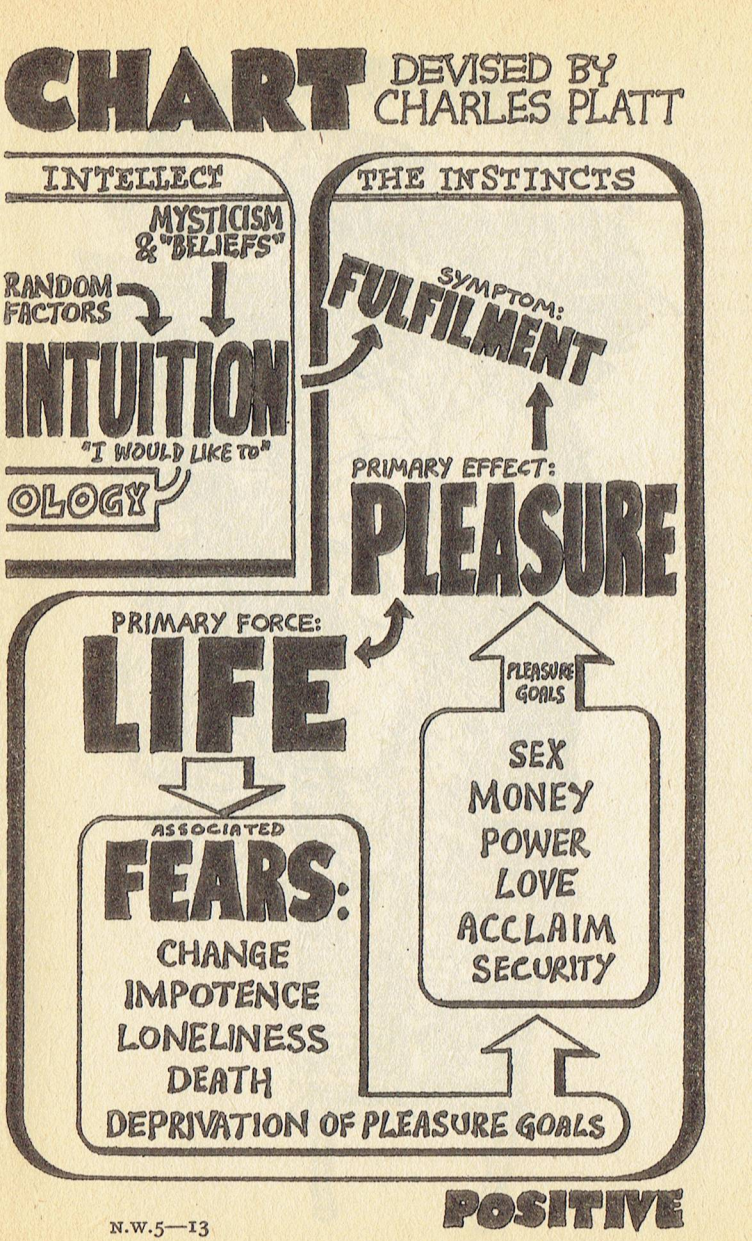
CHART
DEVISED BY CHARLES PLATT
INTELLECT
MYSTICISM & "BELIEFS"
RANDOM FACTORS
INTUITION
"I WOULD LIKE TO"
OLOGY
THE INSTINCTS
SYMPTOM:
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PRIMARY EFFECT:
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LIFE
PLEASURE GOALS
SEX
MONEY
POWER
LOVE
ACCLAIM
SECURITY
ASSOCIATED
FEARS:
CHANGE
IMPOTENCE
LONELINESS
DEATH
DEPRIVATION OF PLEASURE GOALS
POSITIVE

K. ROBERTS '76

THE TRUSTIE TREE

KEITH ROBERTS

His impressions on returning to awareness were twofold; the play of light behind his closed lids, and the chuckle of water under the boat's forefoot. Though the orange flickering could be further analysed into a play of light and heat combined, while "chuckle" seemed altogether too broad a metaphor. Rather the water sounds were like a series of little harps, struck continuously in some musical scheme that seemed always to be on the point of resolution. He toyed with the idea, and with another, imprecisely grasped; that of a relationship between the twin effects. The pattering of heat against his face seemed contrapuntal to the altering, essentially liquid phrases of whatever melody the little bow-wave played. His mind annoyed itself with the unwanted pun; and he opened his eyes.

The trees here, lining the waterway, were of considerable height. To either side the slim trunks stretched away in aisles and arcades of golden-green; above, the small rounded leaves hung still like sprays of newly minted coins. He raised himself slightly, moving his elbows with care, and saw how ahead the canal stretched arrow-straight, infused with that same misty glow. The movement, though small, woke the pain once more. He rested awhile, drifting, his eyes closed. With concentration the stabbings could be made apparently to shift, from knee to ankle, ankle to thigh and groin. Though intellect understood, the animal brain could be confused. Logic suggested that by a similar exertion the agony might be reduced, perhaps to vanishing point; but the experiment, if possible, was beyond his powers.

To his left, slightly below the stretcher on which he lay, stood

a cup and decanter of what appeared to be cut crystal. What it was the Kalti had given him he had no idea; but it was effective, though the swallowing of it turned lips and palate for an hour or more to purring velvet. He moved again, screwing his eyes; then stretching his left hand to the decanter base, reached with his right to withdraw the faceted stopper. He laid it down, transferred his grip to the cup, rested the neck of the decanter against its rim. Instinct bade him drink at once; but some perversity made him first reverse the process, replacing the stopper as carefully as it had been removed. Only then did he feel free to steady the cup to his lips. In his all but supine position, drinking posed an additional difficulty. He managed it by degrees, dribbling the precious liquid a spot at a time into his throat. After the first sips it was easier; the action of the drug was immediate, and his hands were steadier. He set the cup down, rubbed his mouth and the unaccustomed fringe of beard. The stuff had a faint, antiseptic tang. He felt it must cling to him; and welcomed it. There were other scents, which he was pleased to mask; for he was a fastidious man.

He lay drowsily, feeling the trickling anaesthesia spread, watching the feathery gliding of the treetops. Between them the ribbon of sky was an intense, nearly metallic blue. From time to time birds, the little fishing birds of the swamps, flitted across his angle of vision, darting like sparks from bank to bank.

From where he lay, in the bows of the enormously long boat, the sound of her engine was all but inaudible, its pounding reduced to a murmur scarcely louder than the wash of ripples driven against the stone-lined banks. In places the stones had fallen in, releasing little slides of brownish-yellow mud. Between them, like moss-grown sockets, showed diminutive tunnel mouths. Birds scuttled beneath the trailing bushes; once a small furred animal plopped into the water, dived and was gone. He saw it surface some thirty yards ahead, a black dot trailing a smooth chevron of ripple. Later the canal narrowed between stands of tall orange-flowered bushes. The air was heavy with their musky scent. On Earth, no doubt, there would have been the steady drone of insects; but Xerxes, mercifully, owned almost no flying forms. He brushed his forehead, where a rivulet of sweat had started, turned his wrist to stare at the chronometer. The figures swam momentarily before his eyes; and he let his arm fall slack.

From the cabin at his back came the momentary rattle of some utensil; but none of the Kalti came near. Nor had they come near, since they lifted the brushwood stretcher into the bows; was it

the morning before? They placed the decanter beside him, and the cup, and said no word; these square, short, seamed-faced folk in black, with their broad-brimmed, round-crowned hats and expressionless, slightly slanting eyes. They reminded him of old-fashioned nursery toys; or Chesterton's grim, simple little priest.

A breeze stirred momentarily swaying the tops of the trees; and he wrinkled his nose. Twice now, of necessity, he had urinated through the stretcher; and there was the other stink, from the dressings on his leg. He wondered if in their way the Kalti were fastidious too.

He moved once more, settling his shoulders against the broad, sloping butress of the cabin end; and was warned by the searing flash from his knee that the drink was a palliative only. He lay breath held while the pain throbbed through its many overtones, faded along the nerves. His leg twitched, and was still.

