

FIRST ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

UNEARTH

THE MAGAZINE OF SCIENCE FICTION DISCOVERIES

NUMBER FIVE/WINTER 1978/\$1.50



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**WINTER 1978
VOLUME TWO
NUMBER ONE**

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for "Conjugal Rites"

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Looking Back Into The Future

One year ago, there appeared a magazine that was, and is, unique in its dedication to new writers. With almost no money to smooth the road ahead, we may have been foolish, but we had something we believed in, and we wanted to share it with everyone who loves this medium that is at once more real and more fantastic than any other. We believed there was room for more dreamers, and we believed that a literature of growth should do everything possible to seek them out.

And so UNEARTH was born. We've printed a lot of good fiction in the course of our initial year, and we've brought twenty-two new writers into the field. Our "First Sale" feature has become an important preserve of the early work of sf's most important writers, as well as a place for readers to gain insight into the authors themselves, through the authors' new introductions to their works. We have brought new artists to the field, and we have unveiled new concepts in what sf illustration can do. We have provided, mostly through the columns of Harlan

From the Editors

**John M.
Landsberg**

**Jonathan
Ostrowsky-
Lantz**

Ellison and Hal Clement, a storehouse of useful, and entertaining, information about the writing of science fiction. And, most gratifying of all, we have made many friends, for each of whose support I am grateful.

This literature of ours is concerned with the future of humankind, and UNEARTH is concerned with the future of this literature. Ahead of us, I can see more new writers, more new fiction, and more new ideas, that show me just how vital science fiction can be. They also show me how much UNEARTH has left to offer; our journey is just beginning, and I hope you will be with us.

— *John M. Landsberg*

* * *

Several readers have asked, over the course of the past year, why there haven't been any editorials since the one in the first issue. It's very simple: we've felt all along that the magazine is our message. What you read in UNEARTH speaks for us, as it were, as much as it does for its authors.

If I *were* to speak out, I'd probably say something to the effect that UNEARTH has the most consistently well-written and entertaining fiction, as well as the most interest-

ing articles, of any SF magazine. I'd also point out that there is currently only one prozine to which we defer graphically.

And, since I'm not without a wide streak of I-told-you-so, I'd thumb my nose at the critics who said that a magazine built around fiction by new writers couldn't possibly get off the ground, let alone survive. Nyaah, he said, diplomatically.

But I'll let the magazine do my talking.

*

There are a couple of business matters to discuss before we go any farther. As you've already noticed, the cover price of this issue is \$1.50. We think the issue is well worth it, and we hope you will, too. It's not certain at this time whether or not the price increase will be a one-shot deal, or whether it will have to be made permanent. We've been able to make dramatic improvements in the magazine's appearance from issue to issue, but they haven't come cheap. We've been holding the line on raising prices as best we can, but there comes a time when increased costs must be passed on to the reader.

I hope very much that point has not yet been reached. But if we are forced to raise the cover price, all current subscriptions will be unaffected. In addition, subscribers will be given the opportunity to renew at the current rate.

(*cont. on pg. 47*)

An Unearthly Review

Happy Birthday, *Unearth*!

This is not written for you addicts, habitues, enthusiasts and persons of good taste and breeding who already know what a remarkable periodical you hold in your hands, but for the astonished newcomer who reads *Unearth* for the first time, who is becoming aware that after all there is a proving ground for new talent, an outlet for fiction which stands on its own merits and not on its authors' bibliography or their engaging personalities at conventions. This way it will serve as an introduction (How do, Person! Hope you have a happy birthday too!) and as a review of past accomplishments.

Number One: Winter, 1977.

The editors (through the typewriter of Jonathan Ostrowsky-Lantz) fired the starting gun: "...a market solely for writers who [have] not yet made a sale ... Not merely 'good for a new writer,' but *good* by any standards you'd care to apply." An ambitious and worthy — and risky — project certainly, but one desperately needed. That old knothole that all of us have to face at some time in our lives, usually when

Guest
Editorial

Theodore
Sturgeon

we're least equipped to drag through: *can't get the job without the experience, can't get the experience without the job* applies as much to the writing game as to any other — maybe more so. The usual procedure was to write and write and write (after having read and read and read), and then to submit and submit until you got some response from an editor, and then to visit him and talk and talk until you both had a clear idea of what you wanted, and then to write and write until you finally hit. This still works as it has worked for Asimov and Silverberg and for me too. Once in a long while — a very long while — a writer with a unique style will come along, writing the way he writes and the hell with what anyone tells him he should write, and he does it and does it until the market moves over and lets him in, and you have a Bradbury. (Malcolm Reiss of *Planet Stories* refused to buy Bradbury's third or fourth story: "You're too good for this magazine. Send it to *Collier's*." And he did.) But then, we had the pulps and the comics in those days to sharpen our tools on; it was rough, but not as rough as it got later.

But now, God bless, there's *Unearth*. Uncle *Unearth* Says We Want You.

Unearth Number One, digest size, staple bound, black and white, 96 pages. Lead story by Debra Thrall, a writer of high

promise with a fine sense of imagery; her Deathsinger Yayelet, is most memorable. Daniel C. Smith with a pioneer planet bride-auction. Paul di Fillipo with a clever and hilarious Malzberg imitation, K. W. MacAnn with a story that owes a lot to the celebrated *Six Christs of Ypsilanti* (but don't knock it for that), Danny Williams with a vividly presented example of the drug-oriented future (a species which I hope is endangered; there's not much more to be said in this area, which doesn't alter the fact that Williams did a good job), and a funny first-contact thing by Chris Dornan.

And now we come to the hallmark of *Unearth*, a brilliantly conceived notion and one of lasting value to writers, collectors and sf enthusiasts generally: The First Sale. *Unearth* reprints, in each issue, the first story of established writers, together with an introduction by that author telling how it was written and sold. This one is Harlan Ellison's; it has never been reprinted before — understandably so, for it is just awful. But you know, it has in it every bit of the fury, the hatred, the passion and compassion and driving force that have become his fame and his fortune. Clumsy as it is, the story is clearly the work of a man of conviction, who can write so well of evil because of his grasp of good. His introduction is as sharply-focussed a portrait of the artist as a

young man as he has ever done (and he's done a lot of them).

The departments in *Unearth* are worth the price — a year's subscription price, each time, especially this one. For it contains one of the best articles on writing I have ever seen anywhere. It's by editor John M. Landsberg, and I guarantee you this: that if you as a writer take his advice, you will sell, and if you don't sell it's because you haven't taken his advice. I say this despite a certain hesitation — he is gratifying to me personally in the article — but I am not about to do the 'modesty forbids' number and deprive you of this remarkable and insightful compass-card. Articles on writing by writers — specifically, an upcoming column by Ellison — are a regular feature of the magazine.

Book reviews in this one are by Craig Gardner and Tyler Matthews, dealing most articulately with *Deus Irae* (Dick & Zelazny) and Silverberg's anthology *The Aliens*. I like their handling of the job. No iconoclasm for its own sake, but when they don't like something, they say so. Gardner also does Films, in this issue *Logan's Run* and *The Man who Fell to Earth*. In the latter, Gardner draws the most interesting and perceptive comparison between *The Man* and *2001* — one I certainly had never heard of. As a reviewer myself from 'way back, I can tell you that it isn't easy to report on

books and films in a way that does more than prove the reviewer has read it, or was there. *Unearth's* reviews come from a wider spectrum than that; what is the place of this work in sf? in literature? in your life and thinking?

And now Science, and bless him, Hal Clement. As a regular columnist he begins a series on science for sf writers, lucid and knowledgeable as only he (and Arthur Clarke, I have to say) can be. *Unearth* — and the rest of us — are fortunate beyond measure to have a man of this stature as a regular contributor.

So much — so very much — for Number One, to give you the size and shape of what will be, I'm sure, a prime collectors' item.

More briefly:

Number Two: Spring, 1977

96 pages again, but already a four-color cover; staple-bound with a lead something — story? article? effusion — which is something, friends, really something, by Keith Justice. I doubt he can do it again; I'm doubtful that he should, but it was worth doing and is certainly worth reading. The editors call it Special Fiction and I suppose that will do. Chris Dornan is back with a puzzle-piece that reads like early Asimov and just misses being latterday Feghoot. Timothy Sullivan makes an amusing mix of interstellar flight and the Marx Brothers, and Sterling Taylor gives us a swords-and-

sorcery bit complete with temple, goddess, vestal and blood. But the shining star of this issue is an exquisite piece by David Frieze, so perfectly wrought, paced and textured that I could hardly believe it, and had to read it again. And when I did, now knowing how it would come out, and seeing the perfect placement of every word and image in it, I — well, I learned from it. What more can I say? Except: watch this guy.

The "First Sale" is Hal Clement's, a (if you'll excuse the phrase) bewilderingly accurate SCIENCE fiction story of hardcore Campbellian vintage. His science article is about genetic engineering and the notion of mer-persons. As in his previous column, he ships out story-springboards by the truckload. The book reviews (Dick's *A Scanner Darkly* and *Who's Who in Science Fiction*, by Ash) are by Terence Green and Tyler Matthews, the first careful and provocative and the second an hilarious bruise job.

Number Three: Summer, 1977

I have been itching since the beginning to get to Number Three. Not only does it have the first of Harlan Ellison's columns on writing — a wonderful explication of the art of titling a story; not only does it have that inexcusably obscure master Algis Budrys' first sale, and his interesting introduction to it; not only does Clement hand out still more fascinating yet

solidly based notions of life on other planets and Gardner and Matthews, joined by Susan Wood, produce fine reviews not only of books, but of records, plus Gardner on films (though I will *not* hold still for his dismissing *Performance* as a "much lesser film" than *Demon Seed*, which to this eye seemed a triumph of special-effects over matter, with very little mind involved) but (and now at last he drops an anchor from this hot-air balloon of syntax) Issue Three has the finest clutch of fiction to be found in any prozine around. I know that there is an embarrassment of suggestion for Hugo categories, but I have long wanted one to go to the best issue of any magazine during the Hugo year, taking into account art and editorial content; if such there were, I'd nominate this one.

James Blaylock's lead piece is a meld, if you can imagine such a thing, of Bradbury and Carl Sandburg, along with plenty of pure Blaylock and maybe a shot of Laferty. I love a man who loves words. Richard Bowker has a delightful and sardonic comedy about what is laughingly known as the ethical drug trade, Somtow Sucharitkul writes a completely original tale of an America taken over, of all things, by Incas, Toby Perkins does the only story I didn't like, but that's a personal matter; I don't get off on torture and agony, even in a deft comedy. Finally,

however, there's William Gibson's "Fragments of a Hologram Rose."

It takes a writer with the skill of a Pangborn to draft so huge and detailed a canvas by a fine dotted line all around the edges of his subject; it takes a very deep human understanding indeed to so eloquently, and so quietly, get into, and share, a bereaved man's anguish. Here's another one to watch: William Gibson.

Number Four: Fall 1977

And now look at us, the bound-to-fail experiment (lots of people said that): case-bound with a spine, with a perfectly beautiful Barber painting on the cover, with 128 pages, — a very handsome package.

The lead is Part One of a long story by Timothy Sullivan, (which, to show that I am not writing an unalloyed puff, I have to say I don't like a whole bunch), a circus story by John Kelly which, for its glimpse of horror, would be worthy of a by-line like Robert Bloch's, a nice piece of characterization by Mike Baron which irritates only because it ends too soon, a Bruce Kent piece about a sealed-off and insane Manhattan that has its moments (I hope Kent writes a whole lot more) and Chris Dornan again, this time with a rather hard-to-believe, but entertaining *Black Mask* pastiche about crime control on an earthlike planet. And there's a poem by Caroline Dechert, clearly another word-lover, with nice

imagery and a most precise control of cadence and texture.

Ellison's column deals with characterization, and the necessity for good science fiction to be good fiction, and the often-overlooked fact that fiction is *people*, not ideas, and if you want to delineate people, you have to do more than the kind of thing you hear in a missing-persons report; you have to listen to them as you write, watch them, smell them if necessary. I couldn't agree more. Gardner does what I consider the definitive review of *Star Wars* and Matthews and Landsberg, joined by Gordon Powers cover a large clutch of books from swords-and-sorcery to hard science. The First Sale is Norman Spinrad's "Last of the Romany"; and Hal Clement deals with possible life-forms in the Solar System, mostly Titan.

I have neglected to mention that the editors give credit to the artists in each issue, and introduce their writers with amusing and informative thumbnail paragraphs. All in all, a full-fledged, professional job.

So: now you know the birth, growth and puberty of *Unearth*. I hope you support it, and beat on your friends until they do too. I think there is more promise, more future for the entire field between these covers than there is in any other magazine now published.

Again: Happy Birthday, *Unearth!* ●



Monk was satisfied with what his \$50 had bought. Then he learned it was only a down payment.

Conjugal Rites

by Steve Vance

I came to Arenosa after killing three men with my hands.

That's as good a way as any to start this thing, I guess. It's the first thing I've ever tried to write, and and it'll probably be the last, but for once I feel like telling somebody something.

My name's Emmanuel Lumbrera, but people call me Monk because I've got big shoulders and long arms like a gorilla. I don't bother people so long as they don't

bother me, and I never would have been sent to prison if those three guys hadn't tried to roll me in an alley behind Charlie Steelman's bar late one night. Two of them had pipes, and when my skull had been laid open in a couple of places, I sort of lost control. When I came around, there were three red bodies crumpled at my feet and a sweating rookie cop holding the barrel of his .38 at my belly. It's a wonder I didn't kill him, too.

