THIS ISSUE
Exciting new fiction from
Frank Herbert
Robert Wells
Terry Greenhough
Alan Harley

Superb SF art by
Christopher Foss
Bruce Pennington
Anthony Roberts
Bob Haberfield
Mike Little
Bob Fowke

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TIMES MIRROR
There was no path. Harding picked his way cautiously through the trees, holding the gun tightly. "All clear so far," he whispered into the radio.

"Okay. Keep looking."

"No choice, have I?" His voice was sharp with nervousness. "Three men are gone, maybe dead. I don’t want to be the fourth!"

"You won’t be," somebody back at the ship promised. Harding wished he could feel so sure. He glanced down, fighting off a shudder of disgust. The Bouncer was still with him, a foot or so in front, matching his speed exactly. The urge to kill it there and then was almost too strong for him but somehow he resisted it.

The Bouncer was a flattened spheroid, about ten inches high, coloured a pale, sickly yellow. Its flesh appeared soft, pulpy and horrible, a criss-cross of veins showing just beneath its skin. The only visible external feature was a small eye-fringe near the top. It had no legs, and progressed by a series of short hops or bounces. It was leading Harding into the wood, which worried him. Each of the three missing men had followed Bouncers. None of them had returned. After the first few descriptions of the situation, all that had flashed over the air had been one brief, cryptic message from the second man. Then total silence.

"It’s still here," Harding said, "guiding me. Or setting me up. I’m heading in the direction of Mackay’s last radio-call."

He heard a loud noise in the undergrowth and whirled round quickly. It turned out to be a false alarm. He grimaced and went on.

Experimentally, he made a grab at the Bouncer. It hopped out of reach, too swift for him. It was always the same; they wouldn’t let anybody touch them. Intelligent, he decided. But how intelligent? Enough to lure three men to -

He tried not to think. The Bouncer slowed, until it was roughly a foot ahead of him again. He didn’t bother with a second attempt at catching it. He wouldn’t have succeeded.

A tiny insect droned past his head - only the fourth or fifth he’d seen, he realized, and he hadn’t noticed even a single bird. That was strange in a forest as flourishing as this. Plenty of animals, yet no birds and few insects.

Not that it mattered, he thought, and pressed on. He continued without anything unusual occurring for several minutes. He started to breathe more evenly.

Suddenly the Bouncer left him. Without any warning it began to hop faster. It drew steadily away from him, a yard in front, two yards, three, four - and then it disappeared into the undergrowth in front of him. His fingers tightened on the gun. His heart started to hammer. Straining his eyes, he tried to catch a glimpse of the Bouncer. But all he could see was a vague movement in the undergrowth. He seemed to be alone.

He whispered into the radio-mouthpiece. "It’s gone. The Bouncer’s gone. It’s a yard or so in front of me, but I don’t know exactly where. God, it’s creepy in these woods. Keep talking," urged the radio. "This is just how it happened with - well, you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean." His voice was heavy. "The thing’s still in front of me. I can see the grass moving. Christ, I’m jumpy! The trees seem to be thinning out."

"This is it!" The radio-man’s voice was high with excitement. "First the Bouncer leaves you, then the trees thin out, and then - sorry."

"So am I," said Harding, with feeling. His finger was trembling on the trigger. This was the moment of truth. This was how it had happened with the other three men. First the Bouncer had hopped away from them, and then they’d noticed a thinning-out in the trees. After that, they’d told of a clearing and a tree and - and that was all. Silence. All except for that one mysterious radio message.

Harding took four more steps forward, and saw that the trees were becoming more and more scarce. The leafage was less dense, so that he could see several yards in front. He took another six steps, until he was out in the open.

And then he stopped dead in amazement.

He was standing in a clearing, and in front of him stood a tree. The clearing had a grass-covered floor, with here and there some colourful forest-flower reaching skywards. Harding estimated that the clearing was at least fifty yards in diameter, and most of it was taken up by the tree. It was one of the largest trees he’d ever seen, and certainly the weirdest. He could see no trunk, for the leaves were too thick and the branches hung low. The ends of the lower branches met the ground, forming a great green canopy over most of the clearing. Harding couldn’t see through the outer leaves, and he could only guess at the girth of the central trunk. He estimated that its size must be colossal to support such a weight of branches. The leaves were huge and oval, and Harding guessed that each one was at least the length of his arm. He continued to stare at the tree for some time, speechless and surprised. The radio still chattered at him, but he didn’t notice it. His mind was too much occupied with the tree. One of the branches of the tree was no more than five yards away from him, and his whole attention slowly came to bear on this nearest branch. He gazed at it in a kind of dazed fascination, for it made no sense.

Hanging in an orderly line from the branch were no fewer than twenty Bouncers. They were hanging upside-down, with their eye-fringes towards the ground. Harding thought they were asleep. He also thought they looked like a row of pale, fleshy fruits hanging from the branch. Briefly he wondered if the Bouncers might in fact be vegetable rather than animal organisms, but he soon dismissed the thought as being ridiculous. He noticed something he hadn’t seen before: there was another mark on the Bouncers.
just below the eye-fringe. This was a circular patch of dark colouration whose function escaped him.

He stood there for a while regaining his senses. Then, slowly, he turned his mind to the radio. "Hello," he said at last, hearing the sigh of relief from the other end. "Sorry about the pause, I was surprised. I'm in a clearing, just like the others were. I can see that huge tree they described. There's a row of... wait a minute! This is something new!" His voice was sharp and excited.

A flash of movement caught his eye some thirty yards away around the edge of the clearing. He looked, blinked, then looked again. And still he was unsure whether his eyes were right. Only a stone's throw away from him, a solitary Bouncer was hopping stealthily through the grass towards the tree. Behind it trailed a small quadruped which the survey-group had spotted in great numbers. The animal was following obediently where the Bouncer led as Harding himself had done. Exactly as the three missing men had done.

His grip relaxed on the gun and he tried to prepare himself for trouble. With some misgivings he watched the Bouncer led its victim quietly into the heart of the bodies completely out of sight. He reported the sighting to the ship. 'The Bouncer and the animal have both gone into the middle of the tree. Everything's quiet. There's nothing... Good God!' Once again his voice lifted almost to a scream. 'This is ridiculous. There are two more of them - another Bouncer and another quadruped. They're coming out of the tree, not in. It doesn't make sense. I don't think it's the same pair. They're... they're heading for the wood. They're going into the trees. They've gone.' He shook his head in disbelief. First a Bouncer leading a... victim?... into the depths of the tree, and then another Bouncer leading another victim out into the woods. He shook his head again.

Then his mouth began to feel dry, and total fear overcame him. For this moment, he knew, might be one of the last in his life. This was the moment at which he had to take his search right into the heart of the mysterious tree. There was no turning back, and the only way to go was forward... forward into the very depths of the alien tree, into which, presumably, three of his colleagues had already ventured, never to return. It was a chilling prospect.

"And... I'm... I'm going in," he said hesitantly into the radio. As he walked towards the tree, he wondered what he might find within the cover of its monstrous branches. Death, perhaps? Probably the bodies of his colleagues. Or was it... by some chance... still alive? He didn't know. He couldn't guess. The only way to find out was to enter the tangle of branches and investigate the tree. He parted the foliage carefully and ducked under. And then the branches closed behind him and the outer world disappeared; he was alone in the mystery-world beneath the tree.

Hardly any sunlight filtered through. A dim twilight held sway over the scene, with the result that the shadows seemed to stretch and move and the animal have both gone into the middle of the tree. Everything's quiet. There's nothing... Good God!' Once again his voice lifted almost to a scream. 'This is ridiculous. There are two more of them - another Bouncer and another quadruped. They're coming out of the tree, not in. It doesn't make sense. I don't think it's the same pair. They're... they're heading for the wood. They're going into the trees. They've gone.' He shook his head in disbelief. First a Bouncer leading a... victim?... into the depths of the tree, and then another Bouncer leading another victim out into the woods. He shook his head again.