He returned to his contemplation of the gliding banks and trees; and a former notion, that of microcosm, came back to him, to some extent with greater force. The stately variation of perspectives, the sense of a progression both effortless and inevitable, gave the concept strength. "Like life", he thought; but the idea was complex, defying further pursuit. To be expressed perhaps in the emblem-writing of the Kalti; but not in words. He thought idly then more intently of the pictograph blazoned on the name panels of the boat, the blue swirls fountaining above the white bar that is earth, security and God; and that can mean trust. Something growing was surely represented, a bush or a tree. He turned the phrases round his tongue, lips moving; and a memory came, bringing with it first the tang of pain, later a pleasure curiously powerful and unalloyed. He spoke the new words aloud, tasting their flavour.

"*I lean'd my back unto an aik,*

"*I thocht it was a trustie tree . . .*"

Then like a passage in the shadow-show his life had become, sense faded; and he slept.

When he woke the notion of the long hull beneath him, gliding so effortlessly night and day, was ready in his mind to comfort him. He welcomed it, as he welcomed the remembered words. A part of him, that in other times would have dominated, protested perhaps that never yet was boat called the *Trustie Tree*; but he was satisfied. He raised himself a little; and saw how beyond the upswept bow the woods drew back enclosing a broad pool, its surface still and milky-green. At its far edge the canal plunged into a cutting of dark red rock; across the face of the little bluff,

hung with creeper that trailed like Spanish Moss, hawked a solitary golden bird.

For two days, to his waking knowledge, they had met with no other boat; and the pool was likewise empty. Nonetheless, he knew the marshlands to be full. He saw, vividly, the drifting of the endless black hulls, like particles drawn by a single current through the great vascular system of the Northern Continent's waterways. Midsummer was near, and the Kalti festivals at Bran Gildo and Hy Antiel. Somewhere beyond the cutting lay the low hill range that fringes the Salt Lagoon; and on the lagoon edge lay Bran Gildo itself and Earth Base, the trading complex and the Terran Hospital. He saw the city with equal brilliance, white walls clustered beneath green mops of palm, the watch towers like squat terrestrial minarets; and wondered at the clearness of his mind.

As the long boat nosed into the cutting the Kalti woman reappeared. She rigged a little canopy over him, of blue and yellow striped cloth, its edges frothed and scalloped with lace. He smiled at her as she worked and said, "Bran Gildo". She paused, crinkling her leathery face, and nodded; but made no other sign. After she had gone, and the diamond-lighted cabin doors were closed, he wondered why the protection had been necessary. Then as the sides of the cutting narrowed, shrubs and bushes arched dim overhead; and great spots of water began to fall, like an icy and persistent douche. He smiled again at that; for the Kalti were not unaware.

He fell to watching the strands of fern slide by to either side. Some, the longest, brushed the black-painted hull; others, disturbed by the faint air-mass the boat drove before it, swayed gently, discharging from their pointed tips their cargo of pellucid drops. The fronds were greyish, he saw; but the sides of the defile were by no means of uniform hue. Between the bastions of brick-red rock were lozenges of purple and maroon; through the strata ran veins of copper and dull gold. The updraught touched his face, dank-smelling and pleasantly cool. He closed his eyes, recalling just such another bluff, seeing with the troubled yet very clear vision vouchsafed him the flyer as it lay side-shattered, crumpled against the rock. The image, devoid of the immediacy of horror, was replaced by others. De Valera's body, lying smashed amid a tangle of crimson-flowered cane; the burst and gutted first-aid chest; the saplings of the little clearing stripped of bark and foliage by the machine's descent. One spar of the flyer, driven javelin-fashioned, had passed cleanly through the trunk of a tree; he remembered lying dazed, his back against a low earth bank,

watching the slow trickling of dark sap or resin from the wound In places the fluid balked by a knot or stump, welled into tiny pools; in others it overflowed suddenly, streaking down glutinously a yard or more. Round him the air was motionless and warm; and somewhere a bird was singing. The image, arbitrarily recalled, afflicted him with a curious sense of desolation and loss; a sensation, he decided, that was primal as the pang of birth, the pain the thinking spirit must feel at the violence of the inanimate, the blindness of chance. He lay a day or more beneath the tree, while the impermeable dressing clamped to his leg turned first pink, then to poppy red. In the days that followed, the colour changed once more; and he covered the thing with bandages, roughly torn.

The violence of the descent, that disembowelled the flyer, had been indirectly his salvation. When the first shock and sickness passed, leaving only the pain, he commenced crawling laboriously between the twisted struts, finding here a treasure in the shape of a water flask or brandy bottle, there a morsel of food; an unsplit vacpac, a slab of emergency chocolate. He found a tube of white pills, that for an hour at a time partly relieved the pain; later he crawled to de Valera, fiddled with the wrist strap on the outflung arm. But the radio was dead as well. For all he knew, the flyer's main set might be unharmed; but it hung ten feet above his head, and was inaccessible. There were limits to what the white pills could achieve.

Later he wondered, as he wondered now, why he had not long since used the pistol at his belt, the standard nine-shot semi automatic space regs. compelled him to carry. He could recall no driving will to live; yet the notion of violent self-destruction seemed nonetheless monstrous. He felt himself at one with the dead of all the ages; obscurely, it was as if his own extinction would make their ends the more complete. Later the thought was driven away by one still more irrational. He fumbled the gun from its holster, sat staring at it and trying to laugh. Held in his hand, the pistol still seemed a toy; that a bullet might be accelerated sufficiently to tear the flesh was a patent absurdity. How the conviction had come to him, he could not say. But come it had; and finally he put the rubber thing away, more useless than a catapult.

He rested in the shade, sipping from a water bottle, eating the little white tablets; and in time it seemed his strength grew rather than decreased. He wondered, disinterestedly, at the stubbornness with which the body clings to life. Finally, to occupy his mind and hands, he made shift to cut himself a pair of crutches

from the tough stems of the bamboo. At first his mind, illogically obstinate, refused to admit that the things might have a purpose at all. Later, when their use was conceded, there was still no notion of actual employment. Their manufacture was an exercise, and nothing more; a gesture, in the face of futility.

The knife he carried was barely adequate for the task; he discovered a machete, in the remains of the Incidents Box, that speeded the job a little. He made crosspieces for the tops of the poles, succeeded after several failures in lashing them more or less firmly to the shafts. Later he wrapped the makeshift joints with strip after strip of the flyer's silvery skin. The job finished, he set himself to fabricate slings. From them he suspended the last of the water bottles, and what ration containers remained; and finally he found himself, after a dozen false starts and as many pain-blenching falls, hobbling slowly and with infinite care away from the clearing, down the long slope into the forest.

"*With the primarily agricultural economy of the Northern Continent must be considered the remarkable sub-culture of the Kalti, the Boatmen of Xerxes. The origins of this people are obscure. Reinhardt* (op. cit) *argues a Southern derivation, detailing the many resemblances between the emblematic script of the Boatmen and the stelae of Barene and Defling in the subcontinent of New India. Agreement is however by no means general, and the field is a rich one for historian and ethnologist alike. The views of the Boatmen themselves add to rather than detract from the uncertainty. Some claim descent from a legendary ancestor, Bar-Zenno, sole survivor of a terrific and ubiquitous flood, while others assert that their forebears were once rulers of Antiel and Bran Gildo, till driven like the Tarquins to take refuge in the swamps with which the Continent abounds. Their religious beliefs are likewise confusing to the outworlder, centred as they are on the notion of the Silent One, the Being who is at once Godhead, the epitome of the virtues and the tutelary spirit of the waterways, the canal complex on which from birth to death the Boatmen live, move and have their being. The symbol of his many manifestations is the* Bar-Ko, *the white or blue hyphen round which most Xerxian pictographs are built . . .*'

He smiled and said to himself, "The voice of the guidebook is heard in the land."

The crutches served after a fashion; though after each few hours travel he found he must sit and painfully retie the padded heads. Despite his efforts the bamboo chafed him, so that the sides of his shirt beneath the arms became crusted with dried blood. He accepted the extra pain, unquestioning; for he had happened,

dimly, on the first of several notions that were to sustain his journey, that of expiation.