I've heard the other cons say that I could have gotten off even the triple murder charge if I'd had a smart lawyer who could play up the self-defense angle and make a hero of me. But, being an unskilled laborer and flat broke in a city that had six other homicides that same night, I could only rely on a public defender. I drew a guy who didn't shave yet, a judge who hated spics, and a life term in Arenosa State Prison. A bad hand no matter who deals.

So, I've spent six years behind these walls on a somewhat reduced charge, alone and liking it that way. People take me for a big, dumb animal, because I don't talk much or make friends, but I want them to look at me like that. Nobody hustles me, and, after a few fights, nobody tries to put me into any pecking order, so I've got my privacy and the books in the library. I read practically everything that comes in.

I'll have to admit, though, I

don't stay out of trouble completely. Three months ago, Dan Felcher — the screws call him Dangerous Dan because he's a karate nut, and the craziest son of a bitch in the joint — decided that I scared too many people with a reputation built on too infrequent fights, so he decided to knock me off, make me wipe the floor with my face. He should've left me alone.

Word has it that a bunch of the screws really egged him into it, and I've got to believe they knew it was coming. When he jumped me in the laundry, I saw at least seven of them standing back, making and taking bets with the other prisoners like we were all at a dog track. Dan and I gave them a show for their money by puching the crap out of one another and almost bringing the laundry down on us like Samson at the Philistine temple. I hadn't started the fight — hell, I've got parole coming up soon — but when Felcher came at me with that slick bald head and that glare in his eyes, what was I supposed to do? Faint?

He screamed a lot and tried to work me over with that martial arts junk, but I landed a few shots that took most of the starch out of him early. He got wilder and louder as we fought, but when I caught him with the right he was gone. The guards jumped in, very officiously, after he was cold on the floor, and one even tried to slug me to make his "interven-

tion" look real. Still pumped up from the fight, I pounded him out before the others could wrestle me to my senses.

"Damn, Monk," I remember one guard saying at the time, "with a punch like that you could have been rich, the heavyweight champion, instead of in this hole!"

I *am* the champ, if only of Arenosa.

Again the cards came out bad. If I'd left it at punching out Dan and sending him to the hospital, I almost certainly would have gotten off with the help of the screws who'd bet on the fight. But busting up the smartass guard cost a lot: thirty days in solitary, to be exact.

I went in and read all of the books they allowed me to take (one was even by Joseph Conrad, and I'll lay odds there aren't two guys in the joint who'll say I've ever heard of him). Actually, it was kind of a vacation, since I got out of my job. I don't mind being alone.

Coming out, I met the same walls and bars. The exercise yard and the library were still there, but something was different. It was more of a sensation than anything I could see. I felt like the duck on the pond who doesn't see or hear the stone thrown into the water but who can feel the waves it sets up. Scuttlebutt claimed that Leon Coburn had made his biggest score.

Coburn was our ace scrounger.

Every prison's got a guy who can come up with the goods that everybody inside needs, whether he's called a scrounger, a scoop, a lifter, or whatever. Coburn is the best I've seen in six years, and he's seldom failed in delivering everything from X-rated films to uncut Horse street valued at ten grand. I've never known how he does it, and I've asked only once.

A few days went by as I settled back into my routine, and I didn't give Coburn another thought, not in need of anything he could get for me. Then, about a week after I finished solitary, he approached me during a free period in the exercise yard.

"How's it going, Monk?" he asked casually.

I grunted, hoping he'd move on and leave me alone.

"I hear that Dan's not out of the pesthole yet. You sure did a job on him."

"Yeah."

"I got a deal going, Monk," he said in a low voice. "It's the best thing I've ever managed; it's my crowning glory, and I want you in on it."

"Get lost," I muttered. I turned away, but he followed me like a dog playing with a kid.

"Come on, Monk, you can't walk out on this!" His voice was high and fast. "I've got what you've wanted for six damned years! Any straight con in this place would give me his legs for

this chance!"

He caught me. I should have left him with his jaws flapping, but the urgent tone in his words hit something in my brain. What had I missed most in those long years? "Tell me about it," I suggested, grabbing his shirtfront and lifting him half off the ground.

His eyes bugged out and he tried to swallow. "Easy, man! I like you, that's why I'm giving you a turn."

"At what?"

"A woman."

We stood there, not talking, while I thought about women and being alone. He had to be lying through his teeth or trying to set me up with an effeminate jockey. Coburn had always delivered before, but I knew he was bullying me this time, and I tightened my grip on his shirt. "You're a lying bastard, Coburn."

He got a little panicky then. "I swear, Monk! I can get you a woman. I've already done it. Ask Silvers, Amos Dunn, Phil Cassidy!"

Then I thought again, slowly, and let him stew under my fist. Finally, I said, "What'll it cost me?"

He sighed in relief. "You got fifty?"

I nodded, since I've kept almost everything the state has paid me in all of my jobs inside.

"I figured you did," he said with a nervous laugh. "You don't

blow it on poker or smack. I want you to have this chance, so you give me the fifty and I'll set it up for Friday night, while the movie is on."

"When do you go before the board?" I asked.

He looked confused again. "I'm not up for parole for eighteen months."

"Okay, I'll give you the money. But I've got a year and a half to get my refund, Coburn."

I had three days to wait and not show anybody the other side of my face, just in case it read "gullible" and "anxious," Monk Lumbrera is big, dumb, and mean, and everyone leaves him to himself.

Coburn kept reassuring me every time our paths crossed, even though I never said a word to him. He wanted to tell me that my money was being well-spent, because nobody wants to owe me.

On Friday night, we were all herded into the big auditorium to watch "The Longest Yard," with Burt Reynolds, and I sat in the back row next to the south door, as Coburn had instructed me. Ten minutes into the film, while Reynolds was making the short cop tall, I felt a hand fall out of the darkness onto my shoulder. The hand belonged to Ben Hutton, an old, amiable guard who could be bought for any purpose by five bucks. He motioned for me to

follow him.

We moved out of the auditorium and into an empty corridor that led to a seldom used storeroom at the corner of the upper deck C-block. I saw Coburn waiting outside the door with some candles from the crafts shop, an overcoat or robe of some kind, and a big, heavy book with an illustrated cover. He looked like a Catholic priest.

"Are you ready, Monk old boy?" he asked through a smile that could have cracked his face.

"She in there?" I asked, pointing to the storeroom.

"She will be," he said. "Hutton will keep an eye out while you enter the sanctum for your tryst." Like plenty of other guys, Coburn liked to throw about words that they think will confuse me. "You'd better enjoy it, Monk, because she's only available for thirteen visits, and you're number twelve. Step inside and wait; she'll come to you."

Still uncertain as to what I should expect, I stepped by Coburn into the cool, dark room. I thought that some guard's daughter would greet me, but no one reached out as the door was shut behind me. An unrelieved blackness flowed over the room.

Coburn's voice came faintly to me, and he seemed to be whispering in a repetitive, chanting rhythm. I didn't hear Hutton or anyone else answering the confusing words.

Some men probably would have pulled open the door and pushed in Coburn's face, but I'd learned nothing but patience in Arenosa, so I waited quietly with my eyes closed against the darkness. The first thing that came to me was a faint, warm breeze washing over my face and bringing with it the scent of ocean. I sniffed the salt and listened to the sudden closeness of nighttime waves. A pale glow on my lids caused me to look up to the ceiling, where I saw the moon.

I had been in that storeroom plenty of times in six years, and I knew every dirty shelf, bucket, and bottle of cleaning fluid in the eight by ten hole. There were no cracks in the roof and no drafts in the walls, but that was a fat yellow moon hanging over my head and a soft sea breeze wiping my face. And the waves were there, only fifteen feet away, with sand under my shoes...

"Coburn," I said in a low voice. "What're you doing, Coburn?"

A slender swell rose from among the waves, and the glistening drops outlined a woman's body. Then I didn't care about the hows or whys of the moment, only this living scene from a book I'd bought during my hot adolescence. It was all coming true: the island, the warm trade winds, the beautiful woman walking like a goddess from the rolling waves. I could even hear — faintly, from somewhere behind —

the sounds of "Kui Lei" played on simple instruments.

She came smiling to me, with her long black hair parted over her brown shoulders and falling about her glistening breasts.

"Emmanuel," she whispered, like spoken love. "I have waited for you."

I had to touch her face before I could be sure that it was no dream, and by then she was loosening my shirt and running her fingers through the hair on my chest.

We sank onto the beach.

Daylight brought reality to my cell, though I couldn't remember leaving the storeroom, and reality brought tedium. To the outside world, I was still dumb Monk, ignoring lines I wasn't supposed to understand, and giving notice to anybody who got too close or irritating. But inside I felt better than I could recall in my life. She had been everything I'd wanted and needed.

At supper, I sat alone, as usual, until Ibn Al Rasmah, a big, muscular black guy who was only half sure that he was afraid of me, sat across the table and helped himself to my salt. Since the ruining of Felcher, Rasmah had taken over as the "meanest bastard in the can," and his move at dinner was mostly to show his followers that he didn't think so much of my reputation. Not feeling like fighting or walking away, I sat and ate on.

After some minutes of being ignored, Rasmah said loudly, "You don't mind if a dark brother eats with you, do you, brother?"

I looked up at him, but continued eating.

"I say, it's okay that I sits here, Mr. Monk, right?"

I belched. "You're here, ain't you?"

That wasn't what he had wanted, but it was enough. When he spoke again, his tone was low and confidential. "I hear you paid Coburn a big fifty for some entertainment last night."

I nodded.

"Me, too. Two weeks back. That turkey can get anything for a price." The traditional need to brag and compare notes took over his words. "She good to you, brother?"

"Hmm," I agreed, indulging myself.

"Yeah, the best, the ... You like black girls, Monk?"

"Huh?"

"Last night, man, the black girl?"

"She's Polynesian," I answered, surprising him with the reply and the four syllable word.

"You jivin', Monk. That little girl was as black as my sister."

"Not last night."

Nobody disagreed with Ibn Al Rasmah, not even Monk Lumbrera. He stood and looked down at me from six and a half feet. "If you afraid of being found with a black girl, boy, maybe we

better settle this here." He slammed a fist into the table.

I stood, also, even though I was still several inches shorter than he was. Every eye in the place was glued on us. "Get away from the table," I said.

There was a long, tense silence while Rasmah looked me over and remembered the faces that I had left staring blankly up from the floor. I had no choice, but he did.

"Can't talk to some folks," he grunted. He lifted his plate and walked away, a loser without taking a punch.

The first murder came the next Friday. Lights had been out for three hours, and the only steady sound in the block came from the screw's steps as he checked out the cells with his infernal flashlight. It was hot, and every time I drifted asleep, I would roll over into a fresh pool of sweat and wake up. I was in the middle of a roll when Paul Chadwick started screaming his lungs out in a cell six down from mine.

Shouts from other cons and guards mixed in, but Paul's agonized screams rode over all of the noise. I stumbled to the front of my cell, but I couldn't see what was causing the panic.

Finally, somebody hit the main light switch. Chadwick had stopped yelling by then and only the shouts of his cellmate echoed down the corridor. Half the cons

awake thought that a fire had started in the room — that's one of the worst things a man behind bars can imagine — but when the guards checked Paul's body, it was clear that he hadn't burned to death. As I heard it later, the bloody pieces of Chadwick's body were scattered to the four corners of the cell, making the whole place look like a butcher's floor. He had been torn apart.

The screws hustled the other guy in the cell out of the block (who else could they suspect?), but I could hear the hysterical man screaming about a red glowing tiger all the way out. In the four days that followed, no one could get him to change his story.

The next Tuesday night, we got to see "Slapshot" with Paul Newman as the first of our twice weekly movies. Chadwick's death was still news, but most everybody figured that the other con had done it with a knife somehow. Everything was calm until a couple of hours after lights out.

This time, the cat came again in A-block and ripped Carlton Roganberg to shreds. When Petey Richards tried to help his buddy, he got two broken arms for his trouble.

The warden started a hardnosed questioning to find what he thought was a psycho, but the witnesses still said it was no human at all; they insisted it was a huge, glowing cat-thing with teeth and

claws like daggers. Nobody seemed to notice that both murders happened on movie nights.

That changed on Friday. Even though a good-sized crowd watched "Monty Python and the Holy Grail," at least thirty guys reported in sick with no illness the doctor could find. Maybe they guessed that not watching the regular film would protect them from whatever was tearing prisoners apart.

It didn't work. Hank Neilson was spending the night in the infirmary when he died screaming.

Arenosa was almost ready for a major riot. In one week, we'd had three savage killings that the screws couldn't explain, much less stop. Guys who had shot their own mothers were huddling together in corners and watching other cons with wide, white eyes.

The warden might have missed the meaning of the pattern, but I thought that I might have figured something out. Stepping out of character for once, I started asking a few questions around, and no one, not even Ibn Al Rasmah, refused me any answers. Like I'd thought, Chadwick, Roganberg, and Neilson had all paid Coburn for meetings with his smuggled girl, and they had been the first three to go with her, all on movie nights when it was easiest to get away from the guards.

I didn't understand why this was happening, but I knew that, in a way I didn't like, it involved me.

Saturday afternoon in the library was the first time I got to talk with Coburn. I found him diggin nervously in some books from the non-fiction section and, after giving a guard a look that sent him to the far side of the room, I sat at the table with the guy who'd arranged my "tryst."