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Hardly any sunlight filtered through. A dim twilight held sway over the scene, with the result that the shadows seemed to stretch and move and reach for Harding with long and ghostly fingers. He was afraid. There was no such thing as a sentient, malicious tree. Still, the existence of the mystery-world beneath the tree.

The only way to find out was to enter the tangle of branches and investigate the tree. He parted the foliage carefully and ducked under. And then the branches closed behind him and the outer world disappeared; he was alone in the mystery-world beneath the tree.

Hardly any sunlight filtered through. A dim twilight held sway over the scene, with the result that the shadows seemed to stretch and move...
Zed woke up hearing blue. It was a colour never heard on Trathon Ten although Zed had been taught its theoretical existence during his incubation period. He sat up and listened intently.

The colour swirled and deepened. It was something completely new to him and his planet. His auditory sense throbbed with its beauty. If only he could get its source located he must inform the Controller immediately.

Then, in a flash of recollection, he remembered that the Controller and Trathon Ten and even his own familiar bed were millions and millions of times away; that the couch which contained and protected him was not home.

He saw the jarring tick of the cabin chronometer above and to his right, and focussed his optic nerve on it in an effort to control the sudden panic that gripped him. It passed. The beauty of the colour he could hear didn’t diminish. In fact, now that the moment of fear was over, his calming senses seemed more responsive to its richness.

During pretranslation training he had learned from the Controller that he must be ready to encounter totally unfamiliar sensations in that other dimension it was his mission to explore.

The chronometer told him that he had slept for three periods and he deduced that this had been the duration of his journey. It was almost time to leave the capsule.

He presumed that the internal flight regulator would already have advised the Controller of his arrival at destination. He wondered whether it had been a signal from Trathon Ten which had roused him and his planet. His auditory sense throbbed with its beauty. If only he could get its source located he must inform the Controller immediately.

As it developed, pure superimpositions of pure ultramarine.

The expedition had landed him in an immense place of congregation. The uniform signals his external antenna picked up on a rapid sweep showed that the walls and roof were solid but were penetrated in the cabin.

He touched a button and watched the sonic instruments buzz into life. One after another he read them. They told him that the capsule door was still securing; that the surface environment was non-toxic, but that its g-force was hostile; that the capsule’s presence did not appear to be manifest to native life forms.

Zed waited for the Controller’s release. Until it came there was nothing for him to do but relax and enjoy the colour. It was obviously arriving at some sort of climax. It shaded sometimes to a quivering transparency, plunged to depths of cobalt intensity and on into inky darkness, rising again through indigo punctuated with glyphs of pure turquoise to finish on a brush-stroke of ultramarine.

A moment later tiny sparks of orange and yellow erupted into the gap, scribbled toward Zed and broke like waves on his quivering nerves. But they were trivial after the purity of the blue sound.

"I see — what happened then?" The Controller’s thought, bored across the dark distances, was comforting to Zed in its link with home. Time had passed, contact had been established. Now the Controller took him through the customary period of interrogation.

There was a whole symphony of brightness. It was too complex and dazzling to identify any dominant theme. As it developed, pure superimpositions emerged. There was a striking green more beautiful than our technical communication wavelength, thick daubs of crimson shading to mauve at one end of the spectrum, most purple-black at the other; the intense blue again. Each one had its period of dominance then all merged again in one harmonious unity. It was... it was...

"And now?" The Controller’s chillly enquiry was aimed at bringing the explorer’s flying imagination down from exaggeration to fact.

"I have isolated the capsule, but I believe that the manifestations continue outside."

What do you deduce?"

Zed considered. "It’s pure speculation, but whatever life form our uncrewed probes observed here employs colour in ways distinct from our own."

"Is it inimical do you suppose?" Zed fancied that the Controller sounded apprehensive. "Could it be interpreted as an attack on the vehicle?"

"The instruments evidence no local interest at all directed at the capsule. I feel that the native forms may be unable to detect it with whatever senses they have. The only reaction the colour provokes in me is purely aesthetic."

"Nevertheless, the intention may be hostile."

"If it doesn’t actually harm," thought Zed, "I have no objection to full exposure. Where do you read me?"

"You have, in fact, landed in a densely inhabited environment according to the preliminary plots. We have no very precise data to give you. There was a final error in the approach procedure and we had to abort during phase eight and put you down where we could. So you’re off the scheduled target area. These colours you hear — don’t you think they could be some sort of reaction to you?"

"If they are, I hear them as friendly," Zed telepathised. "How should I proceed?"

The Controller was silent for a long time. At last his ordered thought throbbed across space to the explorer on that other world. "I shall release the capsule door in ten trispacs. Institute Procedure Six. Act with extreme prudence and report fully to me in one decaperiod. Begin. Ten... nine... eight..."

Zed slipped comfortably into the exploration pod. The remote think-down continued. On the instant of zero the capsule hatch folded and slid aside. The pod moved ahead and Zed found himself in a bubbling ferment of colour.

For a moment the g-shock dragged his frame into violent old age, then the pod adjusted the pressure on him to Trathon Ten level.

Zed set his instruments in accordance with the procedure ordered, isolating until the great ocean of colour into which he had swum was dimmed sufficiently for him to get a hearing of his surroundings.

The expedition had landed him in an immense place of congregation. The uniform signals his external antenna picked up on a rapid sweep showed that the walls and roof were solid but were interrupted here and there with translucent material.

He logged the data carefully, then concentrated on the more interesting manifestations of mobile life which filled the hall. He tested a random sample, beaming the instruments on individuals and limbs, bi-pedal and stationary in different parts of the building.

Signals showed the local life form to be of more or less uniform height, four-limbed, bi-pedal and stationary in repose. Isolated movement here and there...
“GRAY MATTERS”; Painting by Anthony Roberts of Young Artists.
(Courtesy Sphere Books Ltd.)
A Sonnet for the Seeds of Time
by John Brunner

On autumn days my schoolfellows and I
would run to catch the seeds of sycamore
like helicopters as they spiralled by.
Some few sowed saplings on the copse's floor...
while many died. Time too has seeds which die,
but some sprout rainbow futures which before
were less than guesswork. Prophets can't descry
what shoots grow peace and love, which hate and war.
Still, let us dream that through the hollow sky
our fancied stellar argosies shall soar
to Rigel and Arcturus. Let us try
to make those dreams come true. There's hope in store
that children of the Earth may walk between
growths strange and marvellous, and unforeseen.

28 Oct 73
Lewis Orne, a man of great personal magnetism, is assigned to oversee the activities of a planet at the edge of a distant galaxy long torn by devastating wars. An interplanetary trouble-shooter, it is his assignment to monitor the planet; to detect at the earliest stages any sign of aggressiveness that might trigger still another exhausting conflict. Fulfilling these duties, he discovers extra-sensory powers of awesome potential. He is invited, because of his special powers, to join the company of the ‘gods’:

To become a god, a living creature must transcend the physical. The three steps of this transcendent path are known. First, he must come upon the awareness of secret aggression. Second, he must come upon the discernment of purpose within the personal shape. Third, he must experience the death.

When this is done, the nascent god must find his own rebirth in a unique ordeal by which he discovers the one who summoned him.

Orne’s rites of passage in the vast and perilous reaches of deep space provide an unforgettable dramatic story with philosophical insights and human emotion.