The land at first tended steadily downward, aiding his progress. He knew, approximately, the direction in which he must travel; he made slow but steady time, guiding himself by the sun. Later, when he reached the lower ground, his difficulties multiplied. The soil here was spongy, clad with a carpet of vivid green moss; the tips of the crutches sank deeply, throwing his weight unexpectedly to either side. When this happened the tip of his maimed leg scraped the ground, and flashes like white fire woke inside his head. Once he fell, and lay for most of an afternoon before summoning the strength to continue. His water, now, was all but exhausted. More was to be had readily enough, by pressing his cupped hands into the moss; but it was tart and stinking, he didn't like to drink it. He contented himself with rubbing it on his lips, which still in time grew cracked and sore.

Also he found his mind was wandering. The simplest tasks he set himself, like the retying of the crutches, were hard to concentrate on and took far too long. Also it was becoming increasingly difficult to make his hands obey him; they wobbled and shook, possessed seemingly of a life of their own. These signs of impending collapse at first caused him acute distress. In time he came to view his state once more with something like depression. He was, he reminded himself, rather like the soldier in the poem, from whom successive pieces are carved and shot away until he is reduced to little more than a head. Later still when the white pills were gone, he realized why the doggerel had at one time affected him with such horror. The soldier forgets to curse; even his God.

So he was reduced finally to crawling; in which condition earth banks assumed the proportions of low hills, bush clumps reared like the rain forests of an endless continent. Till on the fourth or fifth day his sense of the scale of things was once more altered; then it seemed, to his befuddled brain, that his body in its blundering spanned light-years. He elbowed his way to Earth between the stars, thrusting aside whole galaxies. In this way he came to the water, on which the long boats passed like dreams.

He rested awhile at the crest of the final slope before scrambling and clawing the hundred yards or so to the bank. He sat the remainder of the day, nibbling his chocolate squares while his leg, resting in the cloudy water, was soothed to bearable numbness. The rushes whispered, rustling; and the black hulls puttered and thudded past, each like the next. First would come the rearing prow, with its knotwork and filigree; then the round

portbrasses of the cabin, the endless cargo space tented with tarpaulin-like cloth; the engine house with its thin, vibrating chimney, so like the chimneys of the narrow boats that had once plied on Earth, and like them haloed by a haze of diesel-blue. Finally the nameplates with their bursting hieroglyphs, the tiny stern grating, the steersman gripping his bright-banded oar. Through the day none of the Kalti so much as glanced at the bank; and he for his part waved and smiled understanding with perfect amity. For the Silent One, who gave the *Bar-Ko* for his sign to men, sends pain and joy both in their season; all things are decreed to be.

Why they stopped their boat, the *Trustie Tree*, no one can say. Why they stilled their engine and drove their stakes, came thumping and squelching back along the overgrown bank, is a mystery as great as the Boatmen's origins. An hour or more they must have stared, the dumpy woman and the dumpy men, alike as pegtop toys in their suits of solemn black. No word passed between them, certainly; but at the end of that time they wove the stretcher, and raised him from the water with care. Once while lifting him aboard they jolted him. He—the central, thinking part—was indifferent; but the body screamed. They did speak at that; the clicks and guttural bangs that pass for syllables among their kind. They lashed the stretcher, and brought the drink; and then they let him be.

By early evening of the planet's short day the boat had cleared the cutting. The thudding of her engine, amplified by the close rock walls, faded once more; the ripples reasserted themselves. He saw he travelled now on a high embankment, twenty feet or more above the level of the surrounding land. To right and left, stretching to the horizon, ran a sea of sunbaked yellow grass, dotted with clumps of scrub and low, mounded bushes. Beside the embankment crouched thorny, bulbous-stemmed trees. From this vantage point he saw an animal break cover, trotting daintily; hornless, and something of the size and colouring of a terrestrial goat. He watched the grass heads wave, marking its passage. Some memory of Jefferies came to him then, and the sick magnificence of the Sun Life; uncomprehended before, realized now in a flash of insight. It seemed he too was one with what his senses recorded; the beast in the grass, the star hanging in the sky. The thought bred another, yet more fleeting and elusive. He understood, dimly, what world-union might mean to the Kalti and their flowing Tree, the boat that bore him; understood too his part in an ultimate scheme in which the very certainty of change, growth and death and birth, was an expression

of the immutability of the Most High. The notion, as grandiose as it was vague, brought nonetheless a further upsurge of the pleasure that had buoyed him, a sensation almost of ebullience, a lightening of the spirit that seemed as carefree as a bird. He knew himself to be on the verge of greater revelations, and wished for pencil and paper on which to record his thoughts. There was nothing of the sort to be had; but no matter. In Bran Gildo, he would write of this. Later, his leg set up a devil's hammering; and he drank some more of the anaesthetic wine.

When he opened his eyes again the Kalti woman had lit the great running lamps on either side of the cabin roof. To Planetary West, a cauldron of dull light marked the setting of the sun. Ahead, breaking the dimness of the veld, low hills rose rounded against the sky.

The lamps were beyond his immediate range of vision. By twisting his head he caught glimpses of the filigree of brass, black against the brilliance of the coloured panes; red to the left, blue to the right. The glow reflected in moving ghostly patches to either side; beyond, a warmer diffusion more sensed than seen told him the cabin lamps were burning. The Kalti family, perhaps, was sitting to a meal; but day and night, the boat would never stop. He watched the hills grow slowly against the sky. Beyond lay the Salt Lagoon; beyond again, Bran Gildo. Rushingly, the *Trustie Tree* was swimming home.

> "*For all but a fraction of the working year the Boatmen lead their solitary lives in the fastnesses of the canal country, transporting their cargoes of wood, coal and road stone across the swamps and plains of the Northern Continent. Only at the midsummer Feast of Bar-Ab does this most taciturn of races throw off its reserve. Then for a week or more the great fairs of Antiel and Bran Gildo glow with light. The streets fill; everywhere, on temple fronts, public buildings, inns, the flower-wreathed* Bar-Ko *is seen. The festivities continue unabated from dusk to dawn; and here too the season's business is transacted. Marriages are arranged, contracts sealed, boats bought and sold. Though the Feast is evidently the successor of a much older solstice celebration, it seems fitting that it should be held now in honour of Bar-Ab, the vigorous and enlightened ruler of Bran Gildo who four Earth centuries ago first gave to Xerxes what has remained the planet's major transportation system . . .*'

The canopy had been drawn back. He lay seeing the shapes of unfamiliar constellations. For some, he knew the Kalti names; the Anchor; the Fishing Net, Sista's Barge. The quadrilateral toward which the Barge forever steered was the Great Pound;

beyond were the Boatmen with his Oar, and the Hunter Brad. As ever, the night sky of Xerxes held a faint greenish pallor; to the east, a broad silver streak heralded the rising of the planet's single moon. The hills loomed now to either side, black against the glow.

The sleep that claimed him was the deepest he had enjoyed. Round him, unheeded, were the night-sounds of the boat's passage; creak and thump of gates, rattle of paddle gear, roar of unseen sluices. The long hull ground and jolted, unheard; the shouts, rasp and scrape of footsteps, groan of ropes, seemed small as the flutterings of moths. The moon of Xerxes declined, sinking toward the west. Far below, the grass plain showed now pale as bone. The swamps, and the rising massif beyond, were a dark rim to the world; and still, by the hour, *Trustie Tree* climbed and climbed. As scores of her kind had climbed before her, and scores would climb after. Somewhere, far back in the hills, the mile-long reservoir that fed the summit was showing its reedy bed; in two weeks time, when the last black hull had locked back to the east, it would lie empty.

There seemed no sharp transition between the states of sleep and waking. He knew only that his eyes were open; and that he smiled at the boat, and the hills, and the sky. The sky was flushed now, chequered with pinkish light. At the zenith flickered the last star of the Pound; and a wind was on his face. A dawn wind, fresh and cold, overlaid with the great tang of the sea.

He sat up, nearly with a shout. Along the horizon, like a dimly shining sword, stretched the Salt Lagoon. Between hills and sea the land was dark, overlaid with the moving shimmer of mist; and from the dark, climbing toward him in a breathless sweep, rose the locks of the Bran Gildo flight. Beside each lock, the pale patch of its side-pond; above each the *Bar-Ko*, vaunting in its wrought iron frame; and from pound after pound the gleaming stars, red and blue, red and blue, that were other boats, locking down to the city and the sea.