"Hi, Monk," he grinned sickly. "What's up?"

"What you looking for, Leon?" I said.

"Now? Uh, nothing, just something about painting, maybe."

I picked up one of the books. "In *The Ways of Satanism*?"

"Oh, no, not in that. I just..."

Leaning on the table enough to make it groan, I stared him in the face with a Liston glare. "I got it figured, man. You couldn't dope me into thinking I was on a beach with that girl, and I know it wasn't a dream. And that ain't no knife ripping these cons to pieces. They all had dealings with you recently, did you know that?"

He was sweating in streams by then. "Yeah?"

"You conjured, didn't you, Coburn?"

I thought he was going to run or attack me. But he started shaking his head and rubbing his hands together like a cold wind had blown past him. "Jeez, I never thought you'd be the one to guess it

Monk."

"It had to be supernatural."

He heaved a sigh. "It is; well, I had to try it, didn't I? Lord, I didn't believe it would ever *work*! But it did" A smile drifted over his face. "I was able to call up any woman I wanted. I tried it out on Paul Chadwick and he didn't have to pay."

"A succubus," I said. He started to answer, but I added, "Did one of those books tell you how to do it?"

"Yeah. A real old one, probably donated when the place was built. I could call it up just thirteen times, but I didn't realize what I'd have to pay."

"She's collecting now," I agreed. "She must be tearing their souls out or something, one by one; that means she'll be coming for Arnstaff, Mullins, Rasmah, and me."

A sudden, sharp fear flickered across his face, and he stared at my clenched hands as if he couldn't believe he saw them. "Monk," he began shrilly, "don't get stupid! Don't kill me, Monk!"

I didn't move. "Why not?"

"I'll *help* you! I was looking for some way to stop it when you came in! I won't be any good to you if I'm dead!"

"How do I know you won't just wait until she comes for me, Coburn? What's your stake in this?"

"It's not a 'she,' it's a monster!

And I've got to find a way to beat it ... I was the thirteenth man. I conjured it for myself a week ago Tuesday. Oh, God...."

He lay face down among the books, and I believe he started to cry. I left, letting the guard wonder how I reduced a man to tears without raising a fist.

I knew that I couldn't rely on Coburn to pull me out of this one. In the first place, the man was falling apart like an old building under a wrecking ball, and exhibiting more than enough symptoms to send him off to the nearest nut hatch. Secondly, he had one distinct advantage over me and all of the others he had suckered into his "crowning glory," that being the simple fact that he would be the last man the succubus came for. Even if he managed to discover some way of appeasing or driving away the spirit, he might still casually wait out our deaths and use the method only when his own life was in jeopardy. Maybe that sounds inhuman, but a man has to watch his own behind, and I know Coburn wouldn't cry at my funeral.

So I went to work for myself. Before, in every challenge that I had ever faced, I had been able to rely on my brute size and muscle to pull me through, and it had seldom failed me, but here I was meeting a thing that was beyond fists and knees, a creature that looked like a human/cat hybrid and could shred

a man with terrifying ease.

It didn't take long for me to discover that none of Coburn's books would help me. While the other residents of Arenosa wisely kept their distance because of my heightened irascibility, I studied *The Ways of Satanism* and four other volumes like it, and searched for any way to turn back this force that was waiting for me. But they were all based on the early mystic legends of the Jewish and Christian religions, and contained one main feature: payment for sin. In this case there was no forgiveness, no patron saint for the defense of the seduced; we had enjoyed the pleasures of supernatural lust, so we were expected to deliver the generally accepted settlement.

Sunday was long and frustrating; I left my bunk only for meals and to go to the toilet. I punched a guy who had too much to laugh about in the laundry on Monday. By six p.m. Tuesday, I was ready to tear the damned place apart, but the whole joint was on the verge of exploding since everyone knew that movie night brought death.

My brain throbbed as I tossed one useless book onto the floor and lifted another from the new stack that had been provided by a supernaturally-inclined guard I had spoken with after exhausting the meager library supply. His contributions had been more of the same religiously oriented — and useless — mysticism up until that

time, but the book I had just picked up promised something different. It was called *Summoning the Unearthly: Dealing With the Powers of Evil*.

It wasn't a part of the accepted Christian or Jewish mythology, and the writer dealt with "suppressed and forbidden knowledge of the ancient efficacious beliefs and practices." Hell, why should I wade through a pagan ideology to combat a Christian monster? But then, why shouldn't I? I'd gotten no help from the writings of the belief that had produced the succubus, so why not look to other, maybe older ideas? These things worked because the people practicing them believed they would, and I was about ready to believe anything.

Figuring that false hope was better than none, I plunged into the book with new viciousness, and met with beasts, forces, and nightmare creations that made the tame horrors of the succubus fade in my memory. An hour passed, prison life went on around me, but I knew only what the poorly printed words in the book told me, and I didn't grin at their quaint beliefs or practices. Once I might even have laughed, but not now.

The solution came three quarters of the way through the book. It was protection that could be brought forth with little of the ritualistic mumbo-jumbo that accompanied most conjuring, and it required

only one prop, a marking substance. Taking the smooth bar of soap that I had been allowed in my cell, I sprinkled it with tapwater, blessed it with the words that were in the book, and hid it in my pants in preparation for the job to come.

I didn't want to wait another day to try my theory, not because I was worried about saving any of the cons ahead of me, but because I *had* to know whether it would work, so I tucked the small book away in a pocket and went to the bars of my cage to start yelling. My voice was full and rang out through the whole block with a power that scared plenty of the long-time screws who had never heard me raise my voice except in fights. I shouted with all of my lungs and shook the bars so hard that they seemed to loosen under my fists. It didn't take long for the watch guard to come running to my cell with his face red and sweating.

"Hey, hey!" he shouted. "What's this? Pipe down there!"

"I got to see Joe Arnstaff," I answered.

"What? Shut up! You crazy or something? Get back in your bunk!" he said nervously. He wasn't a long-timer.

"I got to see Arnstaff *now*!" I bellowed. When he stepped close enough, I grabbed both of his hands and jerked him up against the bars so that he was pinned like a fly. "Yell for help," I ordered

him.

He didn't have to be told twice. His voice sounded like it came from some hysterical woman, and it brought four other screws running with their sticks at the ready. They tried to beat me off of him from a safe position outside the cell, and though they couldn't reach in far enough to hit any vital places, their clubs bounced off my hands and forearms with a crude sort of rhythm. I responded by pulling harder on the trapped guard's wrists and making him cry louder while his shoulders popped. Finally they ordered my cell open and flooded through the door to swarm over me, just like I had hoped they would.

We went to the floor in a heap, and I relaxed so that none of them would feel obligated to smash my brains into jelly. A stick across my windpipe effectively pinned me to the concrete, making my words harder to force out, but they heard when I wheezed, "Okay, it's okay, let up!"

"What in the hell's gotten into you, Monk?" shouted one guard who had known me for three years. "Have you gone crazy or something?"

I realized that an explanation would take a long time and be met with confusion or laughed off, so I just said, "I have to see Joe Arnstaff, Mike, and it's got to be soon."

"Arnstaff? he repeated in

amazement. "You can't see him; he's probably dead by now!"

Did he know? "What do you mean, dead?" I asked carefully.

"He tried the stiff chute an hour ago, cut his wrists with the lens from his glasses. They carted him off the grounds to Parker Hospital, but from what I saw it was wasted motion; he was leaking like a sieve."

The hospital — off the prison grounds and out of my range. That meant Arnstaff was as good as dead, since I had to be in the presence of the demon to call up my protector. But I felt no particular sorrow at his loss, though it forced me to wait a few more days to test my theory. But what if Friday's scheduled victim tried the same routine, or some pants-wetting con spilled the entire story to the people in charge and they isolated each of us "targets" for our own protection? That way I would have to wait until the succubus arrived for the twelfth sinner, me, to conjure the defender, leaving myself no time to retreat or plan any other defense.

I had to confront the creature as soon as possible, and that meant tonight.

"Get on your feet," the guard was saying as the others dragged me up. "If you so much as sneeze, I'll ram this club down your stupid throat!"

"Where're we going?"

"For a little visit with the war-

den. I've got a feeling that this incident will net you more time in solitary than that thing with Fletcher."

The warden; a dumb, blind jack-ass who would spit on my story or ship me off for psychiatric examination. A nuthouse was not the kind of hospital I needed to be in.

My answer came as the screws hustled me down the corridor on the way to see the warden. It was a little before eight, and most of the cons were in the yard or exercise hall, but old Braddock, a gray-haired lifer from way back, was slowly mopping down the upper deck of the block. He moved with arthritically delicate movements and took little notice of us when we passed, merely pulling his wheeled bucket and its bottle of cleaning fluid out of our way. The idea hit me with a cold slap, but a desperate man is rightly called the most dangerous animal on earth. He'll do anything.

With a single sweep of my right arm, I sent three of the relaxed screws into the nearest wall and kicked the fourth in his left knee. Before anyone could recover enough to stop me, I spun about, grabbed up the half-full bottle of cleaning fluid, and poured the remainder of its contents down my throat, forcing myself to swallow.

A pain like nothing I had ever felt in my life lashed at me from my lips to my stomach, and I hardly noticed the cursing guards when they tried to pull me away

from the mop bucket. A brilliant red glare burst inside my eyes, filling my head with agony, and I staggered down the corridor trying to scream.

A guard landed on my back, another hit me at the knees, but I stayed on my feet and swatted them away until one managed to get inside at my head and began to club away. The blows clawed my brain back from the clutches of the fre in my throat, and I surrendered gratefully to the icy darkness that they promised.

I came to in the ambulance, but the pain was still raging. A white-coated man was leaning over me, but showing no real concern, and I was able to get his attention well enough to have him lean close to my mouth.

"Where am I going?" I asked through burning lips.

"Parker Memorial," he replied, probably wondering why I'd ask that particular question in my condition.

My gamble had begun to pay off. Parker was the closest hospital that contained a section for treating prisoners, so I had been pretty sure that it would be my destination. Now, if only Arnstaff hadn't succeeded in killing himself.

They pumped my stomach and did what they could for the seared skin inside of me. The stuff I'd drunk had been stronger than I had figured on, and for a while I

thought maybe the whole farce had been wasted because I would die anyway. But the doctors told my guards that I would almost certainly recover with nothing more serious than a hell of a sore throat. It wasn't long before I was wheeled into the prisoner ward and dumped into a bed across from a sheet-white, unconscious Joe Arnstaff. It was ten o'clock by that time.

Since the entire ward was securely barred and isolated from the rest of the hospital, I wasn't cuffed to the bed, and no screws were placed on duty inside the room, though a pair sat and dozed just outside the steel doors. Still feeling weak and ready to puke at the slightest motion, I pushed myself out of the bed and into the bathroom, where I splashed a gallon of cold water into my face to counteract all of the dope they had shot into my veins. I was wearing the standard sickbed gown, but my grays had been hung in the closet, and a quick check showed me that the important book was still there where I had stashed it. Some conscientious screw had relieved me of the blessed soap I had brought — probably afraid I might carve a key, a set of civilian clothes, and a .357 Magnum out of it — and I almost felt like laughing as I took another bar from the bathroom sink and repeated the process over it. The best voice I could force out was a hoarse, breathy whisper.

Back in the main room, I set

about preparing to face the coming horrors. I had to pull Arnstaff's bed away from the wall, and that stirred him awake to the point that he lifted his head from the pillow and looked at me, his eyes sunken black pits in a dead face.

"Monk," he gasped, "what are you doing here?"

I ignored him and started to draw a rough circle around his bed on the tiled floor. The yellow soap showed up pretty well.

"What time is it, is it Wednesday?"

"No," I croaked.

He collapsed again. "Oh God, she'll be here soon, oh God, save me, please . . ." he cried.

With the prescribed circle drawn and blessed, I stepped inside it and waited. There was no one else in the room.

The minutes passed on leaden feet, but as I waited, reading the ceremony over and over in my mind, I had no doubts that the hungry spirit would find Arnstaff, and would have found him even if he had somehow run to the far side of the world. It had his essence instilled within itself, and could track him down no matter where he tried to hide.

I had no watch, but I knew that midnight had come when a glowing red cloud appeared in one corner of the darkened room and began to grow.

Arnstaff came out of his daze long enough to babble for help and

plead with Jesus to protect him, but when the cloud swelled to a seven foot height and swirled into a human-like form, he passed out before alerting the guards outside.

For a minute, I couldn't move. Nothing had ever shocked me like that sight before. I had long practiced hiding my emotions under a dense, featureless mask, but I stood with an open mouth and staring eyes as the glistening cloud boiled, twisted, and froze into a thing with the head and forelegs of a great cat, the breasts of a woman, and then the genitals and legs of a man; I remembered that a succubus could easily become an incubus when dealing with women. I stood like a figure of stone while it casually scanned the room for its prey. When its slitted eyes fell on me, a kind of smile came to the cat's jaws.

"Now now, Emmanuel," it said in a hissing, but seductive voice. "Your time has not come."

"Stay back," I grunted painfully.

It laughed in a low tone.

Only when the beast began to approach the bed did I recall the book that I held in my sweating hands. I opened it to the dogeared page that represented my life. I started to read, reciting the words in all belief and power for the first time in centuries, and though my voice was only a growl, the sounds traveled into whatever invisible world exists, and reached the crea-

ture they were designed for.