The Making of a God | The Amal Handbook

An extract from the book by Frank Herbert, published by New English Library.
though he had brought this incident into being
slipping, lunged into its high-stepping lope.
clutching her bucket and toy shovel. A red smear
their frozen terror.
ing upon these children the thing they had
bent its stalked eyes toward the children.
marked the stones beside her. She stared across
That was what Bakrish had meant. That thing
sweet with overtones of sour cream and swamp.
Flecks of sand marked the child's legs and feet. His
writhing green wall. Silence blanketed the room.
The dancing purple lines became almost static,
which he as a red turban climbed striding out of the wall: a tall man with
across her neck.
Mahmud had a low, rumbling voice. He said:
Mahmud stared down his nose at Orne. "Are you
or evil?"
Men have motives," Mahmud said.
Orne remembered what Bakrish had said: if
the dancing purple lines through a red haze of
impossible to vent his hatred, instanting upon
the room. One child appeared to be
shrouding the Chargon heaviness of body. The older child carried a small
at the image in the mosque, bowing
words leaped to his lips: "Maddie! Stop that or
Orne whispered the name: "Mahmud!"
A gigantic tri-di of that face and figure dominated his thought: the inner mosque
Orne had attended on Chargon.
God will punish you!
Orne shouted at the Chargon standing beside an uncle, staring up at that image in the mosque, bowing to it.
Mahmud strode up behind the child, caught up the fallen shovel, slammed it across her head.
"Don't!" Orne protested.
Mahmud stared down his nose at Orne. "Are you really an agent of God?"
"Men can be good or evil by any definitions they want," Orne said. "Where's the miracle in that?"
Mahmud stared down his nose at Orne. "Are you good or evil?"
Mahmud asked. "Answer me that! Stop evading!"
Orne swallowed, recalled the nightmare sequence of this test. Creation? And he wondered if the great psi machine amplified the energy of
Romans called religion. How, Bakrish had said I could bring the dead to life here. Religion's supposed to have a monopoly on that. But how do I separate psi from religion? For him. He accepted now that this
Miracles just can't relate to motives. Miracles just can't exist."
"I heard your prayer," said Mahmud. "Good and evil?"
"Oh, is that the source of goodness? Come now, my friend. I know your mind; you have the
"Am I good or evil?" Orne asked himself. He forced his attention onto the question, but it was like wading upstream in a swift river. His
to scatter. He said:
"Thou sayest it for thyself and, thereby, are reborn an innocent," Mahmud said. "Thou hast learned thy lesson and I bless thee for it.
"That was what Bakrish had meant. That thing they had
done here in the name of religion?"

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A bronze clangour echoed behind him. The green wall returned to its featureless gray. Footsteps slapped the floor. Hands worked at the bowl on Orne’s head, lifted it gently. The straps that had confined him fell away.

Bakrish came around to stand in front of Orne. “You said it was an ordeal,” Orne panted. “And I warned you about hate,” Bakrish said. “But you are alive and in possession of your soul.”

“How do you know if I still have my soul?”

“One knows by the absence,” Bakrish murmured. He glanced at Orne’s wounded arm. “We must get that bandaged. It’s night now and time for the next step.”

“Night?”

Orne peered up at the slitted windows in the dome. They gave him a view of darkness punctured by stars. He looked around the giant room, mired. He glanced at Orne’s wounded arm. “We’ll give you an energy pill when we ban­
dome. They gave him a view of darkness punc­tured by stars. Up the hill marched a snaketrack of moving lights.

The Abbod sat on a low stool in front of his fireplace, Macrithy standing behind him with the latest report on Orne. In spite of the hopeful words, there was sadness in the Abbod’s voice.

Macrithy heard the tone, said: “I, too, observe that he did not call his woman to his side or otherwise experiment with the great Machine. Tell me, Reverend Abbod, why is it you do not sound happy about this observation?”

“Orne will reflect upon this himself, given time. He will see that he does not need the machine to do what he wills. What then, dear friend?”

“Do you have no doubts that he is the god you called up?”

“No doubts at all. And when he discovers his enormous powers . . . he will come seeking you, Reverend Abbod.”

There will be no stopping him, of course. I don’t even want it tried. There exists only one concept as sin—guilt—judgement require begin­nings. From these observations, we postulate that sin and guilt products of intent, are not fixed derivatives of eternity. At the very least, such concepts as sin—guilt—judgement require begin­nings, thus occur as aspects of eternal. Such concepts are ways of dealing with finite law and, only incidentally with eternal matters. It is thus we understand how limited and limiting are our projections onto Godhead—

ABBOD HALMYRACH, Challenge of Eternity

The night air carried a chill nip, making Orne thankful for the thickness of his toga. Bakrish had led him to a large park area enclosed within the religious Warren. Birds cooed from trees in the deeper shadows. The place smelled of new-mown grass. There were no artificial lights in the immediate area, but Bakrish followed a rough path as though he could see it and Orne followed the dim outline of the priest’s robe.

Ahead of them, a hill stood outlined against stars. Up the hill marched a snaketrack of moving lights.

Orne’s injured arm still ached, but an energy tablet had walled off his weariness.

Bakrish spoke over his shoulder: “The lights are carried by students and each is accompanied by a priest. Each student has a two-metre pole with a lighted box atop it. The box has four translucent sides, each of a different color, as you can see—red, blue, yellow and green.”

Orne watched the lights flickering like phosphorescent insects on the dark hill. “What’s the reason for all this?”

“They demonstrate piety.”

“What’s the four color idea?”

“Ah, red for the blood you dedicate, blue for truth, yellow for the richness of religious experience, and green for the growth of life.”

“How does marching up a mountain show piety?”

“Because they do it!”

Bakrish picked up the pace, deserted the path to cross a stretch of lawn. Orne stumbled, hurried to catch up. He wondered again why he allowed himself to follow this ordeal. Because it might lead him to the Abbod? Because Steton had ordered him to carry out this assignment? Because of his oath to the I-A? None of these reasons seemed adequate. He felt trapped on a narrow track which he might leave as easily as Bakrish had left the pathway behind them.

The priest stopped at a narrow open gate through a stone wall and Orne grew aware that a line of silent people was passing through the gateway. Hands reached out from the line to take long poles from a rack beside the gateway. Lights blossomed into existence beyond the wall. He smelled human perspiration, heard the shuffle of feet, the swish of robes. An occasional cough sounded, but there was no conversation.

Bakrish took a pole from the rack, twisted the base. Light glowed from a box at the top of the pole. The box was turned red side toward the process through the gate, then it cast a ruddy glow on the people—student and priest, student and priest, eyes downcast, expressions sober and intent.

“Here.” Bakrish thrust the pole into Orne’s hands.

It felt oily smooth to Orne. He wanted to ask what he was supposed to do with it besides carry it . . . if anything, but the silence of the procession daunted him. He felt silly holding the thing.

Continued on page 27
The Artist in Science Fiction


Chris Foss is amongst the most prolific of the artists at present working in the sphere of science fiction with hundreds of covers to his credit. A close attention to detail characterises all his work as does the recurrent theme of transportation in space and it is often difficult to distinguish the real from the imaginary in his paintings. This is partially because his illustrations depict subjects and situations that are very far removed from actuality. Foss himself affirms: "I paint science fact not science fiction. My work shows a time that is only one step above life today. I take things happening today and add on about 150 years."

Foss' interest has always been in the technical side of art, and this is very much emphasised in his work. He originally wanted to study architecture, but to Cambridge to do so but left after two years to follow a more flexible art career. Whilst at college he worked for a time on an adult strip cartoon. The idea was eventually dropped but the cartoon - in the style of Barbarella - was the beginning of Foss' sf work.

Three years ago, after working for a period as a draughtsman designing sculptures, Foss began his series of cover art. The first commercial interest in his sf work followed the publication of one of his illustrations in a 1970 edition of Nova. This was an intricate line drawing of a futuristic city. Cover work quickly followed and in Summer 1970 he completed his first sf cover for the Panther edition of Arthur C Clarke's The Coming of the Space Age.