In the bows, poised impassively, stood the little Kalti boat-woman. He called to her, pointing and laughing; then it seemed the inside of his head took fire, catching brightness from the curious drink, so that he cried to her he was a sick Earthman coming home, and that the penance was done; that he was a Breton, and his forebears had been Bretons, and fishers of the sea. Some nonsense there was too of other boats, and the journeyings of the *Trustie Tree*; all of which she ignored, as was the way of her people. Though once she came to him, catching his chin in her pinching horny fingers, lifting his lids to stare into the pale-

coloured eyes. She pulled at the stretcher, tugged the lashings that held it firm; rearranged the patterned quilting over him, turned back to the bow. Her presence warmed him; so he told her of Ben Cruachan, and the road that angles round the mountain's flanks, through the Pass of Brander to Dalmally and Glen Orchy and Rannoch Moor. He talked of finding Crearwy, and taking her there; and what it was like to love her, and how they went, and where they stayed. And the pink rocks of Iona and the Ross of Mull, the night boat raising a diadem of lights in Oban Bay. Many things, secret things, he remembered now; the wooden towns of Wessex, the teashops and castles, fossils and chalk Gods; barrows crowning the grey ridge-sided downs, Portland tower bawling at the mist. He told her of the Star and the Mermaid and the Hare and Hounds; and renting the cottage for Crearwy who was Marie, the cottage with the yellow pine stairs and hearth of new Ham stone where they toasted legs and calves and laughed at the night-sound of the wind. And Kensington and Chelsea, Holland Park and Salisbury and the Great West Road. Once the Kalti nodded, over her shoulder, wielding the long-shafted hook; and once he thought she smiled.

So, encouraged, he told her the things for which he had never as yet found words; how it is when the Silent One has turned the wheel, when the laughter is dead and the loving and the wind blows empty on the downs, with nobody there to see. The warmth is gone, the stars remain; while over the years the object of love grows realler than when she lay all night at your side. Till you taste her lips, and smell her skin, and see her hair at every empty turn. And the whisky is there in the cupboard and the sandals she didn't want, and her dress on the hanging rail. While *Trustie Tree* drove forward and down, forward and down, and the woman laughed and didn't understand. But how could they understand he asked himself, laughing in his turn; these folk who dressed in black, and used colours for their words?

Every year, they race the great Bran Gildo flight; a full day's work for a full-crewed boat, from Summit Pound to the Lagoon. From dusk to dawn the paddles crash, the sluices churn their streams of water and brown foam and stalks of weed. The blue haze rises, fed by the many exhausts; the shoremen curse, young and old alike, strain shoulders to the yard-thick beams, swing on the gates over the froth and boil. The cabin brasses dance, lamps sway and tick; feet are broken and hands, but the boats can't stop. Beyond lie the city and the sea, and a fever—the only fever ever to grip a Boatman—is in the blood.

The diesels bellow, the painted stern-oars dip; and through it

all the boats sail out, at the end, between the reedclumps of the Salt Lagoon. The tide whispers and lops; the seabirds wheel; and Bran Gildo is half a night away.

In the noise and flurry, amid the roar of water, he at last understood that through suffering he was saved; so he sang, an old sea-song—Light on the engine-room, no more—and laughed again because no hurt can last for ever, no time is too late, no clock runs that cannot be unwound. He knew the *Bar-Ko* and the Tree that sprang from it, the Tree that is life itself; he knew the words he would say, the healing, blinding words, sprung from wisdom that springs in turn from pain. They formed a pattern that glowed and flashed, Constantine's diadem of stars; a pattern that enclosed all things, Marie and the mountains, the *Bar-Ko*, Salisbury spire, Earth Base, the Loop where they rave the atoms of a man like coloured beads against a velvet sky. The tall reeds whispered, to either side; the night birds called from the land; and he was grateful, with all his heart, to the Kalti, and their Lord, and the great boats of the North.

"*I lean'd my back unto an aik,*

"*I thocht it was a trustie tree . . .*"

The lamps, the engine-rooms, and Bar-Ab great prince, faded in his mind.

The early light lay grey and cold across the lagoon of Bran Gildo. A little swell was running, here so near the open sea; so the river boat, unused to open water, pitched and creaked, rolling to show her weed-stained sides. The light, brightening, gleamed on the complex knotwork of her bow, on her running lamps and burnished portrims. It gleamed on the stern oar, still held by the Kalti steersman; and on the painted nameboards, the *Bar-Ko* and the Tree. Beside the Kalti his woman stood head bent. The words she muttered were harsh and hurried as the gabbing of a bird; he frowned, inclining his own head in reply. She spoke again; then turned away, climbed to the catwalk above the cargo space. Along it she trudged, dumpy and foreshortened, secure as if she walked on land; while to either side the mist, thinning, disclosed the shapes of other boats, and others, and still more. On each prow, the headropes of the God; on each side, somewhere, the Sign; on each cabin top, the fading gleam of lamps of beaten brass. At them the Kalti mother stared; then closed with her hard fingers the eyes of the man who lay in the brushwood stretcher, slipped the Ferryman's golden coin under the root of his tongue.

THE ASSASSINATION OF THE MAYOR

THOMAS M. DISCH

He was certain that the quality of life was not
holding its own against the various dreadful garbage
trucks that grew louder every day, closer, harder
to deny, until even his dog was dead, Urban Life,
a dalmatian. Was this authentic anger
that he experienced, or only rage?
He'd come home, undress, and read some boxes
of breakfast food—everything else was pornographic.
New problems needed to be discussed in the area
of sex, his libido or whatever not being
integrated with the way he often felt about his other
emotions. Then smells that no one could identify crept
up all six flights of stairs, and a crewcut
garbageman would smash the neck off
a bottle of California champagne and, laughing
uncertainly, wrap his huge body in flag after flag. He kept
dreaming of leaving his job and going to live in a house
surrounded by bulldozers somewhere in the woods.
Instead, damn it, he was on fire.
Those garbage men! He was so tired
of the same old problems, of doing
the laundry and standing in lines.


I SPEAK YOUR WEIRD
DAILY BLAH

FLATLAND

JOHN SLADEK

Dave and George sat in their cell playing checkers. The rough sunlight shone in through bars, illuminating their striped uniforms, the checkerboard, the ranks of parallel scratches on the wall that made a Crusoe calendar.

"My wife sent me this cake," said George. "Want some?"

"Why not?"

Clanking the chain that bound his ankle to a large cast-iron ball, George moved to the table. He began cutting the cake, then stopped. His fingers probed, crumbling it.

"Hey, look!"

George held up a crumb-flecked hacksaw blade.

Bill read the paper at breakfast, while Mary, who had arranged her hair in curlers, poured coffee. She was opposed to capital punishment, though not unconditionally. She could not easily oppose, for example, putting to death as painlessly and humanely as possible, people who are shown to be *absolute murderers*, whose murderousness is invincible.

The question continued to occupy her long after Bill had run for his bus, until a vacuum cleaner salesman, braving the BEWARE THE DOG sign, rang the bell. While he demonstrated an inferior machine, Mary asked if he believed in capital punishment.

"I think it all depends," he said, sprinkling dirt on the carpet. "You could say that we're begging the question already, in even calling it 'punishment'. I think we should be perfectly aware of our own motives. Do we mean it to be a kind of euthanasia, do we mean it 'to encourage the others', or is it to be just simple vengeance?" He left without finishing the cleaning operation. Mary meant to ask the postman, but this time Fido showed his advertised ferocity, driving him away.

Trixi and Mitzi, two chorus cuties, sat before their dressing-table mirrors discussing, as usual, men. Mitzi felt that men owed much of their character to operant conditioning, a technique that worked best on rodents. She pointed out men who fawned, panted, retrieved, shook hands and wet themselves, on command. Trixi, on the other hand, felt that free will and heredity, which she referred to as racial will-to-become, were major factors, conditioning only a novel side-effect of will-to-learn. The great herd of men were, she explained, simply built upon shifting genetic sands.

"You must meet Horace," Mitzi said. "He's a funny little bald man with a big white moustache. But he's rich."

"That sounds like Major X!"

"Call me Hector, my dear," said the major, sweeping off his silk hat as he came in. He presented Trixi with a dozen long stemmed roses (one is pressed in her Self-Book still) and a diamond-encrusted manacle.