"I call thee forth, oh Isolattin, Protector of the Belief and Defender of the Weak, I abjure the might of mine enemies and place my heart and life with thee!" I shouted. At my words, the succubus stopped, cocked its head to the left, and listened in stunned wonder. Whatever this thing was, it hadn't been attacked in this fashion in over two thousand years.

I read swiftly, not willing to waste this precious extra moment. "Appear! Come before thy disciple in the flame of Chasnoh, and dispatch this intruder with the death of ages! I call thee, I beseech thee in prayer and in blood!" *Blood!* My God, I had forgotten the only substance that could summon the creature from its spiritual home: human blood!

At the prison, I had been considering cutting my forearm and using a few drops of my own blood in the ceremony, but now, at this crucial moment, I had no knife and no time; the guards were unlocking the doors and the cat-thing was coming forward again for its prize.

With no knife to draw my own blood, and the clawing combination of rage and panic in my gut, I dodged around the bed, careful to stay within the circle, and searched wildly for something to slash open a vein. There were needles sticking out of Arnstaff's forearms, and I started to rip them out to obtain

even a few drops, but then my eyes fell on the suspended bottle over his right side. It was plasma, not whole blood, but it was all I had. With something of a screamed prayer, I tore the bottle from its stand and Arnstaff's body, and hurled it to the floor in front of the approaching creature.

The guards burst into the room just as the bottle of plasma shattered before the succubus. A flash of blue fire leaped to the ceiling and licked it brown, while an earthquake shook the tile floor beneath me and laced out a giant spidersweb of deep cracks. The running cracks stopped when they touched the edges of my soap ring.

The guards were thrown on their backs by the roaring waves of blue energy, and my eyes were dazzled by the brilliance of the swelling blue cloud hovering above the smashed plasma bottle. The cat bared its glistening fangs and screamed at the conjured being forming before it. The blue thing swirled in the air and solidified into a shape that burst with long, clawed arms, fins, and fur that writhed with a separate life of its own. I staggered against the bed, where Arnstaff moaned wildly, but there was nothing real except the hallucination-like scene before me.

"What manner of being are you?" demanded the succubus.

Isolattin opened the six mouths in his wolf-like face and laughed

like the pounding of a bass drum. One of the recovered guards squeezed off a shot at the two, but neither seemed to even notice his presence.

"I am Isolattin," he answered. His voice was as powerful as the wind of a hurricane. "I am the first god of death, and I come at the call of my disciple."

"They are mine!" shouted the succubus, its eyes literally blazing with a red glow. "Leave this place or I shall cast you into the deepest pits of the burning Hell!"

Isolattin laughed again, and the entire building and its foundations trembled, causing hundreds of people inside to scream in terror. There was no more conversation. The two representatives of ancient but different evils closed the distance between themselves and, with another burst of light, the battle began.

A rainbow of colors glared outward from the spot, blinding my eyes to everything but its glittering hues, and a whistling gale rose within the room. The wind lashed at my face and burned my stunned eyes, but I still watched as scenes from nightmares were spat out by the broiling mass of fury that had been the two creatures. Winged and fanged things leaped from the inferno and vanished when they touched the walls. Formless creations of colors and sounds sent tentacles grasping at me, but the circle held and the horrors clutched futile-

ly outside its perimeter. All the time this phantasmagoria played itself for my staring eyes, the rumbling quake tore at the building.

A chorus of tortured voices rose from the point of combat, and I slapped both hands over my ears and tried to bury my burned face in the unyielding floor. My voice was screaming in a long, unbroken cry, but I felt no pain from my injured throat. Something broke behind me, and a sudden, unbearable heat exploded upon me and set the hospital bed on fire.

The official explanation — what explanation? The government investigators called it an unprecedented pinpoint earthquake; the survivors of the dead five hundred within the collapsed hospital were left to bury the mutilated dead. The case received widespread national coverage and produced some of the most incredible theories ever advanced by reputable observers, though no one came close to the real reason that the entire building was reduced to burning rubble.

I awoke in the ruins before sunrise, and while my clothes, Arnstaff's clothes, and the entire bed had been reduced to smoking ashes, I couldn't find a single burn on my body. Arnstaff lay untouched on the twisted metal frame, but his heart hadn't pulled him through the nightmare. He was dead.

Floodlights lit the area of the disaster, and though I tried to work my way through the rubble to the nearby woods, a pair of Good Samaritans "rescued" me from freedom. Too weak to resist, I was taken on a short trip to another hospital, where I was recognized by a prison official who was checking each patient from Parker Memorial, and before I knew it I was back in Arenosa.

This all happened over three months ago, and no one has been the victim of a glowing tiger-beast since that night. Coburn and the prison officials have grilled me constantly about what occurred during those few hours in Parker, but I haven't said a word. Until now. But nobody will read this, anyway.

Now I wait for parole. With

these last attacks and "attempted suicide" on my record, there's a good chance I won't make it this time around, but it probably won't make any difference where I am when the rest of the year passes. You see, I read only what I needed in that old book — which was never found after the destruction of Parker — but I can vaguely recall a reference to payment due after calling up Isolattin, and the promise that he will collect before the twelfth full moon.

I'm not waiting passively for the time to come, though, and I'll be ready with another counterattack when he appears. He may only want something simple, like another blood offering, but I doubt it. You get deeper and deeper every time your number is called. And everything has its price. ●

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David knew he needed the rakka, but he couldn't have guessed how much....

The Last of the Demons

by John Kelly

Old Perkin once said that a rakka could make the mountains dance, if he wanted to.

The mountains had never looked so near as now, when he planned to go out to them. David had never been out of the city before, no one alive ever had; but then, there weren't many left alive, and that was the problem.

David was going to open up the dome, open up the city, for the

first time ever. And the demons would come in. He was opening it up precisely so the demons would come in. The demons had fight, and would find a way to cure the Old ones even if David couldn't. And David would run to the mountains, to find the rakka, the people who could control the demons, and the people who could save all those possessed by them. The demons would save the Old

ones from the death of the lingering sickness, and the rakka would save the Old ones from the demons.

So he would open the city. It's what Old Perkin would have done. But Old Perkin was dead.

David set the dials to the unused sequence, just as Old Perkin had once taught him. He closed the power channels, and the air outside the windows popped, as the force shield disappeared. Finally, he pulled the lever down. It was stiff, but he was strong, and the long metal door rumbled open on its horizontal runners. New air hit David, but he didn't feel it, because he was protected by an old shield belt, dug up from the far back of storage. It would keep everything, including demons, away from him.

He ran out of the dome, into the thick surrounding brush. They had tried to make the land around the dome chemically dead, but the poisons seemed to have disappeared with time, until small plants could grow in the dirt. Old Perkin said that mutated plants were probably causing the sickness, growing into the ventilation system and releasing their spores to slip through the old clogged purifier.

David was panting as he blazed his trail away from the city, through the ominous brush, and he had to stop to rest. As he looked back at the city, he could remember his history lessons. He could

remember long afternoons curled in old Perkin's study, learning about radiation and free mutation, and the Earth's second spontaneous life-form, the demons, the children of exploding energy. He could remember loving to watch the flinches and twists made by Old Perkin's bushy eyebrows as the man wove his long stories, stories of the ravages of the demons, and of the men nature changed into rakka, to compete with them, so that people could survive in some form, too. He remembered about the strange things the rakka did to men, things that caused the men to decide that they couldn't live with them, and to build the domed city, with power shields instead of rakka to protect them from demons.

And he remembered how Old Perkin used to describe those demons. Dark balls of light, he called them, boiling clouds of thoughts. Human bodies were good for the demons, Old Perkin said, because men had order; demons had only will. The demons could take men's bodies, and use the men like librarians to order the thoughts, until the demons could do their own cataloguing. Then the people part of the bodies would disappear.

David went on towards the mountains. He hadn't seen a demon yet, but he wasn't worried. Old Perkin said that they always found humans left unprotected.

Four days he searched, and four nights he slept haunted. "Who?" dream voices asked; "Why?" Then they would sigh, a multitude of sighs, and repeat their questions, until at last they would drift away, murmuring among themselves as they passed back to their void. And through it all, faces stared, not the faces of the voices, but the faces of the dead, and more and more of the faces he had left alive just days before. The faces danced in and out of a bright night sky, and then pressed motionlessly upon him. They never said anything; they didn't have to. He knew what they wanted. And once he dreamed of demons.

He still hadn't seen a demon, except so vividly in his dream, and he hadn't seen anything else for days. The birds didn't sing, that high up in the mountains, so just after he had gotten used to their songs he was missing them again. But he was used to being alone. In the city he had always been the only Young one, and now, even after he had been eighteen for months, legally Old, he was still called the Young one. Once, when he was seven, there was going to be another, and everyone was very excited until the mother got the sickness, and the baby was born dead. People were getting sicker at younger and younger ages, now, except for the lucky few like Old Perkin. Old Perkin had lived to be over fifty, and he had been

there to raise David, when David's father Young Perkin died. No one knew why Old Perkin lived so long, when everyone else in his family died so young. But there was a lot about the sickness that no one knew.

It was cold, that high up in the mountains, not just at night, but during the day too. And his food was running out. On the fifth day, David walked on until nightfall, when searching became useless. Once again, he hadn't seen anyone, either man or rakka.

On the fifth evening, David remembered.

One of David's earliest memories was of crashing down the stairs outside of Old Perkin's sleeping compartment, soon to find himself warmly cradled in the old man's big arms. But, as Old Perkin later told him, he didn't cry. He was the only child Old Perkin had ever known who didn't cry. Even when his parents died, he didn't cry. Some said it was because he grew up with no one but adults, and sick adults at that, while others said that the city had been through too much for anyone to cry anymore.

But on the fifth day he had walked too far. When the sun went down and he finally stopped walking, he cried softly into his blanket, and then harder and harder, until he couldn't stop himself, and Grendegor Brown decided to intervene.

It was generally considered very

impolite to break into a private world as fixed as this one, but polite questions during opentimes were going unanswered, and you could sense that the individual felt great stress. So GrendegorBrown readjusted David's world, and became an old man standing at his feet.

"Why?" he asked, before David saw him. David sat up and drew back, the sobs dying in his throat.

"Why do you cry?"

"You're a rakka!"

The old man laughed. "I'ven't heard that name for years now. We'ven't been called rakka since the great transformation."

David snuffled. "The transformation?"

"Yes, the demon disappearance."

"The demons have disappeared?"

The old man laughed again. "Centuries ago! Where're you from?"

David sat up, pale. "There aren't any demons?"

"No, of course not. But where're you from? I've never seen anyone like you."

David's body suddenly slumped. "Then they'll die," he said softly.

"Who will?"

"I have to get back! There are no demons?"

The old man sighed. The pathetic intensity of the boy's voice touched him. He created a demon within the boy's world, in the air

next to him. "Now who will die?"

"That's a demon!"

"Of course, I made it for you."

David slid several feet backwards. "Make it go away!" he shrieked. The demon disappeared. He blinked. "I thought there weren't any more demons."

"There aren't. None that think. I can make them in your thought, though. Now who will die?"

"The whole city."

"City? Why, you're a man!"

"I have to get back," David tried to stand up, but he was held down.

"Calm yourself. You seem too tired to travel."

"But they're too sick to feed themselves. I have to get back ... to save them..." GrendegorBrown held him with unintentional power. No matter, he thought. Let the young man sleep. Grendegor stopped being a man.

Danger to those in the city. Someone has to feed them, he had said. Grendegor tried to find an explanation, but the thoughts were impenetrable during sleep, so Grendegor decided to check personally. GrendegorBrown became a man at the dome.

They were all dead.

GrendegorBrown remembered what had been taught about the old-style men. He knew this would need a "mother." So it was a woman who met David when he woke.

"You don't need the shield anymore," she said.

He sat up abruptly, and stared at the rock on which she sat, then at her. She peered into his thought to make sure she was dressed appropriately. "You're a rakka too," he said.

"Of course."

He looked down at his belt dial, and then clicked off his shield. The air popped around him, and he fell the centimeter to the ground. He was fully awake, then, and he jumped to his feet. "There are no demons! I have to get back. Most of them are too sick to live without me."

She signed. "You will have to go back. Let's start now."

He looked at her again, but didn't know what to ask. The others were far more important anyway. He started off at a run, but couldn't keep that up for long. The old woman kept up with him surprisingly easily. Soon after they slowed to a walk he again had the breath to speak.

"What's your name?"

"GrendegorBrown. And yours is David?"

He stared at her, for the third and most thoughtful time. "How did you know? And why are you dressed in city clothes?"

"I learned both from you." She paused. "I asked your thoughts what was right. You told me."

"I don't remember telling you."

She paused. "No, you don't

think at that level; you could not remember. You just know. Please don't be disturbed. You don't tell anything secret. You know what is secret always, it is never told."

He was silent.

"Why aren't there any more demons? And what can you do to help the sick?"

"I can cure the sick," she answered, "better than any demon could, when they still rolled above. But now the last pure demons roll only in the inner earth, their energy trapped by attraction to the earth's own." She paused, to sense his mood. She sought a safe subject.

"You're very friendly. Men weren't in the past."

David sighed. "The rakka tried to change men. That's why they became unfriendly."

"No. What I mean is — you're not suspicious."

David stared his fourth stare. "I've never had to be. Do you think I should be?"