Foss now concentrates mainly on sf cover art although he does undertake a number of war and sea theme illustrations for book jackets and occasional magazine work. These, like his sf covers, generally reflect his interest in mechanical and technical. Because accuracy and detailed mechanical observations are such an important part of his work, Foss spends a great deal of time studying the transport and machinery of the twentieth century and uses this knowledge when creating his idea of transport of the future:

"I pick up basic principles - how things work - and quite often they come back to me when I need them for a cover. Things I see or talk about are often useful later. Working on science fiction you find that mechanical principles similar to those of today are going to be used in the future."

The success of this background work can be seen in such covers as the 1973 Sphere editions of The Astounding-Analog Reader, Book Two and The Best of Arthur C Clarke 1937-1971 and the Panther 1973 edition of The Current of Space by Isaac Asimov. These all have the sense of reality for which Foss strives.

"The most important thing in any painting is whether or not the artist has managed to convey the feel of the subject. I like to get a 'you are there' atmosphere in my work - the art comes second. You have got to have an idea and the technique to carry it out."

Foss enjoys the freedom he is allowed when creating his cover designs although he finds this is limited slightly by the demands of the publisher:

"One man I work for insists that any picture I bring him be so clear that if I hold it at the other side of the room he can still make out every detail. I can see his point because you are really painting a poster advertising a book."

To achieve the clear lines of his work without losing any atmosphere he uses acrylic gouache colour. He tries to keep to one coat but sometimes finds it necessary to use a number of layers. He admires the work of the Dutch masters of the 14th century because they show great skill in their work and still have that 'something extra' which adds flair: "Turner has always been one of my favourite artists. He gets the effect over in his work. I also like the Dutch masters of the 14th century because they show great observation in their paintings."

The main influences on Foss' work, however, are placed firmly in the mechanics of the 20th century. From his studies he has developed strong ideas about the role of machinery in the future: "Machines have already taken over - it seems inevitable that we will experience an energy crunch soon. One of these days I'd like to build some form of transport which uses minimal energy."

His current plan is to buy a scrap yard near his home in North Cambridge. It is full of old pieces of machinery and Foss explains:

"I don't know what I would do with it but you get some lovely stuff in a scrapyard. It might even be useful for my work - give me some more ideas."

by LYNN WHAITES.
there confirmed the deductions made by the Trathonians from the photophonic messages received from the first, crewless probes: the bi-peds were fully mobile and had a height when erect of 10 ro5. Decomposition of their cellular structure recorded by the pod's radio-controlled assessor seemed to be rapid by Trathonian standards and suggested a useful life of 68 orbrevs plus or minus 10.

It appears (Zed logged) that the primitive organs of communication receive highly crude colour systems as stimulants and the bi-peds respond by beating the extremities of the upper limbs together to create a pretty but superficial flood of discordant sparks. Query: what purpose has this ritual?

The leaders of this ceremony stand or recline on a central platform. The colour stimulants are administered by mechanical means through appliances manipulated by the leaders and obviously designed to augment natural powers inadequate for the purpose.

These appliances are most frequently operated by an orifice in the head of the bi-peds similar to those recognised in the fossil ichthyosaurs of the dead seas of Trathonian Era 10-8.

On one occasion one of the bi-ped leaders endeavoured to make colour by the use of the orifice unaided. The result was a reproduction much inferior to that achieved by mechanical means. Query: is life form decadent, inferior to that achieved by mechanical means? one whose natural powers are diminishing and must now resort to mechanical aids?

The optical organs do not appear to be highly developed and, almost certainly, cannot respond to the sound spectrum as ours do.

The visitor from Trathon Ten circled the hall slowly in his protective pod, working hard to record everything that he saw and heard. Strict training prevented him from drawing any firm conclusions from these early observations. The preliminary probes sent from his world over the last 3,600 periods had suggested a diversity of activities on this planet.

From the lack of interest the close-packed, pulsating bi-peds showed in him or in the voyage capsule which had lodged securely behind the podium in the centre of their meeting place, Zed concluded that neither was detectable by their rather blunt senses.

As an experiment, he powered the machine all the power he dared. The jerking column of sound which was his target faltered but quickly recovered. The resistance dial hummed angrily. Zed cut the current in disgust.

There was now no point in delaying further exploration. Following Procedure Six rigidly, he checked the anti-g potential of his batteries. He found that they would last a further decaperiod before they needed recharging. Everything here had been recorded meticulously. With a final listen round he reduced densities to their limit and filtered through the ringing barrier of the wall.

A thunderstorm of light set his auditory sense tingling with pain. He let out a golden screech and dimmed the inrush of colours to a point where he could just hear the faint warbling of the nearer stars and the pulsing beams of the planet’s only satellite.

He knew that the exploration shot had been timed to land him on the sector of the planet in night phase. If this was the kind of sound diffused light inflicted, what would happen when this side of the alien world turned toward its star and day?

Trathonians (Zed recorded in his log) certainly could not colonise here without considerable modification or protection techniques. Disturbing light intensities would bombard our acute hearing to an unbearable degree. However, the manufacture of every nuance of colour in which the indigenous life indulges would be a desirable field for research.

The most serious difficulty will come in making ourselves perceptible to and establishing communication with the natives. Their crude senses are deafened by a continual over-rich diet of colour which exists in a degree unknown on Trathon Ten and blinded by an intensity of sound which is trapped in the dense envelope the planet drags with it through space.

What hope could these bi-peds have of ever experiencing our ‘subtle changes of inter-thought or ultra-signal aesthetics’?

Back at the Concert Hall, in a below-stage dressing room, Ferry Saint, clarinettist and leader of the Saints Modern Jazz Quintet, scowled at the rest of the group.

“How should I know what happened?” he muttered angrily. “I felt fine before the show. I didn’t take a thing. We were going good weren’t we?” He stared moodily at his clarinet as though it was to blame for his present misfortune.

His companions nodded agreement but no one said anything and with a gesture of disbelief Ferry went on: “Then we went into that encore of the Blue Theme and when I hit the C Sharp it was like something hit me and went on through without stopping. I can’t explain it... Then just for a moment I saw what I was playing. Can you understand how mad that is? I saw the sound, boys. And it was blue. That was the hell of it. Just for a second I saw thick, rich indigo coming right out of the end of that horn.”
To accept for a moment a definition of science fiction as the study of things that haven’t happened yet but may happen at any moment is to realise that the science fiction film carries a basic contradiction within itself. A space wheel, for example, may not be orbiting the Earth right now, but 2001 has shown us the thing in full flight, and with far greater clarity and conviction than the NASA transmissions have been able to achieve. The wheel has already been filmed; after Kubrick, you might say, there seems little point in spending a fortune on the genuine article. Want to know what it’s like in space? The whole experience is made safe and easy for us by 2001. Want to glimpse the ferocity of nuclear warfare? It’s all there in The War Game, except that we survive more or less intact. Want to see the effects of ecological breakdown and overpopulation? In No Blade of Grass and Soyland Green tomorrow has become yesterday, and we are still serenely occupying our respective todays, floating in a bubble of horrific ‘now’ like the girl in the glass phone-booth in Hitchcock’s The Birds. The cinema creates its futures out of images filmed many months ago, which indeed increasingly show their age, like Forbidden Planet or Things to Come, and become history without ever having been fact. Although science fiction tries to cheat time by taking us ahead, it is subject to the same laws as the rest of us and shows us only what we know already, disguised and decorated maybe, but alien only in the sense that no two minds think exactly the same way.

So it is that Westworld is one of the happiest things to have happened to sf in a long time, precisely because it recognises that we are shaped by the myths created in a celluloid past. Hardly an image in its early scenes is not derived from the recurring visions of film and television – the eager interviewer from the washing-powder commercials, the expectant tourists being herded through pristine decor like characters in a Tati film, the massed ranks of screens and dials through which every action is observed and evaluated (numerous antecedents include Seven Days in May and THX1138), and of course the whole setting of Delos itself, the holiday resort in which at least three kinds of dream have become true. There’s Romanworld, an endless round of orgiastic feasting and merriment among graceful damsels and cool fountains. There’s Medieval-world, where banquets and wenching give way only occasionally to the thrill of tournament or torture chamber. And there’s Westworld, where the scruffy little studio street, the tinkling saloon and the rumbling stagecoach provide a background so familiar that the Wild Bunch could bust the bank at any moment.