Mary and Barbara drove into the city to do a little shopping. The roads seemed crowded, and Mary noticed that most of the other drivers were women. They drove badly, making mainly mistakes of indecision, as though the whole region had been buried in existentialist snow. Mary had vivid memories of putting accordion pleats in the car's fender herself, against the garage door. She'd been afraid to confess to Bill.

When the two chums had finished their shopping, they took in a movie and then had tea at a Gypsy Tea Room. Just for fun, Mary had her fortune told by an old woman with gold earrings. Gazing into her crystal ball, the old woman muttered that the fate of the world was of course uncertain, but not impossible. With judicious population controls, agricultural improvements, and large-scale planning along recycling lines, the balance might yet be tipped in a positive direction. She advised Mary to have no more children, to eat less meat, to collect paper and scrap metals and not to flush her toilet quite so often.

Driving home, Mary and Barbara were struck by how many motorcycle police were hidden behind billboards.

Bill seemed slightly shocked at the price Mary'd paid for her new hat. "I guess it's due to the old wage-price inflation spiral, though," he said, lifting his feet for her passing with the vaccum cleaner. She swept away the last of the odious salesman's dirt, and the price tag of her hat.

Walter and Dave stood meditating upon the sales graph on the office wall. It showed a clearly declining jagged line. The Acme Vacuum Cleaner Company was entering, as Dave put it, a dark night of the soul. The question remained whether it would emerge purified and purged of its baser nature, and fit to serve its creator.

"Shall we go see Mr Gordon?"

Walter shrugged. "Why bother? He'll only be sitting there with his blonde secretary Doreen on his lap, 'dictating'."

Walter was wrong. At that moment, Doreen and Mr Gordon sat in separate chairs, to which they had been bound. Mr Gordon was trying to work his gag loose enough to use the telephone. Doreen could only stare horrified at the empty shallowness of the modern office safe, which stood open.

Not a week later, Mitzi was implicated in a serious crime. The judge was on her side—so much could be inferred from the way he leaned over the bench to watch her cross her legs—but the jury needed more persuading. Luckily she could count upon Major X to provide a well-known and eloquent lawyer, Bill Grass.

Summing up for the defense, Bill explained that, just as the Copernican revolution had displaced man from the center of the universe, just as the Darwinian revolution displaced man from his privileged position in the Great Chain of Being, so too had the Einsteinian revolution destroyed man's last assurances that size, duration and speed were real, absolute values. Bill showed how, cut loose from faith and tradition, adrift in modern anomie, Mitzi had faltered. As they moved to acquit her, many of the jury were not ashamed to weep.

Dr Penn, wearing his white jacket and speculum, explained to Hector Gordon just what a heart attack was. Mr Gordon scarcely listened. At length he interrupted:

"Listen, doctor, the important thing is, life has become intensely *real*. The most ordinary objects have taken on a gloss of newness, a translucency of gem mystery. For the first time, I see what the business of life really is. That speculum of yours might be a monocle, for example. The stethescope in your hand might be a glass of pink gin. Yes, and the eye chart on the wall behind you might be a wall of trophy animal heads, arranged in order of size, beginning with the great E elephant . . ."

That weekend began with Al Cullenor, the new neighbor, borrowing the lawn mower. Bill and Mary decided to take the kids to the beach. On the way, they discussed sex education quite freely in front of the children, by using a form of "pig latin" Bill had learned at Law School. "Aturobnay ovidesobpray omanobway ithobway a uilt-inobay atorobindicay of the imeobtay eobshay is ulatingobovay, onsistingobcay of ightobslay ampsobcray ompaniedobaccay by a inobtay aginaobvay ecretionobsay faintly colored with oodobblay," Bill opined. "German scientists long ago learned to call this phenomenon *Mittelschmerz*."

They were lost, driving in the wrong direction.

Major X knew there must be more to life than standing here in his trophy room, drinking pink gin. Somehow the elephant and the rhino had lost their freshness; looking at the musk ox, he no longer felt the crisp thrill born when his charge slammed home . . .

"The city, too, has its wild pulse of jungle noises," he told himself, "its secret struggles, its heart of darkness."

He went out into it, strolling in the noonday sun without his helmet. High on a girder, he could see steelworkers eating lunch.

Al Cullenor straddled a girder and opened his lunch box. What he found there was so shocking that . . .

Major X passed on into the park. He passed ragged George, asleep under a copy of the *Wall Street Journal*, and he passed the bench where N. Decting was proposing to Lida Norse. The major found a bench of his own. It was not until he rose from it that he realized it was freshly painted: His coat was tigered.

"Marked!" he cried, and fled. Past a blind beggar selling pencils. Past a bearded prophet whose sign advised him to Repent. Past a street vendor selling tiny wind-up dolls. On into a department store, to the Complaint Department.

On his way home, the major stopped to watch a fire. A fireman made his way down a ladder, carrying a blonde named Darlene.

They finally admitted they were lost and asked directions of a rustic in bib overalls. Leaning over a rail fence and chewing a blade of grass, he explained to them that in the ultimate sense, all directions were one. Bill and Mary Grass drove on into the desert, past the bleached skulls of cattle. A few miles from the road, though they did not know it, George was crawling in the sand, dying of thirst.

Now and then Pa and Ma Norse looked into the living room to watch the young couple on the sofa. It was in much the same spirit that Dave had looked in, one day, on the waiting room of the patent office. A dozen men sat waiting, each holding a package of unusual shape on his lap. To Barbara, it was much the same as the other waiting room, in which Dave had waited until the nurse told him it was triplets. It was in that very hospital that Al lay recovering from his twenty-story fall: a mass of bandages, with all four limbs held up in traction splints, to an elaborate arrangement of wires, pulleys and weights. Thus gravity would cure, he reflected, what it had caused.

Walter had a table alone, in a corner of the hotel restaurant near a placard: WATCH YOUR HAT AND COAT. There was an unusual object in his soup, and Walter called the waiter's attention to it.

The stag dinner for N. Decting was being held in another room at the hotel. Out of an immense cake leapt Trixi, who often danced on the tables until dawn. Bill was embarrassed. Any nakedness reminded him of the human condition, of answering the telephone wrapped in a bath towel.

On the beach, Bill sneaked a look at a pair of bikini blondes named Doreen and Darlene, while Mary sneaked a look at him. Finally he dozed dreaming of

> dramatic news headlines like
> WORLD DECLARED A MARXIST PARADISE, themselves being expanded into great boxwood word blocks that were being shoved forward to chock up the sagging floor of sand

Meanwhile the kids buried Bill in sand.

On the drive home, Bill and Mary sat in front, while the kids slept dreamlessly in the back seat. Bill pointed out to Mary that a flying saucer had landed in the desert, and that a short green man could be seen making his way from it towards a telephone booth.

Mr Gordon found he couldn't sleep, partly because he'd taken a nap in the afternoon, producing Zs. Now he tried counting sheep, visualizing them leaping one by one over a rail fence . . . into what?

A strange noise. Mr Gordon crept downstairs and looked into the dining room. The man who was putting silver into a satchel wore a flat cap, a black eyemask, and a jacket over a striped sweater. He worked by flashlight.

"Asia," said the burglar, turning his beam upon Mr Gordon, "is the key. As Japan begins to play an increasing role in shaping the economic future of the world, China may shake off her mantle of mystery and challenge the island giant to open industrial warfare. In any case, we must watch Asia, the world's weathercock."

The Dectings' honeymoon took them to Asia, to a place not far from where Major X had hunted the tiger from a howda. In the marketplace, the Dectings saw snake charmers, fakirs reclining on beds of nails, and the famous Indian Rope Trick.

Major X and Trixi were sitting in water up to their necks in a large cast-iron pot. This had been set to boil on an open fire, while black men danced around them, brandishing spears. The black men all wore grass skirts and bones through their noses.

"I wish I knew the reason," said the major earnestly. "I really wish I'd studied a bit of anthropology, instead of all that blasted art history." Then, there being some time to kill before they boiled, he explained to Trixi the cloud-formulae which Constable seemed to have learned from Alexander Cozens.

George was at last a prisoner again. This time he was manacled to the wall, hanging by his wrists. Nearby hung a stranger in the same plight.