"No, no." She smiled the right way. "I meant a compliment." She paused. "All the rakka ever did was teach."

He stared again, for the longest time of all. "You call what they did to people teaching?"

She tried to learn what they had done that upset him so, but it was a secret of his knowledge. "But that was a thousand years ago," she whispered.

"It can't have been a thousand

years."

"It was. That is, the time was a thousand of your years, inside your dome, but out among us, time did not have to flow so exactly. For some it was more, for some less."

She noticed that he was staring blankly. "What don't you understand?"

"Everything. How you think. How you change the world."

She paused. "We don't change the world, exactly, because there is no world to change. Our parameters are the limits of thought. Anything we can imagine we can make real for us; anything you can imagine we can make real for you. But we can't make a dead one think, for he has no thought, and we can't sing to a deaf one, and we can't teach an animal mathematics. And we can't show you yourself because you can't see. You can look, you can have vision, but that's not seeing, and what you think it is is precisely the problem." She sighed. "All I'm trying to say is that everyone's thought is limited, and we live within those limitations." She sensed he didn't believe her, but explaining further would be useless.

He did not talk, and why he didn't was a secret. She decided not to ask about something his thoughts refused to tell. She had heard what a lie was, once, and it had confused her, and right now she didn't want to be confused.

The trip back took him six of his days, since he was too tired to travel at the rate he did before, but she made it five for him, so he wouldn't feel guilt. She could have brought him there in an instant, but she guessed from his thoughts that the trip would be better. She produced food when he wanted it, water when he wanted it, and bird songs when he wanted them too.

The only thing she couldn't help was his dreams. Even without the enquiring voices of the others, they were getting more vivid, and more painful, for his subconscious was becoming more and more sure of its secret knowledge. Three times he rose, screaming, nearly awake, and three times she embraced him until he quieted, and then removed the thoughts from his memory. She sensed that he didn't trust her enough not to reject the embraces when fully conscious. The comforting seemed good for him, but she was sure that if he learned of it, he would be shocked, and would only move farther from her as a result. But inside her thought, the embraces were remembered, and they stirred a sense of what real human motherhood must have meant. And the young human was no longer a passing interest.

When the city was in sight, she knew it was too late to tell him and she knew it was wrong for him to see for himself. But she has never had to do anything but show people things before; that was

much easier and that had always been right.

She stayed at a distance until he had cried all he wanted to, and she made the bodies light as he carried them to the pyre. She shared his outrage that everything in the city had to be so functional, and when he looked for her, she was there.

They were in Old Perkin's quarters. He sat on the bed with his eyes closed, his back to the wall. He sensed that she was there.

"You knew, didn't you?" His words were slurred with the monotone of exhaustion.

"Of course. But I couldn't tell you."

"You said you could save them."

"I said I could heal the sick. But I can't make thoughts where there are none."

"Then why couldn't you tell me?"

"I'm not that way."

David looked up for the first time. "Just how are you?"

She turned the desk chair to the bed, and sat. "I'm very different from you. I'm very different from the rakka you've learned of. The rakka were men with great world control, but that's not what I am."

"The rakka could make the mountains dance, Old Perkin said. But they were not men, and they tried to change men into something else, too. They used illusions, they drove men insane."

"They could make the mountains dance, and it was no illusion.

They knew what their world was, and where, and they knew how to change the worlds of others. But they didn't realize that the old-style men couldn't adapt to new worlds the way the rakka could to each other's. So the men fled into the cities, and yours is the last to die.

"And in the meantime, the demons taught them the talent they should have had all along."

"The demons?" David looked up again.

"Men never understood the relationship of the rakka and the demons. The rakka didn't just hold the demons back; there was no room in them for demons, for the rakka were energy creatures already. But the rakka were as transitional as the demons were primitive, so it was natural that they would change so radically together, in the great transformation."

"They changed together?"

"Their thoughts intermixed as they taught each other. The rakka learned to thoughtbridge, and the demons learned intelligence, and worldchanging. They grew so similar that finally the only difference was the bodies of the rakka. And as those bodies died away, we all became creatures of simple energy."

"Then you're a demon!"

She could sense his rising anger, his fear, and his sense of betrayal. Then his mind closed off completely to her.

"You're a demon! Deny it!"

"I don't know. Memory is limited, and I can no longer remember those days. They're too far back. And we have all mixed experience so much since then that we are the same, anyway."

He began to shake. "You lied to me! You led me on! Get out! Get out of my city!" He leapt at her, but she vanished, and he crashed against the desk. He collapsed on the carpet, hurt.

"I don't know what a lie is . . .," she had said, the words trailing behind her when she disappeared.

The next day, his dome was again sealed, his force shield again fending off everything external. GrendegorBrown decided to wait. David needed time, and she had to decide how to approach him next.

She saw his long daily walks, and his hours in the library reading every book again. She heard his cries, when he awoke from his dreams. She knew what he wanted, so she did what the demons never could and re-entered the city.

David's face went pale when he rounded the corner. "Old Perkin! But — you're dead."

"Does it matter, David? I'm here now."

"But you're dead! I saw you dead!"

"I'm not dead, I'm here."

"But this isn't where you're supposed to be!" Slowly backing up, David turned and fled down the empty corridors. Old Perkin

sighed, and GrendegorBrown transformed back to the woman. She found David huddled in his old chamber.

"It was me, David. I'm sorry."

His eyes widened, and he exploded. "Get out!"

She was gone this time before he even tried to leap.

Days passed uneventfully.

"Why don't you go to her? She's waiting for you outside."

David looked up from his book with a start, to find himself in the city library.

"She's a demon and you're her!" David paused. "Get out." His command was almost a question, and his image didn't budge.

"I'm not her, I'm you, and she's not a demon, in the sense you're thinking. She loves you, and she's never going to hurt you, and you know that."

"I don't care if she's not like the old demons, and I don't care what she thinks of me. She wants to change me and I belong the way I am." He paused. "I belong here."

"Here? This is a dead city. Look at us. We're already getting sick. You belong where there is love for you, and there's no love here anymore. Of course you belong the way you are, but people change, too. They're alive."

"There was love for me here, and I can still feel it. She can't even remember what she is. I'm the last man and I won't leave the others.

I'll remember what has been."

"You won't leave the others? The others are dead. They have already left. If you must be with them, then you can only kill yourself. If not, then live where you belong, with the living. You know we can't stay here, alive in a dead city." His image paused. "Die here if you want. But I'm going out to her, so at least I'll be in her memory, even if you're not in her world."

David strode out of the room, leaving himself sitting in the arm-

chair. Then David got up, and followed himself out.

He walked up shyly, and touched her face. She seemed younger now, but somehow no different.

She smiled. "I'll stay the same, for you."

"You can't ever let me forget."

She nodded slowly. "Of course."

He never lost the nightmares, but she was always there to hold him. And some of his dreams were peaceful. ●

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SCIENCE

Hal
Clement

Science for Fiction #5

I know Emerson said that a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds — some of our littlest ones leave the “foolish” out — but I’m not sure I agree with him. I doubt whether consistency is ever foolish; and the only way I can see its bothering any mind, little or otherwise, is by creating an impassable barrier rather than an unfaceable monster.

“Hard science” science fiction does demand high standards of consistency, and staying with it sometimes forces us older science-fiction types (you’ve heard of First Fandom, the Dinosaurs of Science Fiction) into an awkward corner. We got so used to being told by our elders that everything we talked about such as space travel and atomic power was impossible, that we came to reject the word itself. Some of us came to develop the attitude that nothing was impossible. I was one of those spectacled pests who make life a burden to teachers, and I had that attitude very early, and having grown-ups explain to me that rockets didn’t work in space because there was no

air for them to push against naturally strengthened my feelings. I was quite at home with Newton's Laws by the age of ten.

However, the notion that nothing is impossible is inconsistent with the claim that the universe runs by law — the prime article of faith of any scientists. After all, by definition, the breaking of natural laws is impossible, and if there *are* laws . . .

What lets science fiction out of that particular bag is, of course, the fact that we can't say we know any of the laws for certain. Unlike baseball, where the Commissioner can pass solid judgement, we can only use our imaginations to judge what the laws may be, and then check our guesses by how well they explain old observations and predict future ones. In writing stories, it is quite all right to assume that one of the published and accepted guesses is wrong. The prime example, I suppose, is Relativity; if Einstein is right, faster-than-light travel is in fact impossible. This is a hope that he was wrong, and that someone will come up with a set of rules which not only does a better predicting and unifying job than Einstein did, but which also permits FTL travel by Jack Williamson's electromagnetic geodesic deflectors, or Doc Smith's inertialess drive, or that old favorite, the space warp. There is no really reliable method of guessing what the chances of this may be; I hate to

admit it, but I have to say they are probably poor. Just as a new atomic theory would have to be enough like the present one to explain several million phenomena like the known chemical compounds and semiconductors and the like, anything replacing relativity will have to be enough like it to explain a pretty large body of observed fact. Still, I can hope; and while I hope I'll go on writing interstellar stories — with a clear conscience.

However, when I do this, that nasty little hobgoblin is after me. If one assumed any particular theory to be wrong in order to suit a story, one is stuck with the various consequences of that wrongness. If one wants to assume that the law of gravity is an inverse first power force instead of inverse square, one has to change the Newtonian laws of motion to make planets follow Kepler's observed laws — otherwise the planets follow ellipses with the sun at the center instead of at one focus. To go from the sublime to the ridiculous, if we want to suppose there is actually something to astrology, we have to explain why twins, born presumably under the same cosmic circumstances, so seldom lead identical lives. Claiming that even a few seconds' difference in birth time is actually enough to make major differences in the celestial influence is all right, but implies that the actual computing of a

horoscope is at least as difficult as calculating eclipse phenomena for the reign of Akhnaton — a conclusion which wouldn't bother me, but might be disliked by some who couldn't face the corollary that no valid horoscopes have yet been cast.

To put it a little differently, whenever we assume certain things to be true, we imply that an even larger set of things is false. Whether we start with the assumption that "known" science is generally correct, or whether we alter some part of it for our own purposes, the hobgoblin continues to ride us. We make errors either way, and readers jump on them.

For example, some time in the middle thirties — I can't remember exact date, magazine, title, or author, but feel pretty sure it was in *Wonder Stories* and almost certain that it was before I had high school chemistry (1937-38) — there was a rather amusing yarn about a gentleman who discovered a solvent for carbon. From what I know about chemistry this seems pretty unlikely (but see below); however, I'll avoid the word *impossible* for the moment.

Conveniently, and contrary to current thermodynamics and the crystallography of graphite and diamond, when the solvent was evaporated the carbon recrystallized as diamond. The scientist was less unworldly than many of those in the magazines of the time, and

began quietly selling oversized diamonds. There followed a series of apparent burglaries in which the safes containing these diamonds were blown open and the stones taken. The police eventually demonstrated a level of statistical insight superior to Lois Lane's, and came to the scientist asking why only his diamonds were disappearing.

It finally turned out that the crystals weren't actually diamonds, but a new arrangement of carbon atoms which had a very strong tendency to oxidize; after a few days in the safe they had turned to carbon dioxide, whose pressure blew out the door.

I say I must have read this before taking high school chemistry. Even granting the strange thermodynamics and crystallography, which I wouldn't have appreciated until some years later, if I had finished my high school course it would have been obvious to me that the limiting reactant would have been the oxygen already in the safe; and the number of CO₂ molecules and the pressure exerted by them would have been the same as for that oxygen. Lester Ladd, my high school chemistry teacher, did get the fundamentals across to me, and Avogadro's principle has been with us from the first decade of the nineteenth century (though, like Mendel, he wasn't appreciated for several decades). The author, trying to stick with "known"

science and only a little extrapolation, had overlooked some of the rules.

This, believe it or not, brings us back to peculiar life forms. I've claimed that Jupiter is more likely than Earth to have produced life, and given my reasons. I've suggested that Titan can support structures we could recognize as living organisms; but I have carefully avoided the airless worlds and the high-temperature environment of Venus. Life dependent on liquid water does seem unlikely in an environment where water is totally absent or, at best, not a liquid. (You notice I lacked the intestinal fortitude to say it's impossible; my First Fandom conditioning still operates to the detriment of my scientific self-confidence.)

I mentioned some months ago why I felt sure that life requires complexity of structure, and why the hydrogen bond seemed necessary as an intermediate-strength link to make biochemical phenomena practical. Now, where the hydrogen bond is unavailable, our living cell is going to have to be drastically different (and if we do without cellular structure, it will have to be even more different!).

I would suggest a basically electrical arrangement, with electrical and magnetic fields shifting more or less as they do in our present solid-state devices, and the "fluid" simply free or nearly free electrons. The makeup, chemically,

would be of metallic conductors and semimetallic or metal-oxide or sulfide semiconductors, with an architecture comparable in complexity to our own cells and tissues. I can easily see such structures existing; I must admit I have trouble seeing how they would originate (having somebody make them in the first place is possible and all right for many stories, but is a cop-out from my present situation). Since I am no Creationist I have no trouble believing that replicating molecules like DNA could build up in the organic soup of early Earth by a straightforward combination of chemistry and statistics, using the rules we think we already know; but it is harder to see how the necessary collisions could have occurred often enough in the solid state.

But many of our semiconductor devices are built, partly or entirely, by deposition from vapor to solid. The moon has been receiving vapor from comet tails, interstellar gas, and solar wind for four and three quarter billion years; in the shadows of the polar craters, never reached by sunlight, strange examples of molecular architecture could grow. Admittedly the solar wind, the largest part of the input, is mostly hydrogen rather than metal; but there is a way around this.