It’s as real as anything else,” one idle tourist remarks to the other, and this is the heart of Michael Crichton’s film. In Delos, everyone who isn’t a tourist is a robot, which means that slave girls, Black Knights, or gunmen are all programmed to satisfy the customer and fall at his feet in appropriate postures of impotence whenever he raises a fist. The black-suited gunslinger of Westworld spouts synthetic blood from the wounds inflicted by his inept opponent just like the dying men in Peckinpah movies; dragged off to a workshop surgery overnight for some brisk tinkering with screwdriver and soldering-iron, his body...
is all ready to spout again the next day. He is both expendable and invulnerable, a magnificent metaphor that has marched through the pages of sf since Frankenstein first constructed him, Asimov gave him three laws, and Kuttner gave him a sense of humour. He is, above all, humanoid, constructed in his makers' image like any other offspring, and as his circuits become increasingly sophisticated he gradually achieves, like any other offspring, a measure of independence. What more logical, then, both morally and in terms of narrative, than that the robot should at last fight back, demonstrating his technical superiority over the feeble and inaccurate creatures who dreamed him up? As with HAL in 2001, perfection may be the cause of revolt but there's a hint of malice there too, a glinting revenge for the indignities too often endured in the past. It's a turnabout that Philip K Dick has worried over for years in a torrent of the fragments of human caprice in a welter of bullet-holes, torn togas, and fallen armour.

Yet the message, in what seems to be the unavoidable tradition of sf cinema, is constantly muffled, mumbled and mishandled in Westworld. Crichton has directed his own script, and no-one has apparently intervened with advice about tearing out pages here and there. The film has a funereal pace, a tendency never to use one reaction shot where three will ram the point home, and a curiously haphazard style of editing that holds up the action just when it should be going full belt. The character played by Richard Benjamin is insidiously repellent, while the motivations of his companion are a complete mystery except in the context of James Brinl's popularity in an American television series. That much of the lighting in the film is ugly to watch is consistent with the low-budget charades that have inspired the tourist resort in the first place, but more could surely have been done with the spectacular qualities of the Roman and Medieval reconstructions, used on the whole like nothing more than backdrops to a Dick Emery sketch. The final scenes of incongruity, an anachronistic mixture of costumes filmed in the extraordinary exotica of the Harold Lloyd estate, have genuine touches of surrealism (as when a flaming human torch staggers between two enthroned and motionless medieval figures), but too often Crichton doesn't go far enough when we red-blooded fans, however, will not be inclined to complain too loudly; this is one of cinema's all-too-infrequent contributions to the genre that can claim a sense of fun as well as of imagination.

The film sets up so many resonances of this kind that it could easily have been a master-piece. Hiding within it is an allegory about the myths by which we destroy ourselves, about the ease with which we dehumanise the society in which we live, about the evolution of man into a hyper-efficient fighting machine, about the risks involved in extrapolation. That Crichton was aware of these implications is evident from his quasi-satirical slow-motion gun-fights and especially from the bar-room brawl, in which North to Alaska (and a host of other John Wayne movies) and Clockwork Orange meet in hilarious collision. Every furniture-smashing cliché is there - the flying bottles, the collapsing bannisters, the bodies thrown through windows, dropped on tables, slid along the counter, piled on the floor. Only the tourists, however, suffer from hangovers; the robots, like animated furniture, can be polished up like new. By the end of the film they are all set to inherit the earth, leaving behind them the inevitability of survival of the fittest.

So comparison, one only has to cast a glance at The Legend of Hell House, which attracts the sf enthusiast's immediate attention for having been written by Richard Matheson, an erratic but often memorable writer (I Am Legend, The Shrinking Man), whose work for the cinema is all ready to spout again the next day. He is both expendable and invulnerable, a magnificent metaphor that has marched through the pages of sf since Frankenstein first constructed him, Asimov gave him three laws, and Kuttner gave him a sense of humour. He is, above all, humanoid, constructed in his makers' image like any other offspring, and as his circuits become increasingly sophisticated he gradually achieves, like any other offspring, a measure of independence. What more logical, then, both morally and in terms of narrative, than that the robot should at last fight back, demonstrating his technical superiority over the feeble and inaccurate creatures who dreamed him up? As with HAL in 2001, perfection may be the cause of revolt but there's a hint of malice there too, a glinting revenge for the indignities too often endured in the past. It's a turnabout that Philip K Dick has worried over for years in a torrent of

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Analog and fanzines varied, adapting themselves to the Science Fiction Foundation. His organised fandom via the BSFA year. Stephenson’s interest in Stephenson’s techniques are through half-tone and scraper illustrations for breakthrough came with his (see our last issue) and the amateur writers of science fiction.

BRITISH ARTIST Andrew Stephenson has been commissioned by Harper & Rowe of New York to illustrate Christopher Priest’s new novel, The Inverted World, which will be published in the Spring of this year. Stephenson’s interest in science fiction started at university. Later he met up with organised fandom via the BSFA (British Science Fiction Association), the Globe meetings (see our last issue) and the

Science Fiction Foundation. His first illustrations appeared in the fanzines Cynic, Macrocasm, Zimri and Vector, but his professional breakthrough came with his illustrations for Speculation of Larry Niven’s Guest of Honour Speech at the Easter Convention 72. Niven liked them so much that he sold them with his speech as a package to Analog. Stephenson’s techniques are varied, adapting themselves to the requirements of the medium. They range from simple line drawings, through half-tone and scraper board, to the complex blending of techniques exemplified in the Analog illustrations.

PIERIA is a workshop which has recently been set up in the Oxford/Thames Valley area for amateur writers of science fiction.

MIKE MOORCOCK’S first venture into music, a single comprising two straight rock and roll numbers written by himself, is due out shortly. Moorcock, it appears, has more than just a talent for writing; he sings lead vocal and plays 12-string guitar on the disc. He is also working with Hawkwind guitarist Dave Brock on an album to be released by Liberty this spring. The album, a fantasy on the lines of a rock opera, contains songs based on his books. These are connected in narrative sequence and have as their central character the Eternal Champion, who is reincarnated in a number of roles under different names.

Fanzines are written, produced and distributed by just one person. They are a number of roles under different names.

PIERIA is a workshop which has recently been set up in the Oxford/Thames Valley area for amateur writers of science fiction.

Mike Moorcock with Dave Brock
At each session writers bring along original manuscripts for constructive criticism by their peers. Each story is read, discussed and the author is then given time to reply to what has been said. Pieria is modelled on the Milford conferences initiated in England by James and Judy Blish, and developed from similar meetings held by the Oxford University Science Fiction Group. To enable plenty of time to be spent on each story, Pieria’s workshops are spread over a weekend, the aim being to give one and a half hour’s attention to each story. Anyone wanting further details about the workshop should contact Robert Holdstock, 14 Coxhill Gardens, River, Dover.

Fanzines There are many, many fanzines (amateur sf magazines). Some are joint efforts but most are written, produced and distributed by just one person working heroically from a backroom with only an antiquated duplicating machine and limitless energy. For this reason, fanzines usually appear at irregular intervals and are of varying standards, but they are useful for anyone who wants to get in touch with other sf readers. We are listing a few that have been published recently:

Speculation edited by Pete Weston, 72 Beeshe Drive, Erdington, Birmingham 24. Zimri edited by Lisa Conesa, 54 Manley Road, Whalley Range, Manchester M16 BHP.

Checkpoint edited by Peter Stables.