"There is a game called Prisoner's Dilemma," George said. "We assume that two men have been caught by the police and are questioned separately. Each can either talk or keep quiet. If one confesses, he'll get ten years, and his companion will be executed. But if both confess, they'll both get life imprisonment. Finally, if neither confesses, they'll both be freed.

"According to the rules of the game theory, each man should confess. But common sense tells us they can do better by both keeping quiet. It's quite a puzzle."

The other did not reply. At dawn, George was taken outside, stood against a wall and shot. As he died, the ground beneath him seemed to go translucent, like the smoke of the cigarette he had just refused. George could almost make out words beneath the world.

Finally Dave was cast up on a desert island. Though only a few yards in diameter, it featured a single palm tree against which he could rest, while he waited.

SHUCKSMA

JOHN CLUTE

From Keith Laumer, Avram Davidson, Algis Budrys, Samuel R. Delany, Robert Sheckley, Theodore Sturgeon, Ben Bova, Robert Silverberg, A. E. Van Vogt, William Rotsler, Joe L. Hensley, Roger Zelazny, Robert Bloch and Henry Slesar, famed science fiction writer Harlan Ellison admits to having learned strength, erudition, empathy, youthful commitment, outrageous madness, dazzlement and love, the rationality of reality, craft, complex conceptualization, irreverence, gentleness, poetic intricacy, the ability to come to grips with terror, and courage and pride and dignity so that, inevitably, a Heavy Dragoon is the residuum and indeed, as he later intimates in his priceless introduction to *Partners In Wonder*, a volume of his collaborations with Keith Laumer, Avram Davidson, Algis Budrys, Samuel R. Delany and certain other authors, "only a fool or an amateur would consider working with them (see above) without a full realization of how good one must be to share the same story with each of them (ibid)", which deposition forces one into the realization that if Harlan Ellison is neither a fool nor an amateur, then he must be something else.

Speculation being invidious, however, we should keep ourselves to what the text at hand shows of an author who, as Donald A. Wollheim uniquely phrased it in his *The Universe Makers*, "has indeed found new ultramodern ways of narration which yet manage to keep comprehension . . ." possibly at bay, for Ellison's high-pitched burning-bush prose is sometimes hard for an atheist to parse. Any author who claims, as he does in the same introduction, that failing in an attempt to compose a collaborative novel with Avram Davidson ranks as an experience with "death camps, hard-hats, campus massacres and the human gamut that runs from Spiro to Manson," demonstrates, through the use of apocalyptic hyperbole as doodle, a sense of stylistic weighting that does rather burn the bush to the ground; the reader, kicking around in the ashes, isn't likely to find much more than charred twigs, parboiled *shucksma* (a back-formation from

"shucks Mother I dint mean to burn the garage down and crash the car and torture Pussy but aint I cute?") and carbonized fragments of Word. Nor is the author's claim at this point, that collaborations are risky enterprises, with the consequence that one can do just as well going it alone, much clarified when, on the following page, he advances the claim that successful collaboration is "akin to the benefits of sex with a partner," and that going it alone is like masturbation, with the consequence that nobody has ever "gotten a baby by playing with himself". Put together, flapping their wings like drunken parrots, these two consequences have an aching, vertiginous effect on the reader, rather like the effect of Ellison's best prose in general.

Comprised as it is of *shucksma* and vertigo, this prose forcibly reminds one of the iconography of the Italian Western, and relates in the same heated parasitic way to the genre from which it appropriates an excuse for tripping. It is the style of the dog-wagging tail—for however stiffly and ferociously erect the tail may be, its tumescence depends on the heart and arteries of the dog padding stoutly within networks of habit or genre, and it is in this way that the sort of story Harlan Ellison writes, with all its presumption of abandon (and consequent incoherence of affect), finds itself in truth deeply bound to the genre which gives it sustenance, nor is it the case that he would deny this binding relation, for how else should one read his tribute to other writers in the field for what they've given him, from strength to dignity? Indeed the religiose excesses of the passages in which he tenders homage read as a fallacy of imitative form, a proof of the pudding.

Like Sergio Corbucci, Sergio Leone, Burt Kennedy, Ignazio F. Iquino, Jose Maria Elorietta, Luigi Vanzi, Giovanni Simonelli, Gino Mancini, Camillo Mastrocinque and Antonio Isasi-Isasmendi, Harlan Ellison is a feeder, and it's not surprising to find that *Partners in Wonder*, whose introductory material we've been looking at, stands as by far the best of his collections to date. It does include one solo story, "The Prowler in the City at the Edge of the World," an item he has in any case already printed elsewhere more than once (in both *Dangerous Visions* and *Over the Edge* for starters), though that's a common science fiction practice, rooted in the gung-ho hothouse Alamo mentality of its market, for constant republication of stories wouldn't cut much marketing ice in the real world—but what the hell, it's one of his best efforts at "masturbation," and most of the volume's duos are either excellent or fascinating or both, showing their various senior collaborators off in splendid fashion, for Ellison has a distinctly vivifying influence on such writers as Van Vogt and

Sheckley and even Silverberg, who sometimes, with all his skill and knowledge and sophistication, does tend to the androidal, so that a touch of the burning bush can be beneficial. What one reads, perhaps impolitely, as parasitism can, therefore, attain symbiosis, given the opportunity. The genre can only gain.

But back to the Alamo. Keith Laumer, a collaborator in *Partners*, has just released through Ballantine a new collection which he calls *Timetracks*, and indeed time travel or travel through dimensions provide the jumping-off points or pretexts for several typical stories in the author's two veins: the licketysplit adventure with an affectless mercenary through time and space; and the "comic romp" with Retief or someone like him bamboozling a cast of gildersleeves or aliens (i.e. Coloured) without the law. Unfortunately for the reader with enough memory left to be allowed out of the hospital on weekends, most of the book has already appeared, so recently that republication with a new publisher might seem a touch precipitate, in other Laumer collections, "The Other Sky" in *Greylorn* (1968), and "The Time Thieves" (under a different title) in *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad Galaxy* (same year); these novelettes make up most of the bulk of *Timetracks*, so beware, not everyone can afford to be a science fiction reader.

The best nonhumorous Laumer novels and stories grip one with a manic panache, through their stripping-away of everything irrelevant to the goal of arriving at a narrative embodiment of brute kinesis. Not only will the protagonist, usually an ego-neutral I, discard socialization, bourgeois responsibility and most other human affects, but in his search for "kinetic invulnerability" he will actually embed this mechanical self of his in the reality he so ominously prefigures, transforming himself or being transformed (as in *A Plague of Demons*) into an actual and invulnerable chassis fitted with weaponry-prosthetics. The reader finishes a book like this dizzy with a sense of momentum so perfectly aroused and sustained by the transformation of latent content into kinetic form that it will almost seem that he had been watching a genre movie which, with its wider attack on the sensorium, has tended to take kinesis over from the novel of adventure. Unfortunately, *Timetracks* presents a series of dead-ends, and when the transformation into sentient tank is thwarted Laumer is about as dreary as any writer one could imagine, a beached fanatic.

In the Alamo again, a writer with whom Harlan Ellison has not collaborated, Colin Kapp, bestows *The Patterns of Chaos* upon the unwary, and Gollancz doesn't help much by proclaim-

ing that because it's "Full of big ideas, it will delight sf enthusiasts." Briefly as possible, *The Patterns of Chaos* is a kind of replay of Kapp's earlier attempt at creating that old genre standby, the hero who doesn't know who he is, only that the fate of the universe rests upon his discovering his identity and using his extraordinary powers, the earlier book being *Transfinite Man*, and a great deal more palatable than the current offering. Both are typical science fiction vulgarizations of the picaresque base paradigm—the boy/man without a family or homeland, the survivor, the agile picaro who quests unceasingly for his true name, the name and identity of his father, the location of his final home, where he will be at peace, for it is certainly not the case that the picaresque novel is formless and lacks direction; only the English distortions of the form, from Smollett to Priestley, are gormless . . . In certain science fiction novels the base paradigm can go through a process of essentialization, for instance in Harness's *The Paradox Men*, where the amnesiac picaro protagonist, rebelling against a hostile world, discovers that he is his own father, and that he, as his father, is the hidden ruler of that world, the world which persecuted him just so long as he was not himself, and precisely for the reason that he was not himself. The climax of this book presents the deep message of the picaresque model with a clarity never achieved in its historical forms—know thyself, and the world is your oyster.