Last August I attended, as usual, the annual summer conference of the New England Associa-

tion of Chemistry Teachers. One of the speakers, Professor Alan G. MacDiarmid of the University of Pennsylvania, gave a talk on "Metallic Covalent Polymers." He handed around samples resembling strips of silver or aluminum foil — shiny, flexible, electrical conductors — made entirely of carbon and hydrogen. I would have said *that* was impossible, on the basis of what I thought I knew of chemical bonding.

I don't know how to calculate chances of replicating electrical systems growing in vapor-solid phase exchange, but once they do their reactions, being electrical, are faster than organic ones. Maybe this is all nostalgia for the moon monsters of the thirties, but why not? Come on, writers. We haven't covered much of the moon yet except by photos from orbit, and the shady places at the poles don't photograph. Go ahead. People the airless moon with semiconductor-cell life, using carbon or silicon and single-bonding elements like chlorine or fluorine if you don't like hydrogen...

Did I say silicon? Yes. Of course, every science fiction fan knows now that silicon doesn't form the long, complex chains which allow carbon to form life molecules; experts like Isaac Asimov and me have been pointing this out for years.

Only we're wrong. Professor MacDiarmid again, same conference; talk title "Silicon Chemistry — Is it Pseudo-Organic?"

It seems that carbon is relatively poor at making long carbon-carbon chains except when combined with small atoms — hydrogen or, at best, fluorine. Silicon does poorly with the small ones, but if you use chlorine or bromine on the side it's a much better chain-maker than carbon — the chains are *more* stable than the carbon ones.

So let's get back to our silicon beings and moon monsters and natives of Io able to stand Jupiter's particle radiation. Maybe it will contribute to the lability of their silicon-fluorine bonds, so who needs hydrogen. Come on. I'm homesick for the thirties. ●

illustrations by:

Clyde Caldwell	.....	"Conjugal Rites"
Greg Harper	.....	"The Last of the Demons"
Al Sirois	.....	"Midwatch"
Jim Glenn	.....	"Act of Mercy"
Donna Dewhirst	.....	"Downward to Darkness"

FILM

The Turning Point

A Journey to the Moon was made in 1902 by Georges Melies. It is generally referred to as "the first science fiction film." Seventy-five years later, in 1977, we are offered an opportunity to move science fiction film out of its infancy.

By way of elucidating the last statement, let me offer you another: "The science fiction film is an intellectual impossibility."

That's what John Baxter says in the introduction to his book *Science Fiction in the Cinema* (Paperback Library, 1970, \$1.25). He then describes what the general public has perceived as "science fiction film," and goes on to write perhaps the only decent book ever produced on the subject.

Even without reading his book, though, you can see Baxter's point. Science fiction films, with very few exceptions, have been light-years away, both in subject matter and philosophy, from written science fiction. If sf can be called the literature of ideas, sf film, with its giant spiders discovering Jesus Christ on Mars, and

Craig
Gardner

"There are things man was never meant to know," could just as well be called "a cinema of anti-ideas."

But the "anti-science" aspect of many so-called sf films isn't the only problem one can see when looking at film history. Examining those movies generally identified as having "science fiction content" over the past 75 years, it becomes apparent that there is very little actual development from film to film. Especially before 1950, each film, from *Metropolis* to *Flash Gordon* to *Things to Come*, stands alone, separated by great chasms of both time and film maker's intent. After 1950, there's finally a flurry of what might be called "sf film" making, nearly all of it trapped in a series of sensational cycles. Overall, the history of science fiction film looks like a collection of sputters and starts, each going into its own separate direction.

There's a simple reason for this: Most sf films come from anywhere but science fiction. *Metropolis* is a product of German expressionism. Most of the fantastic films made during the 1930's and 40's were peripheral to two more popular forms; the horror film (*The Invisible Ray*, *Island of Lost Souls*) and the serials (*Flash Gordon*).

In the 50's, with a few partial exceptions like *Destination Moon* and *Forbidden Planet*, the horror aspect was still dominant as the giant insect/end of the world cycle

took over. These cycles reflected the moral and intellectual tone of the times, complete with a distrust of technology and a reliance on "higher powers." Even films taken from respected science fiction sources, like *War of the Worlds* and *Day of the Triffids*, "get religion" by the last reel. Anti-science reigns supreme.

It took the broadening values of the 60's to bring any real life to the science fiction film. The most important development in the early part of the decade was the appearance of the "relevant satire." These films, set in the near future, would magnify some aspect of current culture for satiric intent. Good examples of this type of film are Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* and the films of Peter Watkins (*The War Game*, *Privilege*, *The Gladiators*).

Science fiction film was trying to make a point! Or, more specifically, the satires were trying to make a point other than "There are certain things man was not meant to know."

As the 60's drew on, the sf films got better and better: *Planet of the Apes*, *5,000,000 Years to Earth*, *The Power*. Each was well assembled and had a point to make. Science fiction film was beginning to show some maturity. Even on television, *Star Trek* and *The Outer Limits* occasionally used actual, honest-to-goodness science fiction ideas.

And then there was this movie called *2001*.

2001 is a Great Leap film. It managed to do what no other sf film had before. It captured a new perspective, "outer space," a place of both majesty and mystery.

At last, people sighed (at least certain people), a real science fiction film.

And what happened next? Not much.

One film, *Silent Running*, was made in direct imitation of *2001*. It was visually interesting but intellectually muddled. The success of *2001* and the "psychedelic" atmosphere of the time made one other good movie possible; George Lucas' *THX-1138*.

Mostly, what we got now was more of the Same Old Thing. Films went back to the future to drive home their one line messages. Except that most of the 70's films weren't as well made as those of the later 60's. The humor and visual flair that redeemed *Privilege* and *Planet of the Apes* was sadly lacking from *Soylent Green*, *Rollerball*, and *Logan's Run*.

There were exceptions. *A Boy and His Dog*, made independently, had a commendable black humor. *Westworld* had a certain good-action-B-movie ambiance. Nothing, however, came close to the transcendent power of *2001*.

Then came *Star Wars*, a highly entertaining fantastic film that also has become a Big Hit, far bigger

than *2001*. But its importance to the science fiction field goes farther than its entertainment value or its hit potential. *Star Wars* is important because, within its limits, it is a totally realized film.

Baxter considered the science fiction film to be an "intellectual impossibility" because the general audience would not be willing to accept — in fact, would be completely lost by — concepts that would be accepted as "givens" by science fiction aficionados. For this reason, almost every fantastic film ever made has been somehow anchored in the mundane. Sure, there's a giant octopus out there, but in here is the brave Air Force Colonel, the wily old scientist with his beautiful young assistant, the comical cook, etc.

Even *2001* uses corporate America's expansion to the Moon for satiric comment. And when HAL, the computer, degenerates, it sings "Daisy." *2001* presents a new reality, but it is one derived directly from "today" — present day reality.

Star Wars presents a universe as far divorced from "present day reality" as Lucas can make it. As the ad campaign says: "Long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away..." Lucas, who appears to know his sf, doesn't even call the film science fiction. He refers to it as a "space fantasy."

Still, *Star Wars* is immediately accessible to the larger audience.

Why? Because even though Lucas confronts his audience with a strange new world of androids, wookies and spacial warfare, both his basic story and his story telling methods are designed for mass consumption.

The story is classic Saturday matinee stuff: Good guy vs. bad guy / young hero proving himself / beautiful princess / cynical friend / wise mentor / etc. Lucas' extremely calculated presentation of this story, however, is what makes things work, for Lucas has found an alternate method of creating a believable fantastic universe.

Quite simply, Lucas has used the history of cinema in the same way that the history of science fiction exists in every work of speculative fiction. Rather than the literary development — including Poe, Wells, Verne, "Doc" Smith, etc. — that serves as a background on which every modern sf novel draws, Lucas has constructed a filmic development derived from Ford, Hawkes, Riefenstahl, Kurosawa, etc. Basing shots and sequences in *Star Wars* on devices that these earlier directors created, Lucas takes the power locked in these images and translates them into the framework for space battle — from Hawkes; The finale in the great hall — from Riefenstahl; Darth Vader's costume — modeled after that of a samurai warlord, say Toshiro Mifune in

Throne of Blood; etc., etc. Through the use of these devices, combined with the film's broad characterizations, Lucas not only gets audiences to accept, but to identify with the film.

And by using this method of filmmaking, Lucas also manages to overcome Baxter's "intellectual impossibility." But Lucas may have managed to do even more.

Many people have criticized *Star Wars*, and many of the criticisms are valid. For example, the film has no real depth. However, *Star Wars* has introduced the public to the possibility of the fantastic film.

In the history of cinema, a film will occasionally come along which will radically alter a genre, rising beyond everything that has gone before and pointing in a new direction. *Stagecoach* was such a film, bringing a new vitality to the western. *The Maltese Falcon* ushered in a whole new trend in the mystery film, taking the cases out of the drawing room and thrusting them straight into film noir.

Star Wars could be this kind of film, a turning point for science fiction cinema. Whatever its faults, it is the first film to hint at the scope and excitement inherent in sf. It has gotten the public to accept a fantastic universe — and has left them wanting more. Now, for the first time, a real possibility exists for actual, mature science fiction films to be made.

Whether Hollywood is ready for

this challenge is anybody's guess. Hot on the success of *Star Wars*, studios dusted off their sf projects, including remakes of "When Worlds Collide" and (shudder) "Rocketship X-M," as well as a number of other projects that sound even worse. But rumor also has it that Brian de Palma is contemplating making a film version of *The Demolished Man*. Can *The Stars My Destination* be far behind? Thanks to *Star Wars*, science fiction films incorporating thought as well as action may be waiting on the next reel.

*

Star Wars director George Lucas, who also directed the much more abstract (and thought-provoking) sf film *THX-1138*, has stated that he wanted to make one good entertainment film, which he did with *Star Wars*, and then move on to more experimental film making. Lucas, whose knowledge of, and preference for the sf form has been shown in these two superior features (I remind people again that Lucas does not even call *Star Wars* science fiction; he refers to it as a "space fantasy"), may very conceivably figure again in the future of sf film. ●


Editorial (cont. from pg. 4)

Another possible change concerns editorial restrictions. As you know, UNEARTH currently accepts fiction submissions only from writers who have not yet sold to major SF magazines or anthologies. These guidelines have worked well for all involved: we've had little difficulty getting enough top-quality stories, and writers have, we hope, benefited either from the exposure being published in UNEARTH brings, or else from the comments we make on every story we return.

Our concern is that we may not be helping enough writers. In addition to previously unpublished writers, there are many authors who have made only one or two sales in the genre. These writers are themselves hardly "established," but we exclude them from consideration. It's important to make a rule and stick to it; the question is, what should the nature of that rule be? Though no decision on this question is imminent, it is under active consideration, and we would appreciate your comments and suggestions.

The latter are, of course, always most welcome. We're always trying to give you a better product; you can help us serve you by letting us know how you think we're doing.

—Jonathan Ostrowsky-Lantz



There might be enough time for Simon to save his ship — if he could save it from itself first.

MIDWATCH

by David DeWitt



The coffee was too hot, too black, and as usual, too sweet. Ship's steward Simon Vermont grumbled his way down the empty, white tiled corridor from the galley and grasped the handrail leading up a tall metal ladder. The ship heeled over. He tried to tilt the styrofoam cup at the proper angle, but he squeezed a bit too hard, and a stream of boiling coffee spilled across his finters.

"Damn!" he bellowed.

His flesh burned, then went numb.

This, he thought, is a helluva way to start off the evening.

He made his way carefully up the steep incline of the ladder. Near the top of the stairwell he felt a sizzling splash of coffee run down his coatsleeve, and he bellowed again. *Goddamn, he thought. Sixteen years in this business, ten of them in the old U.S. Navy when it was still military, and I still can't make the top of this stairwell without spilling coffee all over my hands. And my pants. And my shoes. And the floor.*

He reached the top step and turned left past the wardroom door, the XO's office, and the Captain's stateroom: all empty and welded shut.

It was funny to him how deeply ingrained the old life was. Despite there being only two men on board he still couldn't swear in this passageway without feeling a

pinched nerve. If an officer had heard that kind of talk outside the Captain's stateroom, there'd have been hell to pay.

But those days were gone.

The officer's compartments, crew's quarters, barbershop, post office — all were barren, stripped of everything useful, empty. The ship's once-proud cannons and deck guns that jutted gallantly into the sky were now functionless ornaments. As much as he tried to stick to the old routine, there were too many reminders that this was a different time, a new situation.

He could remember when this ship had been a four hundred foot destroyer escort instead of one of a fleet of automated cargo ships; with these four ugly cargo-pods grafted onto its old sides, the ship just wasn't the same. He could hear its thin, battered hull complain with strange creaks and metallic pops as the ship groaned steadily through the night.

He didn't like all the damned extra security on these trips, either. Being locked in his compartment like some kind of sardine made him uncomfortable as hell. It left only a few minutes between watches to shoot the bull with Boditch, get some food from the automated galley, when it was in a mood to operate properly, or pick up a film or a book from the library — an old upright metal locker in the galley. At least, he figured, there was the quiet night

ahead.