DENT is starting a science fiction list. Their first two books, due out in April, are: The Sheep Look Up, John Brunner’s major new novel, and Halcyon Drift by Brian Stables.

BOOKS FEBRUARY/MARCH

Hardbacks

Fiction: The Great Years edited by Carol & Frederick Pohl. Published by Gollancz. Science Fiction stories of the 30s, 40s and 50s – brash, vulgar but still valid.

Casey Agonistes by Richard McKenna. Published by Gollancz. Introduced by Damon Knight, this is a selection of stories by a writer who is above all interested in people and their reactions to the fantastic situations he describes.

Race Against Time by Piers Anthony. Published by Sidgwick & Jackson. A book for children which examines the questions of freedom and reality. The small village of Newton is sleepy and peaceful, but John gradually comes to feel like a prisoner under surveillance.

Paperbacks

Out of Space and Time (Volume 2) edited by Clark Ashton-Smith. Published by Panther. A collection of short stories originally published in Weird Tales in the 1930s.

The Jewels in the Skull by Michael Moorcock. Published by Mayflower.

Dragonsquest by Anne McCaffrey. Published by Sphere. The second in the series about the planet Pern. The Red Star shoots out tendrils and destroys the land whenever Pern comes into its orbit. It can only be conquered by the great fire-breathing dragons of Pern. The book deals with the political confrontation between the dragonsiders and the great landed families.

The New Adam by Stanley G Weinbaum. Published by Sphere. The book tackles the subject of the successor to man as we know him now. A child is born with an extra lobe on his brain. This gives him powers which seem supernatural to his contemporaries so that, although he is superior to them, he is regarded as an outcast.

Corgi Science Fiction Collectors Library: The City and the Stars by Arthur C Clarke.

Canute by Leibowitz by Walter J Miller.

The Big Sun of Mercury by Isaac Asimov. Published by New English Library. Number three in the Space Ranger Series.

The Ice Schooner by Michael Moorcock. Published by Sphere. A book set in the future when the next Ice Age has come and people are travelling in ships on skis and hunting the ice whales. One man is entrusted with the finest ship in the fleet and is sent to find the legendary city of New York.

Best Science Fiction Stories from New Worlds No 8. Edited by Michael Moorcock. Published by Panther.

Eternal Man by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier. Published by Mayflower. Highly technological beings have lived on earth before, only to destroy themselves Maps of the earth existed 10,000 years ago, so accurate that they could only have been drawn with the aid of aircraft...
Wilts haw watched for the green light over the door. His tall figure was stiff, his blue eyes narrowed and fixed on the calendar on the wall by the secretary’s head. June 2297! He shook his head slowly, almost in wonder, but time didn’t mean anything to him. He saw the green light blink and, as he crossed the wide carpet, the door of Commissar Vacslov’s office opened by remote control. He entered, knowing what this was all about, and he hoped he could bluff the Commissar again. If they exiled him to Runa, the penal star, he would be finished, and so would twenty years of valuable work.

Vacslov was Mongolian, and Wilts haw wondered how the man had managed to overcome his origins to rise to his present position. For even Vacslov was not immune to Authority, although he commanded this vast Complex. No one was safe, not even the World President himself. Even in this enlightened century there were always purges taking place.

“Sit down, Wilts haw,” Vacslov rapped, and frowned when he was ignored. “I have had more reports that you are still slacking in your work. What is wrong with you? You are getting so close to a breakthrough in your tests! Everything points to it although your reports are so pessimistic. Are you sick?”

“I’m all right!” Wilts haw had heard the many rumours about what happened to men who reported sick. This was an experimental Base. “I’ve got one last major problem to solve,” he said. “I can’t do it to order. But with its solution I shall be able to hand you the complete formula for Time travel. That’s what you want, isn’t it?”

“It’s what you’ve kept us waiting for!” Vacslov leaned forward in his seat. His heavy figure stiff with hope. His dark eyes watched Wilts haw lean forward in his seat, his heavy figure stiff with hope. His dark eyes watched.

“I know you are a good man, but there have been these reports about the way you are evading the final issues of your project.”

“Tallent has been making those reports, hasn’t he?” Wilts haw demanded.

“I have informed the President that you will prove those reports wrong by handing Time travel to us on the completion of this present series of tests,” Vacslov tightened his lips. “Don’t fail me, Wilts haw, because if you do I shan’t be able to save your life.”

“I’m doing my best, I assure you,” Wilts haw retorted, smiling thinly. “If I could get some peace to work out this last problem then I would succeed. But the atmosphere in this place is well nigh intolerable. I’m treated like a prisoner instead of a top scientist.”

“We are giving you as much freedom as the situation permits. Just remember that you could get a Red Card for your services to the State if you do succeed in your project. Go back to your office and think deeply about your future. You know what awaits failure, don’t you?”

Wilts haw nodded slowly and turned to depart. Vacslov pressed a button and the door slid open. Wilts haw did not look round, and hurried back to his department. He paused at the doorway to his office. Tallent, his assistant, was seated at the desk as if he owned it, and there was a wide grin of triumph on the man’s thin face. His brown eyes glinted with pleasure.

“I think I get a positive result on the last test,” Tallent called excitedly.

“Don’t get excited until we’re certain.” He kept his face straight. The closed circuit video screens would have his face in close-up. If Vacslov suspected they were so near to success everyone would be forced to work overtime.

But Wilts haw had already solved the problem; despite his denials to Authority. The final solution had come to him in his sleep like a visitation from the Lord. But it was for him alone! He had decided that years ago. They had killed his father twenty years before, and his mother had been exiled to Runa, where life expectancy in the chemical ward was around six months. Wilts haw could not forget, and when he did make that first trip into Time he had no intention of returning, ever. Then Commissar Vacslov could do what he liked with his beloved World Communism.

Wilts haw quickly ran through the test Tallent had been conducting. He knew the result would be negative before he started because he always sabotaged Tallent’s tests to prevent him discovering the final solution. Tallent might look over the Craft.

He went along the corridor to the test chamber, and his heart pounded with pride and love when he stood looking at the Craft, nestling on its special base in the centre of the huge testing chamber. It was a large transparent sphere, glinting now in the subdued lighting, and it was the most sophisticated transporter in the world. He had built it! He glanced up at the engineer finishing his work on the sliding roof above the Craft, then nodded to himself. All preparations were nearly finished. He glanced around and called to an electrician, a Brown Card whose status was one short in above that of a Stateless Slave, and the man came across wordlessly.

“I want generators set up around the Craft to form a force field during the first test,” Wilts haw said. “I’ll need a big electron flux under the Craft as it hovers.”

“That could be dangerous,” the man retorted.

“I don’t say I couldn’t do it,” the man retorted quickly.

Wilts haw crossed to the Craft and climbed inside. He closed the transparent door with a grin on his face. He had them all fooled. He didn’t need a sliding roof. That had been just one excuse to delay them until he was ready. He didn’t need a force field around the Craft. It wouldn’t hover before taking off through Time.

There was a padded couch riveted to the floor of the sphere, and beside it a long metal arm carried the small control panel. The only trouble was, Wilts haw reflected as he sat down on the couch, he could not select the era in Time he wished to visit. He would be able to transport himself out of the Present, but the Time direction — past or future — would have to be left to Fate.

He rested his head in his hands as he considered. According to his study of the subject, Time was phased, joined into aeons which broke away from the string of Time in predetermined lengths to remain on separate planes in different dimensions. These aeons were intact as fragments of Time, people by those who lived during the course of unfolding, and those people were born and reborn eternally as their particular Time phase reached its conclusion and then recommenced the cycle.

He knew he needed to go to the Time Present before the next Time break occurred, for if he was caught up in this particular span he would be eternally trapped on the same plane with everything he hated, and that could mean months or years before each future cycle perfected a Time craft which would take him back every time to exactly where he had started in the beginning.