In *The Patterns of Chaos* the protagonist is duly amnesiac, but with a kind of clammy witlessness that also gums up much of the rest of this sorry claptrap the author fails to explain *why*. As he duly goes about expanding his powers, the protagonist merely happens to remember what it is convenient for the author to have him remember, and what the author wishes to remain blank (because exposure would topple the book about its own ankles) remains blank, equally without explanation.

Bron, for that is the protagonist's burly moniker, possesses an inexplicable and ungovernable capacity to create chaos, and though by novel's-end he is busily and traditionally engaged in the construction of a galactic federation which he intends to run, hardly the sort of thing an entropy-increaser would be much shakes at, it is not for one to question the powers of amnesia, even the author's. 600,000,000 or so years earlier, expert alien entropy-charters from far-off Andromeda had perceived the dangers ungovernable Bron would some day entail to their racial pride that curse, and had sent off a number of enormous planet-buster hellbombs on millenia-long courses designed to intersect with his path as he travelled about creating chaos, the mind boggles, this

takes half the book. Nothing loath, however, Kapp's villainous Andromedans from long ago had, possibly as insurance, set off at the same time in a vast armada at sublight speeds on a millenia-long journey to conquer our home galaxy, and we are in the second half of the book, the galaxy is in danger, though just *when*, considering the size of the galaxy and the speed of the armada, and just *where* this threat can be thought to focus is made no clearer than the source of the amnesia, which leaves one's suspension of disbelief riddled with credibility gaps.

But no mind, Bron games with entropy and duly decimates the Andromedans, and the plot begins to expand like a drunken zeppelin. Connected by improbable biolink to the sadistic woman he can't remember who loves him and hates him at the same time from half a galaxy away in a subterranean bunker and who even though she is bitter and sophisticated and wryly wise and vicious has a conversational style Kim Kinnison's fiancee would find hokey, and also connected to a General Ananias who has trouble telling the truth, Bron takes this parsec-cowing spaceship of his, and . . .

What's the use, the book is impenetrable to sense and taste alike; one worries away at it mainly from a sort of flagellatory desire to work out how far authors and agents and publishers will permit themselves to go in a hothouse market—because it must be obvious that cynical and pernicious twaddle like *The Patterns of Chaos* could only be written and published for enclave suckers, that in the clearest possible sense it is a book for the addict, and that, as is usual in this sort of enterprise, the shit is cut.

So the heart sinks, there are dozens of books at hand and to the blurred eye they all seem to be by Lloyd Biggle, Jr., to whom we gladly tender the favour of not reviewing *The Light That Never Was*, his newest and awfullest longueur, though closer examination of the stacks reveals that most of the piled volumes were, in fact, edited by Lin Carter, a cozy hothouse perennial if there ever was one, a writer who, to read the evidence he presents in barrels, has come to the parareligious conviction that Ballantine Books is in fact that great fanzine in the sky, and that it's going to get exactly what it deserves, from him. Not that the Adult Fantasy series hasn't disinterred a good number of worthy items—though it is true that Carter, in his fireside shovelfuls of chat, does evince a tendency to call authors forgotten as soon as he begins to remember them, to Ballantine's profit and to his. But it's the fanzine conception, which he embodies, of scholarship as an epiphenomenon of gossip, that best expresses his as it were deep-structural relation to the role of editor.

Discoveries in Fantasy, to take an example. The paragraph beginning on page 151 and ending overleaf. Editor Carter is talking about Eden Phillpotts, an author by no means forgotten in England. In his presentation of relevant information, he fails to indicate that Phillpotts died in 1960; fails to mention that his first novel was published in 1891 (not 1896); that his last book appeared in 1959 (not 1954); and when he can think of no writer to have published a greater number of volumes than Phillpotts (some 250, he claims), he shows an ignorance of John Creasey (over 500 and alive and famous) or Georges Simenon (around 500 and alive and famous) that would be forgivable in conversation but not in print, which is of course the great obvious essential lesson hothouse or enclave or Alamo buffs rarely seem to learn: that in the real world gossip cannot co-opt study, nor chat substitute for thought.

Enclave cliques may once have been an adaptive response to a hostile environment, as Donald A. Wollheim, the immortal platypus, claims in that prose he seems to think derives from H. G. Wells (page 20 of *The Universe Makers*), and as he cannot be paraphrased he must be quoted on those hardy Depression fans: "Our lives tended to be bent toward each other, our world was a microcosm of our own lives. . . ." How perfect, how plastic an expression of the inscrutability of fandom is that last phrase, how humbling for the congenital exile who has never been a fan to realize that he will *never understand* Donald A. Wollheim; on my shelves, *The Universe Makers* will remain a closed book. But the enclave simplex he embodies does linger on, though variously, as the novels and collections we've looked at hopefully demonstrate, and it begins to look more and more like an evolutionary cul-de-sac whose inhabitants increasingly resemble the magnificent splay-footed ostrich, especially when attempts are made to construct formal generic models for science fiction texts by writers and critics who don't lay eggs, scholars, for instance, like Darko Suvin, whose formalist review in the May 1972 FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION displays precisely the sort of cognition the field needs to survive, however one may judge particular points he makes. The time has come for a good deal of rethinking and hard work, but let Wollheim himself supply the peroration: "Grand adventure, which has had its followers when reprinted (as I have done in the sixties), but, again, imitation without innovation must always remain shadowed by the work of the imitated."

Time for a brief coda, possibly embarrassing to Michael Moorcock, NEW WORLDS' editor, as it is in praise of his new novel,

Breakfast in the Ruins, which is no more science fiction than Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, nor as good for that matter. But precisely because writers identified with the science fiction genre are treated with distancing condescension by most critical outlets as products of an enclave, it's most unlikely that *Breakfast in the Ruins* will get review space outside the field, which is sufficient reason to touch on it here.

Most of Moorcock's ouevre consists of sword and sorcery romances whose underlying sourness may raise them to a point where they could be described as albino camp, though not much further; but beyond these exercises in the invert thou, there are a number of increasingly substantial efforts whose relation to the fantasy and science fiction field has become more and more tenuous. Of these, *Breakfast in the Ruins* seems to be the cleanest and most austere example of Moorcock's attempts to write novels as such, though it would be going too far to claim that he's trying his hand at the bourgeois-individualist novel Joyce burned out.

Breakfast in the Ruins is subtitled "A Novel of Inhumanity," and is arranged as a series of paradigms—each paradigm an episode from the last 100 years of civilization whose structure requires the protagonist to make a moral choice about how he will survive; the implied desideratum is that the choice be humane, but within the paradigms the humane response is generally implausible, because of the nature of the world. A set of paradigms sounds like a set of episodes, and indeed the novel is only saved from disintegration by the use of a single protagonist, Karl Glogauer, whose successive incarnations advance him gradually in age, through time, and in the increasing difficulty of choice, so that his progress through the paradigms is a progress into corruption, but what else is there?

There is also a framing device which replicates the body of the novel; a homosexual Nigerian seduces the adult Glogauer, but is in turn seduced as the novel progresses, losing his survivor panache and his presumptive corruption to the increasingly "adept" Glogauer. This device, a touch ramshackle in any case, exhibits a curiously flat prose, a style unequal to the demands made upon it, and oddly inferior to what one finds in the body of the novel; it also echoes, rather unfortunately, the lubricity of the Jerry Cornelius books.

Though flawed and occasionally flat and possibly more intricate than necessary *Breakfast in the Ruins*, through the strength and mature indeterminancy of its emphasis on the constituent elements of moral choice in a gravely damaged social order, conveys a pervading melancholy that makes it vibrate to the

perception with a strange, loaded poignancy, so that finally—rare praise—it is memorable.

Partners in Wonder (1971) Avon: 1972
Timetracks Ballantine: 1972
The Patterns of Chaos Gollancz: 1972
The Light That Never Was Doubleday: 1972
Discoveries in Fantasy Ballantine: 1972
Breakfast in the Ruins NEL: 1972

THE AUTHORS

MICHAEL AHERN is 24, American, and has a BFA in Theatre from New York University. He is currently living in London, writing, playing golf and occasionally working on rock and roll shows. *The Cake Chronicle* is his first published story.