Simon climbed the three-level set of steps to the wooden bridge door, and slowly twisted the door-handle until it clicked. As the lower pressure inside the wheelhouse sucked the door open, the light on his side of the door blinked out, throwing him into pitch blackness. His eyes stung. He doubted that any ship skulked on the horizon to see the flash of light as the door opened; as a safety measure, though, he thought, it perhaps had some value still, and certainly, it was a reminder to him of better times.

He slammed the door shut behind him.

Simon stood quietly inside the door, unable to see anything clearly except the lighted dial above the wheel in front of him. He couldn't read the numerals that showed the heading to the nonexistent helmsman, but he could hear the wheel turning by itself. In the light, the wheel seemed like a giant polished brass coin that would spin, stop, and turn the other way under ghostly hands. He was careful not to step in too far from the door with his now blind eyes.

A husky voice jumped at him from the starboard side of the wheelhouse. "About time, Si," Boditch said. "I been standin' around up here figurin' maybe you went for a swim or somethin'." Hec's tired voice melted into a cool breeze blowing across the bridge,

bringing in the sounds of overlapping waves and salty, rushing midnight winds.

"What's your trouble, you big ox?"

"I said, get your lazy butt over here and sign this damn log before I freeze to death."

Simon zipped his dark blue workcoat up to his chin. "What's it so cold up here for?" he said. "You got all the windows open?"

"Well, it's that, or you findin' me curled up like a puppy in some warm corner, steada' tendin' to my business."

Simon edged slowly toward the sound of Boditch's voice, cupping his palm around the top of his coffee cup. "Sheesus—" he said. "Start closing some windows."

"What have you got there? Another half-a-cup of coffee?"

"Just start shuttin' windows, smart-ass."

"You gotta sign first."

Simon dimly saw Boditch weave toward him across the slightly vibrating floor. The large dark form seemed like a huge black bear that stopped and hovered near his side until they both reached the small, slanted log table behind the empty Captain's chair, back on the starboard side.

Simon rested his cup under the spraying red light of a lamp on the desk, fitting his boiling hot prize snug into a hole in a plastic tray. The steam from the cup rose through the light into the darkness.

He took a good whiff of the aroma and said out into the general blackness, "Can't see to write, yet. You gonna hit the windows?"

"Anything," Boditch mumbled.

Simon bent over the open pages of their private deck log to try to read the last few entries. He couldn't focus his eyes; the words and numbers became blurs.

Boditch thumped shut the last of the windows and came back over to the log desk with a big grin on his wide Dutch face. "I hope," he said, "that you don't plan to reopen any of these here winders, fella, because you'll need a wrench to do it now."

Great, Simon thought. If I want some air I'll have to go out and sit in the wind. "Okay," he said, "gimme a pen."

Boditch leaned over the log book and grabbed up the weather-checking notebook. He pulled a slim yellow pencil from the coil binding and pointed it at Simon.

As Simon signed his name into the log, 'officially' assuming the midwatch, Boditch leafed through the last few pages of the weather-log and read aloud his predictions for the rest of the night and early morning. "There's one hell-of-a squall coming, Si," he said finally, "but nothing could blow this tub off course for more'n a few seconds, huh?"

Simon didn't reply.

"Least," Boditch continued, "I know if the plug got pulled I'm

still sailor enough to..." Suddenly he felt tired, and a bit foolish. He and Simon both knew the ship would only take orders from a human operator under the severest of conditions, when the ship's on-board systems couldn't verify its information from any of the separate indicators it used to base its commands. "Well, hell," he said, "it's gonna be a rocky night. I got it figured to clear up by morning, so..."

"You did all right, Hec. Go on'n get some rest. There's some hot coffee boiling away into nothing downstairs. If you want some, you better hurry."

Boditch disappeared down the stairway behind the wheel. Simon looked up at the time-lock meter above the door. If Boditch didn't get his big fanny down into his compartment on time, he thought, and that damned wailing alarm horn went off again; well, this time there'd be hell to pay!

He turned toward the bridge windows and looked out into the cold dark night, listening to the roar of the seas from the open starboard door. "So you're gonna give us hell tonight, and heaven tomorrow, eh?" he said. "All right, give us hell first!"

He inserted his identity card into the terminal on the large starboard behind him next to the starboard hatch. So much for the ship's computerized log, he thought. He picked up the pencil

and began writing out the form information of the new watch into his logbook:

USS KEEP-CA103mv., under command authority Onshore Computer Station CA103cc., Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, this 22nd day of August, 1998, steaming, with a full load of seventy (70) Plutonium-239 isotope cores in all four (4) ship's holds, in a configuration of one (1) on course 092. Speed 16 knots toward vessel destination; US Naval Decontamination and Disposal Depot NADECON 23 W with 1, 2, & 3, engines on the line. Port engine. Port cable. All computer navigation systems of Loran Command Computer in ship's communications central compartment operating normally with full complement of stratographic reconnaissance and telemetry satellite (non-operational due to weather); sonar track, radar and magnetic navigation computation system.

2345 Ship's steward first class, Simon Vermont assumed the Midwatch from ship's steward 2nd class, Hec Boditch.

"Thank God this is the last of these goddamn secret government shipments," Simon said to himself. "Hauling this shit makes me itchy as hell." It was, he knew, a

particularly brutal way to go. He checked his shirt for his pocket dosimeter. *That stuff has a half life of 24,000 goddamn years*, he thought, but a tiny voice somewhere told him bravely, "What the hell! A little puking, it's all over — in a week or two."

He put the pencil back into the wire binding in the weather log, and walked over to the radar scope on the port side of the bridge. He turned the range up to maximum. All the sparkling letters and numerals on the stat-board vanished and were replaced by new information based on the wider sweep. He saw no indication of other ships, small craft, or the like.

By 0115 Simon had checked the barometer and written the wind and sea state into the log. The ship kept a much more accurate and detailed account of all this, but doing things the old way gave him a certain measure of dignity. That's why he and Boditch had bought the field glasses and old-style weather checking instruments locked away in metal boxes under the bridge windows. Simon knew it was kind of silly to lock them up, but he felt a tremendous need to feel responsible for something. There wasn't much of that if you did things strictly according to the new book; or much to do at all that couldn't be handled with a screwdriver, a bucket and mop, or the business end of a straw broom.

The wind now was blowing a

steady 18 knots, and the sea was a blustery state of four. He went out into the crisp wet air and stared at the rising waves. It was coming all right.

The starboard magnetic-heading meter showed Simon the course and heading in revolving numbers set on two rings illuminated from beneath. When the ship veered off course in a roll, the meter showed the ship returning to its automated position with mindless precision. He hated that. He stood there looking back into the wheelhouse at the unmanned wheel. He remembered a time when he could call himself the best helmsman, but there was no sense thinking about that every time he ... no sense to it now at all.

He stared down at the nose of the ship as the water broke swiftly past the bow. It seemed electrically white, sparkling with flecks of algae that glittered as they tumbled through the cold foamy waves. He looked up again, then saw something that wasn't there a moment before. His stomach muscles twisted into a tight, bitter knot. He stood frozen, feeling an icy chill run up his spine. Coldly, he moved into the bridge and stood next to the forward windows. Without taking his eyes off the horizon, he started to search through his ring of keys. The one he wanted felt long and slender in his fingers. He opened a metal box containing the new pair of binoculars he'd bought

just before this trip, and focused them toward the mammoth blinking red-and-yellow lights on the distant horizon. Instantly he knew they were much closer than that.

"Christ," he whispered to himself, "what the hell is that?"

He turned his head to the starboard and carefully pressed his gaze over each statement, but there was no mention under "Unknowns" of the strange distant lights.

He went back into the wet air on the starboard deck and grabbed a handhold on the deck-wall railing. He pulled himself up onto a swaying, grey-decked floor that used to be called the "Signalman's," now given over to electronics. He grasped another bar and jumped up onto the roof over the bridge.

The "Big Eyes," a large pair of binoculars fixed onto a metal post, had plastic caps covering its twin lenses. Simon twisted the caps off and let them dangle from their safety chains.

He could see the huge black ocean, lit by the unnatural lights lying ahead of the ship, and felt the wind whistle through his collar. Bitter cold tears streaked back across his numbing cheeks.

Under the examining eyes of the giant binoculars the object seemed nearer, but it was still hard to focus on it very clearly. The deck pitched and dipped, making it hard to keep his eye up against the viewer, but the huge unknown, seen through

the lens, seemed to glint and flick under the occasionally broken clouds and fading moonlight.

Simon knew the horizon would soon cover with the fog that was creeping up toward the ship, then making the object completely invisible.

He hesitated for a moment in quiet desperation, knowing Boditch would be physically useless during whatever emergency might be developing.

It wasn't unusual, he knew, to have a "trailer" or a "watchdog" following their course along international boundaries, but the only country around was the continental United States. "We're being jammed," he told himself, "but why?" Any ship out on secret maneuvers, he knew, sure as hell wouldn't jam detection instruments and then throw this much light around, unless — maybe — it was meant to be some kind of distress signal. "Whatever it is," he said aloud, "it's not supposed to be there."

He could see the two lights, seemingly fixed in one position, one point off his starboard bow. Just how far away they were he couldn't accurately judge.

He returned to the bridge to make a report to the computers.

He pulled out an evaluation card from his belt packet, filled it out, marking the proper code in the little round circles, and slipped it into the stat-board computer ter-

minal. In an instant the card was pulled out of sight and an answer displayed itself in yellow letters on the board:

**"AVAILABLE DATA REFUTES
ENTERED STATEMENT.
RE-EVALUATE."**

"Re-evaluate, shit," Simon said.

He looked over his shoulder at the lazy blinking lights. The thought struck him that if it *were* some kind of distress signal, he'd have been able to pick it up on his monitors long before the emergency, if it really was one; but there hadn't been any indication of other ships in the area for days. And, since all ships operating in the open seas knew these cargo lanes, they had to be here illegally, because ... "Whatever they're using to botch up my scanners," he said, "it's got every contingency covered." *Maybe they're smugglers*, he thought, *rendezvousing with another ship, or a sub*. "Who are you kidding?" he asked himself aloud. "Nobody uses blinking lights to transfer cargo ship to ship in seas like this, especially hijackers."

He pushed the intercom button for Hec's compartment.

Hec's voice, coming over the tiny speaker, was muddy with interrupted sleep. "A problem? What is it? Can't be a leak, I'da seen it on my meter."

"No. You would have heard the alarm. I think we may have a

hijack headed our way.”

“What? A what?”

“A hijack, and I think we’re the target.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Remember the course change we’re due for tonight?”

“So?”

“So it puts us on a heading straight for the middle of two big yellow-and-red lights on the horizon. The ship isn’t registering them.”

“Well, put a card in the gizmo up there—”

“Look, goddamn it, I’ve done all that!” Simon snapped. “The fucking ship doesn’t see them, and it won’t believe that I do!”

There was a silence, then Simon could hear Boditch’s breathing over his mike as Boditch mopped a hand across his face and sniffed. Boditch said slowly, “Shit. They give us a couple World War Two .45 automatics.... How far off are they?”

“Can’t tell. But I don’t think much will happen before morning. I’ll get back to you.”

Boditch thumbed his voice-box button twice, meaning “understood,” and Simon thumbed back once in reply. Simon looked at his watch and saw the tiny dots glowing brightly: 0145.

He knew other ships had been stopped when pirate vessels merely moved into their paths at close range and suddenly became visible to the ship’s computers. All the

ship’s sensors — sonar, radar, and stratographic satellite, which wasn’t reliable now because of the coming storm — were geared to plot alternate courses around imminent hazards to navigation, unless the hazard was within spitting distance. In that case, the ship threw all engines into full reverse until it was D.I.W. — Dead In the Water — until the obstruction cleared itself or the ship had time to seek an alternate route, whichever came first. But, the few minutes the ship was halted were more than enough for a boarding party to take over the ship, kill the crew, if they decided to resist, take what they wanted, and sometimes scuttle the boat.

But hijackings were rare, because of the relative speed with which the ships could be traced and their crews apprehended. He could be way off base, but chances of that, he thought, were slim right now.

He put his binoculars back into their metal box under the bridge windows, then looked up at the repeating lights. There was only one way he could think of, without the computers, to find out who was out there.

He crossed the bridge and climbed down the port stairwell along the outside of the ship. His face and hands were instantly numbed by the cold. He felt the wind, which had doubled in velocity, bite into his flesh as he

descended the stairs and saw that the fog was blurring across the tops of huge, swiftly-rushing, ebony waves.

He began undogging the hatchway leading to a stairwell and to the security entrance of com/central, just inside the hatch on the right. The effort whitened his fingertips, but he managed to crack open the heavy metal door. Caught by the wind, it slammed against the outer wall, pushing Simon backwards. He saw the banging hatchcover flap madly in front of him; he felt himself sliding in the wind and spatters of rain toward the life-ropes. Then he felt his leg slap hard against a metal stanchion bearing two strings of cord along the edge of the deck. Instinctively he used it to kick himself back toward the door. He lunged at the pounding hatchway and managed to grasp a metal strut on the inside of the hatchcover. He stretched one leg inside the companionway, fighting for balance, then slowly pulled himself toward safety. He turned around inside the doorframe and pulled out the door against the roaring wind. He hung onto the strut, feeling the door biting the air like huge metal jaws. Suddenly it swung toward him and pounded shut, knocking him forcefully into the corridor. He dogged it down with bitter cold fingers that felt like shards of cracked glass.

A long moment passed. He tried

to get his breath.