His father had begun this search for the means to travel into and through Time — his father, who had been killed on the very day his only son reached the impressive age of fourteen years. Wilts haw never forgot his fourteenth birthday! It had started wonderfully well, until the news came that his father had fallen in the abortive rebellion against Communist World Order. Ever since that fateful day Wilts haw planned his own escape, and now the time was at hand.

Before Wilts haw got out of the craft he removed a tiny impulse cell from an ignition circuit and pocketed it. Then he left the Craft and, as he studied the blueprints on the
boards, Commissar Vacslov and two guards, followed by a grinning Tallent, entered the testing chamber.

"Stand where you are, Wiltshaw!" Vacslov commanded, and the two guards leveled their weapons. "You are under arrest. Tallent has discovered at last that you have been deliberately sabotaging his tests. I have seen the evidence for myself. You are finished here as a scientist. Take him out, Guards, and hold him ready for an immediate enquiry."

Wiltshaw was led away, and he took with him an image of Tallent's grinning face. He was cold inside, filled with a great fear that he had overstayed the mark too soon. But they must not stop him now! He fought down his panic as he was locked in a cell. He had to keep a clear mind.

An hour later Tallent visited him, protect ed by an alert guard, and Wiltshaw's former assistant was in high spirits.

"I can overlook the sabotage," Tallent said, "because now you have been exposed. I had my suspicions for a long time. Now I'll have the honour of handling the first full scale test. Without your sabotage, my own tests have proved successful, and I know what I have to do to prove Time travel.

"Good luck," Wiltshaw said heavily, and touched the tiny impulse cell he had removed from the ignition circuit.

"You're a fool," Tallent retorted. "You could have had all the glory. But you've been asking for the death sentence for a long time, and now you've got it coming."

"I've been under sentence of death since the day my father died in the rebellion," Wiltshaw retorted grimly. "But the sentence was suspended while I was of some use to the State."

"Now you won't live to see the success of your invention," Tallent rasped.

"I will see Time conquered," Wiltshaw replied, smiling grimly.

"My first mission will be to travel through the Future to see what lies in store for the Communitarian Order over the next thousand years!" Pride edged Tallent's tones.

"And if you discover anything that doesn't suit the Order the President will send the necessary men and equipment to change it!" There was bitterness in Wiltshaw's voice, and he was just beginning to understand what he might have done beyond the hopes he had always held.

Call it judicious reshaping of future events," Tallent insisted cheerfully. "Now I must go. The President himself is coming to witness my first attempt to pass through the Time barrier."

"Goodbye," Wiltshaw said, and there was an enigmatic smile on his lips as Tallent strutted out . . .

It was mid-afternoon when Wiltshaw was summoned to Commissar Vacslov's office. He was flanked by two guards when the green light flashed and he entered the inner sanctum. Wiltshaw frowned when he saw World President Shenko seated in Vacslov's chair, with the Commissar standing in close attendance.

"You have been sentenced to death by a special sitting of the local People's Court," the President said without preamble. "It has been established that you robbed the State of valuable sabotage."

"I spent twenty years of my life trying to give you Time as a gift," Wiltshaw retorted bitterly. "Now you have it and I am determined it is no more than I expected. You are not a sworn Communist!"

Vacslov put in slowly.

If you had finished this project satisfactorily you would have had all rights fully restored to you," Shenko condemned. "As it is, you are now under sentence of death. However!" He paused and glanced at Wiltshaw. "We have run into trouble with the first full scale test of the Craft. We still need your help, Wiltshaw, and I will make a bargain with you. Complete and perfect the Craft for Time travel and you will get a Red Cord and full freedom."

"What has happened?" Wiltshaw demanded.

"Tallent tested the Craft thirty minutes ago," Vacslov said sullenly. "When he applied full power he vanished instantly from the Craft."

Wiltshaw sniggered, and the President glared at him.

"Tallent has gone into Time, obviously," Vacslov went on. "But the Craft is still on its Base so Tallent won't be able to return. That makes the test useless and a failure. We need the operator of the Craft to return with it to report."

"So what do you want me to do?"

Wiltshaw gazed steadily into the President's eyes.

"I've already explained," Shenko told him. "Perfect the Craft and win a full pardon for yourself."

Wiltshaw tried to show reluctance, but not for long.

"All right," he accepted slowly and with some hesitation. "I'll try."

He was conducted to the testing chamber by the two guards, followed closely by the President and Vacslov. They stood watching curiously in t-ear ignorance while Wiltshaw ran through a series of checks. He was filled with elation when he saw the generators for the force field all set up, and he glanced at Vacslov as he checked the control console.

"You were here watching Tallent making his first test I suppose," he commented.

"That's right. We all saw him vanish without a trace."

"That was because he didn't use the force field." Wiltshaw was relieved that the electrician who had set it up was no longer on duty. "Now you've lost Tallent for ever!" He's probably a billion years away by now." Get on with it," the President ordered impatiently.

Wiltshaw nodded. He took Vacslov to the control panels and pointed out the main switch that activated the force field he had said he needed around the Craft.

"When I want to go inside the Craft," Wiltshaw said, "you must push home this switch. Have you got that?"

Vacslov nodded intently and Wiltshaw took a last look around. He connected several circuits and got his system flickered. A faint hum came from concealed power units, and the noise slowly picked up a rising crescendo that stabilised at an infinite level. Then he turned over his ears with his hands and the two guards lost their alertness under the sonic pressure. But it didn't matter now as Wiltshaw crossed to the Craft. He paused to check that the slide-rocker was opened and clamped till him as he entered the Craft and closed the hatch, for now he was beyond their power.

Stretching himself out on the couch, Wiltshaw swung the small control panel over his chest and decided where to place the buttons on it. Lights flickered, changed colour,

He was standing on the threshold of the unknown and he had no idea what would happen.

then remained constant. He glanced out of the Craft and saw Vacslov standing by the console, hand on the main switch of the force field. Wiltshaw waved, and closed his eyes as he saw Vacslov's shoulders heave as the man thrust home the switch.

Wiltshaw had expected the blinding flash as the force field was activated, but he opened his eyes quickly, his vision clearing. When he looked toward the President he saw they were gone; the guards as well! He had expected that, for they had been standing in the area of the force field and had disintegrated in the tremendous release of power. They were all gone, and Wiltshaw sensed that he had evened the score for the past twenty years. His father's death had been avenged.

Now nervousness gripped him. He was trembling inside, but mainly from anticipation. He was standing upon the threshold of the unknown and he had no idea what would happen. His right hand trembled as his forefinger stabbed down at the button that would activate the Craft. He hit the button and closed his eyes, his mind working at terrific speed as he waited that split second of eternity for action.

A nightmare of light and sound erupted and shock waves tore at him. Invisible surges of power pinned him to the couch and blackness swept overwhelmingly into his mind. Some gigantic vortex tugged at his molecular structure. Time seemed to stand still. There was a growing sensation of falling weightlessly down, down into a dark void.

Then a flashing moment of stark awareness pierced his reeling brain and he made a frightening recollection. The impulse cell which he had removed earlier to sabotage the Craft was in his absence! It was still in his pocket. In his eagerness to destroy Vacslov and the President in the force field he had forgotten to replace the cell in the ignition circuit. Its absence had caused Tallent to shoot off into Time without the security of the Craft and denied him the ability to return! The thought
Incense wafted across Orne's nostrils. A hidden vodder began emitting low organ notes, a melody full of unrest. Painfully aware of the path which had come up behind the priest's voice, but never drowned it. Orne saw a dervish circling the massed audience to the right, priests there waving censers. Blue smoke wafted over the listeners in ghostly curls. It seemed that cadence as the priest paused. It rang seven times. Like a man hypnotized. Orne absorbed the whole scene. The emotions act like a psi force! What is this power?