BRIAN W. ALDISS is well known to NW readers. *The Future on a Chipped Plate* is from his forthcoming book on sf, *The Billion Year Spree*, and will appear there in a revised version. His most recent contributions to NWQ include *The Day We Embarked for Cythera* (NWQ 1) and *As For Our Fatal Continuity* (NWQ 3).

BARRY BAYLEY is a NW regular. His work includes *Exit from City 5* (NWQ 1), *The Four Color Problem* (NWQ 2), *The Exploration of Space* (NWQ 4). He is currently working on a novel for Doubleday, *The Soul of the Robot.*

MARTA BERGSTRESSER is married and lives in Berkeley, California. *Smack Run* is her first published story.

ROBERT CALVERT has published a series of short stories in the underground paper FRENDZ. For some time he has been associated with the electronic rock band Hawkwind. His first single with the band was *Silver Machine* (which he wrote but did not perform) c/w *Seven by Seven* (which he performed). He was the central inspiration behind Hawkwind's planned *Space Ritual* which is, for want of a better term, a rock opera.

JOHN CLUTE is from Toronto, Canada, has a B.A. in English at New York University, has worked for *Life* Magazine (1962), is 31, married and currently living in London. For some time (1966/67) he was New Fiction columnist for the *Toronto Star.* His work has appeared in Canadian magazines and his first story for NW was *A Man Must Die* (1966). He has done a considerable

amount of fine criticism for NW since 1968 and has had one other story, *Spiderweb*, in No. 186. His wife, Judith Clute, is an artist and did the illustrations for *The Disinheriting Party* which is extracted from his current novel. His as yet unpublished novels include the above and *The Loss of Andrew Walkin*. He is currently working on his new novel, *A Little Plug for Canada*.

JACK M. DANN's previous appearances in NWQ have been with George Zebrowski in NWQ 2 (*Listen Love*) and *Windows* in NWQ 4.

THOMAS M. DISCH is currently back in New York after spending more than a year in Europe (principally London and Rome). His other appearances in NWQ have been with *Angouleme* (No. 1), *The Wonderful World of Griswold Tractors* (No. 3) and *334* (N. 4). His novel, *334*, has recently been published in the U.K. by McGibbon and Kee. A collection of his short stories is due to appear soon and he recently completed his new novel *The Pressure of Time*.

M. JOHN HARRISON has been appearing regularly in NEW WORLDS and NWQ since 1968 and has published two novels, *The Committed Men* and *The Pastel City*. His latest novel, a sort of hippie space opera in the baroque tradition of Bester and Harness, will be out soon. His most recent appearances in NWQ were *The Lami and Lord Cromis* (No. 1), *The Causeway* (No. 2). He has contributed criticism regularly to NEW WORLDS since he became literary editor in 1969.

LAURENCE JAMES's first sf story appeared in NWQ 3, *And Dug The Dog a Tomb*, and since then he has been working on an sf novel in the classic British disaster story tradition. He lives in a Hertfordshire village and works in London where he is editor of a well-known publishing firm.

MERLE KESSLER is 22, has a B.A. in English (with a minor in Theatre) and has spent a school year at the University of Iowa's writer's workshop, meeting Angus Wilson who "aided me immeasurably in my growth as a writer" and who suggested sending *Some Rooms* to NWQ. Apart from the publication of a poem in the United Church Herald and various undergraduate college publications, this is Merle Kessler's first professional publication. Has just completed a short theatrical piece about the childhood of Jesus, is working on a play about Charles Manson,

and a short children's play based on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen.*

PHILLIP LOPATE is 28, a poet and fiction writer, and teaches children creative writing and videotape film-making for a living. He lives in New York. Thomas M. Disch heard *Walking Backwards* at a poetry reading in New York and suggested that the author send it to NWQ.

CHARLES PLATT has been contributing to NW since 1965 when his first story *Lone Zone* appeared. As an artist and writer he has worked for *The L.A. Free Press, Rolling Stone, I.T., Frendz, The New York Ace, Mobster Times* and other less respectable publications. He is currently living in New York and Los Angeles, working on his new novel which is not science fiction. His latest contributions to NWQ include *A Cleansing of the System* (NWQ 3) and *An Interview with Alfred Bester* (NWQ 4).

DAVID REDD appears all too rarely in print. His last story to appear in NWQ was a reprint, *Prisoners of Paradise*, in No. 1. He still lives in Wales.

KEITH ROBERTS is an ex-editor of *Science Fantasy/Impulse* magazine where his Pavane stories appeared. He did many of the best cover paintings on both *Impulse* and *NEW WORLDS* in the mid-sixties and still earns his living principally as an artist. His appearances in NWQ have been with *The God House* (nominated for a Nebula in 1972), NWQ 1, *Monkey and Pru and Sal*, NWQ 2, *The Grain Kings*, NWQ 3, and *Weinachtsabend*, NWQ 4. His most recent published novel was *The Boat of Fate* (Hutchinson, U.K.) an historical novel.

JOHN SLADEK has been contributing to NW since 1966 with *The Poets of Millgrove Iowa*, his first British publication, and has been a regular contributor ever since. He won the Times Mystery Competition in June 1972. He is currently completing a book on crank beliefs in contemporary society, *The New Apocrypha.* His novels include *Black Alice* (with Thomas M. Disch) which is being filmed, *The Reproductive System* and *The Muller-Fokker Effect.* Among his most recent stories in NWQ are *Pemberley's Start Afresh Calliope* (No. 1) and *Purloined Butter* (No. 3).

EMMA TENNANT lives in London and has published one novel *The Colour of Rain* under the pseudonym Catherine Aydy. She has contributed articles to *Seven Days, The Listener, Vogue* and the anthology *Woman on Woman* (Sidgwick and Jackson).

The Crack is her first published science fiction story and she is currently expanding it into a novel. Her next project will be *The Gospel According to Mary*. She has two children, Mathew and Daisy.

D. M. THOMAS was born in Redruth, Cornwall in 1935 and read English at New College, Oxford. He is now a lecturer at Hereford College of Education. He has published two collections of poems: *Two Voices* (Cape Goliard, 1968) and *Logan Stone* (Cape Goliard, 1971). A selection of his poems on science fiction themes has been published in Penguin *Modern Poets* 11. He has also edited an anthology of poems about Cornwall: *The Granite Kingdom* (Barton, Truro, 1970). With Peter Redgrove (who has also contributed poetry to NW) he visited the U.S. in 1971 to give poetry readings. His contributions to NW have included *The Head Rape*, NW 180, *Two Voices*, NW 182, *The Hospital of Transplanted Hearts*, NW 186, *The Spectrum*, NW 187, *Mr Black's Poems of Innocence*, NW 188, *Labyrinth*, NW 189, *Apocrypha*, NW 199, and *Computer 70: Dreams & Love Poems*, NW 200.

MICHAEL MOORCOCK has been editing NW and NWQ since 1964, with a break during 1969/70 when Langdon Jones, Charles Platt and others had spells of editing it. He has edited various anthologies and began his editing career at 16 with *Tarzan Adventures*. A Londoner, he now spends much of his time in the West Riding of Yorkshire. His recent novels include *Breakfast in the Ruins*, *The English Assassin* (the third Jerry Cornelius novel), *An Alien Heat* (volume one of *Dancers at the End of Time*) and *Elric of Melniboné*.

LANGDON JONES has edited *The New SF* and published his first collection of stories, *The Eye of the Lens*, in 1972 (Macmillan, USA). An editor and associate editor of NW and NWQ since 1964 he has contributed fiction, criticism and poetry to the magazine. He currently makes his living from freelance journalism and in his spare time composes music (including music for Peake's *Rhyme of the Flying Bomb*).

R. GLYN JONES is an art editor for a well-known publisher. He has designed NW and NWQ since 1969 and has contributed poetry and many drawings to the magazine. His drawings and comic-strips have appeared in *I.T.*, *Frendz* and *Cyclops* and he recently illustrated the Allison and Busby edition of Michael Moorcock's *The English Assassin*.

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62006