The priest at the stupa raised both arms, fists clenched, shouted: "Eternal paradise to all true believers! Eternal damnation to all unbelievers!" His voice lowered. "You, who seek the eternal truth, fail to Orne, who had experienced it before. It beat like a rhythm. A bearded priest came from behind the stupa, standing in front of it. He wore a black robe, a three-cornered red hat. His eyes glistened in the dull-green reflection off the priest ahead.

"Keep up! Keep up!" Orne recovered his stride, but still felt the cascading emotions. His light cast a dull-green reflection off the priest ahead. A murmurous rhythm began to sound from the processions, louder as it came down the line, riding over the shuffle and slither of robes, drowning out the chitter of insects in their aspects, they show us the way!"

"Have faith in the eternal truth of this divine priest paused. It rang seven times. flaming grew louder. Presuming greatness roared within Orne. He came out of his reverie to recognize the danger all around him. At the outer corner of the kneeling crowd a student lifted an arm, pointed at Orne. "What about him? he's a student! Why isn't he kneeling?"

Orne recovered his stride, but still felt the psi force. This psi was different, somehow, from the other psi forces. People feared him. The tension of the crowd was a tangible thing, a fuse that smoked and sizzled its way toward a massive explosion. The bearded priest glared at Orne, the dark face contorted with the raspings of students' torches. The amphitheater suddenly was a nightmare scene to Orne, a demonic place, and all the more so when he still carried his own torch like a waving beacon. Its light revealed the trail beside him leading off into blackness. Abruptly, the priest at the stupa raised his voice to an insane scream: 'Bring me the head of that blasphemer!' Orne felt the force of it like a psi blast. He tripped on a root, almost fell. His robe caught on his face.

"Eternal paradise to all true believers! Eternal damnation to all unbelievers!" The calendar told him it was his fourteenth birthday. Almost directly above Orne and no more than fifty paces away, someone shouted: "Do you hear him?"

"Off to the left, an answering voice yelled: 'No!'"

Orne picked out a dim figure at the end of the procession far ahead, growing louder as it passed him. Orne was a nightmarish scene to Orne, a demoniac figure, the face contorted in the kaleidoscopic gleams of the mob. The sun was blazing down. His mind was pleasantly relaxed, but his head was aching a little. From inside the nearby house a slight noise came. From inside the house a slight noise came. Orne's crashing flight into the night from his pursuers. The trail curved into the night. Unbeliever! . . ." Orne felt the force of it like a psi blast. He tripped on a root, almost fell. His robe caught in his face. Orne smiled, hugging himself still to his shivering. Bakrish said to the Abbob Halmryagh near him. As he thought of the Abbob, Orne felt the vacant glowing within him ease momentarily, then thrash stronger. What was this the way a field agent of the I-A operates? Orne felt that he had encountered another clue to Abbob, but its meaning was not clear to him. He fell into a fluid rhythm of flight—under bushes, avoid leaves, dart through the darkest places where trees blotted out the stars. But the trees thinned out, bushes came further apart. He heard the lawn underright, realized he had come down to the last part of the park area. Dim lights glowed from windows to his right. There was a wall. Orne crouched, hugged himself to still his shivering. Bakrish said to the Abbob Halmryagh, "Almost directly above Orne and no more than fifty paces away, someone shouted: 'Do you hear him?'

"Off to the left, an answering voice yelled: 'No!'"

"He's his robe! I've got his robe!' "Get his head!" someone screamed. 'Tear his head from his skull!'

"Orne ducked a limb, scrambled and slid down a hill, plunged across the trail and tore his way through a thicker of tangled trees. As he emerged from the thicket, he saw a sight that frightened him. Branches clawed at his skin. He felt the mob, the mob fixed on him from above him—curses, tearing sounds, thumps. Lights waved. Robed figures leaped through the night. Again, Orne found a trail. It went downhill to his right. He turned onto it, gasping, stumbling. His legs ached. A tight band held his chest. His head throbbed and he saw that he had lost the balance. Orne pushed himself away from the tree, crept down the hill, working his way cautiously, feeling each step. He heard someone running above him, footsteps thumping away to the right. He tripped on a root, almost fell. His robe caught on his face. Orne's crashing flight into the night. Unbeliever! . . ."

\[...\]
flesh, and Harding saw red blood pour out onto the grass. Some of it was his and he knew it.

The seeds were growing. They were increasing in size quickly - almost quickly enough to be felt. Each seed was like a marble, hard and terrible beneath his skin. He could also feel long tendrils that had grown from the seeds, worming down deeper into his flesh and face. He was doomed, and he knew it.

He shot the nearest Bouncer. It exploded in a loathsome squelch of torn flesh, and Harding saw red blood pour out onto the grass. Some of it was his own. That thought made him retch, again heavily against a tree. He was sweating. Suddenly, viciously, the three Bouncers attacked him, fixing him to the ground. He raised himself knuckled and hunched, as if the seed-hosts were his allies, and fought back. He kicked at them and ran for his life. After fifty yards they fell away from him and left him alone.

He laughed and almost smiled. Then he realised that they'd successfully managed to make him lose his gun. They learned quickly. He was alone and unarmed, in the middle of the wood with three Bouncers. Harding didn't know where the ship was. He had the most awful shock of his life. He covered twenty yards quickly and ducked out through the leaves, clearing. None of the trees was large. Four or five ten-foot saplings grew in the clearing. Harding looked back. There were also several other bodies - the putrid, horrible corpses of various native animals, all ravaged beyond belief. Harding felt himself sobbing and crying again. He knew it was a foolish and childish thing to do, and he knew that he would lose his wits completely. He could not help himself. He glanced at the corpses again, but his throat was too torn for him to manage a scream. He could only sob.

He drew from each empty pocket, growths protruding from the dry flesh of his comrades, disappearing into the ground around them. Similarly, slender trunks stood upright from the sundered bodies of men and animals alike, clasping at the sky like demon fingers. None of the men's faces was recognisable, for most of the seeds had taken hold in the soft flesh of the cheeks and throat. Harding touched his own face, feeling long shoots and a kind of mindless calm. There was almost a dignity in the manner in which he waited for their attack. He didn't wait long.

They went on him, tearing at his legs until his mind rocked and the ground came up and hit him. He was down, knowing that he would never arise. The Bouncers seemed to know this, too, for they left him there to die. Harding thought that he would die, but he didn't. He was alone, lying in the centre of a stench and horror beyond all reason.

But he knew that it was ingenious - ingenious and, in a strange alien way, logical. There were few insects and no birds on the planet, and the only winds were steady breezes that appeared rarely. Thus the local vegetation must long ago have faced a problem, and at least one tree had come up with an answer. The problem was seed-dispersal, and the answer was dreadful.

Harding didn't know exactly what the Bouncers were. They might have been animals living in a grim symbiosis with the trees, attracting seed-hosts and then driving them away to fresh ground. For this service, they would have a more or less free hand with the hosts during such time as these hosts were dangerous from the point of view of the tree. Alternatively, they might well have been entirely vegetable organisms, an integral part of the tree itself. Or again, they could have been part-plant and part-vegetable. He didn't know.

Nor could he really care. All he knew for certain was that he was the tree's most recent victim. It had killed him. He wasn't dead yet, but it had killed him just the same. Perhaps a minute, perhaps an hour, perhaps a day.

So this is what it is like to die, he thought almost objectively. There was a vast curiosity about death, a great burning interest that consumed him. There was also a dim dark fear. And the pain had come back, now that he could feel death on his horizon - a tearing, damp, red pain that was slowly pulling him apart. His face was in shreds, his throat a gaping crimson hole. The night was in the wood and it was horrid, and he went on, tearing at his legs until his mind rocked and the ground came up and hit him. He was down, knowing that he would never arise. The Bouncers seemed to know this, too, for they left him there to die. Harding thought that he would die, but he didn't. He was alone, lying in the centre of a stench and horror beyond all reason.

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