He was shaken and wet, but he knew he couldn't rest any longer. In another few minutes he might be too late.

He pumped his feet down the stairwell, using his arms for support to keep from falling as the ship continued to heel through the heavy seas.

A small, red, rectangular piece of plastic was centered in the middle of his compartment doorway. Looking at it, feeling his teeth clack together, Simon dug his frozen wet fingers into his pants-pocket and pulled out a sleek, black identification bar, along with the tangle of his keys, which turned his pocket inside out. The keys fell noisily onto the square white tiles of the floor. "Goddamn it!" he muttered. He picked up the keys and pressed his ID bar onto the rectangle.

The door slid open to the right.

Simon hurried to the mattressless bunk above his neatly made rack and grabbed the handle on a bunk-length set of silvery drawers. He lifted the long rectangular folding-door into an open position and rummaged through his folded shirts, rolled up socks, folded dungarees, and bottles of cologne and toiletries for his camera and telephoto lens.

He found the camera, checked it for film and battery level, screwed on the large telephoto lens, then made his way back through the

ship up to the bridge.

He closed the hatch on the port side of the bridge, noting that the object was still visible, then climbed shakily up the starboard ladder in the icy wind. Once in the bridge lookout station behind the Big Eyes, he focused the camera and snapped all the exposures he had left. Through the rain-speckled telephoto lens he saw that the object was now a blurry, distant phantom on the churning sea.

He went back inside the bridge, unlocked the camera, and picked out the exposed film cartridge. He took the cartridge and coded evaluation card requesting the ship's computers in com/central to process the pictures he'd taken, put the card into the stat-board and waited impatiently. A moment later, a tiny green light began strobing in the proper box. He lifted the thick grey-plastic lid of a metallic tray jutting from the base of the stat-board, and inserted the film cartridge into the track. He clumped the lid shut and the cartridge began its journey to the processing lab in com/central.

He put the camera and its lens separately into the drawer under the log desk, and wrote down in the logbook everything that had happened.

He looked up through the windows and saw the wind sweeping tips of whitecaps across the fore-deck. He looked at his watch and wrote:

0205 The wind has risen to state six with rapidly rising surface fog swirling in light rain. If conditions worsen throughout the night, the chances of ship's personnel escaping or effecting useful precautions before what may be an unavoidable collision are minimal.

Twenty minutes passed before he saw the green light flickering again. Simon took the packet of photographs and carried them unopened into the old quartermaster's office at the bottom of the three-level steps off of the wheelhouse.

The quartermaster's table was chest-high. Above it was a tall set of bookshelves and a cabinet on the left with two glass doors; both were full of their private charts and navigation tables, books, and instruments. A wide-brimmed metallic lamp was fixed onto the wall on his right. Simon pushed the metal button at the base of the lamp and it popped on, warming the small room. He hoisted himself onto the red, cushion-topped metal stool beside the tabletop and tore open the packet.

Not all of the photographs were clear, but two important prints were. He could see the object again as he'd seen it through the Big Eyes, but now he was certain that it was a severely damaged derelict nearly half as large as the USS Keep. The photographs showed

large metal shards and long metal poles, broken and pointed, jutting up into the misty fog. The wreckage sat firmly anchored by the remains of something else, whose tip was visible through the misty haze. There were huge identification numbers printed on its sides, but Simon already knew what the two objects were. The tangle of metal between them, he felt, looking at the pictures, was like the death struggle of two giant insects who had ripped and torn the life out of each other. It was a hideous wreck, and it was stationary, waiting.

He reached for a large dull-green reference book and matched the numbers visible in the two pictures with the lists. He found descriptions and several illustrations and diagrams that gave him the entire picture.

Simon returned to the bridge feeling oddly cool, strangely detached. He marked the time and wrote into the log:

0235 Processed results of telescopic pictures taken of unknown object show a listing, derelict cargo-vessel (private industry). All USS Keep detection equipment continues to show no indication of having spotted wreckage. Suspect sophisticated jamming equipment in use, reason unknown. Now estimate position of wreckage 170 kilometers distant in projected course of this vessel.

With the distinct sensation of standing back and calmly observing his own actions, Simon coded an emergency message to Onshore requesting an immediate D.I.W. command. He could hear and feel the storm outside building in intensity. Twenty seconds later the emergency request was denied:

"NO EMERGENCY STATUS EXISTS AS REPORTED BY ON-BOARD NAVIGATION SYSTEMS. RE-EVALUATE."

He'd expected that. He'd done everything he could everything he knew Boditch would ask him about.

He went to the intercom and told Boditch how matters stood.

"Then, that's it?" Boditch asked. His voice, coming over the bridge voice-box, was almost disbelieving. "We're just s'posed to sit here and wait?" He suddenly screamed angrily into his microphone: "Just what the hell are we supposed to do?"

Boditch's outburst jerked Simon back to reality. "I don't know!" he blurted. "I just don't know! I've got to have time to think how—"

There was a loud crash from Simon's voice-box followed by a fierce muffled stream of profanity. The sound of objects hitting the walls in Boditch's compartment, and Boditch's voice, screaming, sounded both near and far away: "Get me out! For Chrissakes, get me out of this fuckin' cell! Get me

out of here!"

"Boditch! Stop it!"

Simon heard the sound of something heavy tumbling onto the floor, and then nothing.

"Okay, okay," Boditch said. A rush of heavy breaths filled Simon's voice-box as Boditch returned and hovered over his mike. "I'm all right," he said. He seemed to be making an effort to slow his panting breathing and collect himself. He continued nervously, "Hell, I'm probably safer down here, anyway. Right?"

There was some truth to that, Simon thought. There were emergency air tanks in each compartment. "Sure," he said. "I suppose..." *If we don't go under right away, he thought, or burn.*

An uncomfortable silence began.

Finally Boditch spoke: "Well, then," he said slowly, "I guess you better try to figure out which hull is gonna take most of the impact; put the netting down, and get the lifeboat over the opposite side."

"What for? Even if I could get you out it's too rough out there, we'd never make it."

"Not we, Si. One man might have a chance by morning, if he went at the right time. You better get the things you'll need into the boat before it gets light."

"I'm not leaving."

"Look, you jerk, one of us has got to survive this to tell the authorities what happened. Besides, there's just no way to get me

out. My goddamn door is made of titanium and it's time-locked through com/central. If you try to go in there and fool around, you'll get yourself char-broiled. Then what? Listen, our best chance is to get the lifeboat into the regular shipping lanes. You can come back with divers and get me out later. You should get ready to go."

"I don't like it."

"We haven't got much choice."

Simon hesitated for a moment, then said, "Okay. I don't think I'll need to hassle the net."

"DO IT! It's choppy as hell, right? S'pose you dump yourself in the drink when you're loadin' the boat? Then where would we be?"

Simon thought about his fight with the starboard hatchway and had to agree. "Okay, I'll set things up, but if . . ."

"How much time is there?"

"Can't be sure. I'd say about three and a half to four hours. Around 0630."

"All right, get going," Boditch said.

Simon thumbed the receiver button, but there was no reply.

Outside on the port rail Simon struggled with the thickly meshed net, securing it into place over the side. A glance at the pounding waves as he worked convinced him how right Boditch had been. The thought struck him that he could tie the log up inside the lifeboat and set it free, stay behind, try to do something. *No*, he thought, the

bitter cold rain slashing his face, *that kind of stuff is for the movies, not real life.* But he stocked lifeboat with extra provisions for two and returned to the bridge.

Simon called down into Boditch's compartment and told him what he'd decided to do. If there was time, he explained, there might be a chance he could rig the time-lock meter to show a false time, 0730, fifteen minutes before the start of Hec's morning watch, so that the computers would unlock his compartment early.

"Look, Simon," Boditch said, "if you go screwing around in there, we've both had it. Those contaminants'll spill out all over the bottom if the —"

"They're gonna spill out anyway!"

"I —"

"As soon as we collide, those poles, those cargo booms, will puncture at least one of the pods. They're not gonna *let* me come back and get you out!"

"Then — you do whatever you think is right."

Simon went into the quartermaster's office, opened a door under the desktop and pulled out a belt with pockets and slings full of tools and instruments used to make minor repairs to the ship's systems. He strapped it on and looked at his watch: 0342.

The storm was now raging outside as Simon moved back up to the bridge.

He opened the logbook and brought it up to date, then jumped back down to the quartermaster's office. He grabbed up the stool there, took it back into the bridge, and put it behind the ship's wheel. Placing both hands around the oval cushion on the stool, Simon slowly stepped up, reaching for a pipe to keep his balance, then stood erect, rigidly, feeling the stool vibrate under his feet.

He selected a small screwdriver and carefully unscrewed the faceplate of the time-lock meter above the door. No alarm. That was encouraging. Maybe there wasn't one. He took another smaller tool from the belt and prepared to loosen the tiny slotted head of the screw holding the arms of the clock in place. He knew a small infraction would be enough to make the computer aware of the malfunction he was making; too much would seal off com/central entirely. This would be the first time he had done anything against the computer's will. He put the screwdriver up to the screw, but hesitated. His fingers seemed numb. He shook them, the feeling in them returned, and he almost reluctantly put the screwdriver back up to the head of the screw. He sucked in his breath, then made a hairsbreadth turn. Again there was no alarm. He let his shoulders sag and released his chestful of air.

Now he felt committed, despite his growing apprehension about

his chances down in com/central.

He swung the plate-glass cover back into place and tightened it up. He put one shaky leg, then the other, carefully back down onto the swaying deck and moved over in front of the stat-board.

There it was: a com/central repair command.

He pushed a tiny glowing button on the board and a small square of paper popped out of a slit. He tore it off. He wrote his name into the space provided for his signature and put it back into the computer. It leaped back out, validated.

The card gave the location of the malfunction in the clock; Simon had something else in mind first, but he needed this card to legitimately ask for it: entry into com/central. He wrote out an evaluation card asking for permission to get an international time check from the com/central computers, to check it with the presumably faulty statement showing on the board. Permission was granted. He grabbed up his stopwatch from the drawer under the log table, and hurried down through the ship.

He pulled himself quickly up the silver-plated steps to the small corridor outside com/central, the computer nerve center of the ship. He held up his ID bar, then put the repair command into a receiving tray beside the compartment door. The door swished open, and Simon felt a cold wave of apprehension flush over his body: if he made a

mistake in here, he and Boditch were both finished.

The compartment was full of safety and security devices designed, he knew, to capture and destroy any person or persons attempting to misuse the computers — precisely what he was going to do.

As Simon entered he saw the familiar rows of computers, machines, and large screens packed tightly into the three-room complex. On his right inside the door was a tall panel of machinery and dials: the faces of meters and flashing indicators. At the base of the wall of computer monitors was a small keyboard with a metal stool fixed permanently in place.

Simon sat on the red-cushioned stool and nervously typed out a false battery level report about the transistorized system used to receive the international time-check. He glanced above the table behind him at the com/central stat-board and saw the order he'd expected, to re-evaluate his statement. This was the first time he had fed a blatant misrepresentation into the computers; he hoped his lie rested enough on the ragged edge of logic to seem correct procedure to the security computers. The room felt unusually cool, but he was already sweating. He had an overwhelming feeling not to touch anything. He felt guilty, as if what he was doing could somehow hurt the ship. He ground his teeth and requested a security-working-order pass into

the secondary part of the computer room. The wait seemed endless. He shook off his guilt feeling when the security-working-order pass jutted out at him suddenly from the top of the keyboard.

He fed the pass into the other side of the terminal above the typewriter keys and waited for the red confirmation light to brighten. When it filled itself with a red glow, Simon stood and walked slowly toward a white line painted across the floor. He expected to be electrocuted as he started to move into the deeper security part of the computer department, despite the knowledge that he'd just received permission to go in there. He kept an apprehensive eye on the terminals, sticking out at him from their opposite places on the wall between the first two compartments, as he inched toward them. He had seen their fire slice through a man's body, tearing and incinerating every nerve. His steps were quiet, unhurried. Somehow the two sharply pointed terminals passed behind his head. *I'm actually inside now*, he thought.

He opened the box-like housing enclosing the international time-check device, located the batteries, then placed a governor for the decibel selector on the floor. Then he shut off power and carefully grafted certain wires into place, letting the governor hang free in the air. He was making the final connection when power was sud-

denly switched back through the unit. His body tingled all over. A howling, high pitched noise wailed painfully in his ears; steadily it echoed through the small chambers of com/central. He moved his eyes upward slowly; full of tears, they ached, were hard to focus. Blurrily he saw the board registering the low-level voltage he was receiving, and the seconds remaining as they were counted down, in the stunning sequence he had activated. He knew the piercing alarm would last as long as the security computers were conducting a body-heat search throughout the ship for intruders. His fingers were frozen to the wires and connectors he had been handling; the small waves of electricity continued to jerk at regular intervals up through his arms, then suddenly ended. He fell away from the housing onto his hips, then rolled up into a sitting position. His hands quavered, his fingers extended as if frostbit; he covered his ears to block the flashes of pain searing through his head. His flesh shook, and he fought to think clearly; he knew he had to be ready for what came next.

The resounding impact of whining sound waves became a sudden numbness; only then did Simon realize he had been screaming. His voice, he thought, sounded tin-like, far away. He mumbled uncontrollably at first, trying to think how to stand up to the stat-board

to face the computer's identity test. He rolled forward, desperately trying to make his knees support his weight, making an effort to reach the high-backed swivel chair in front of a keyboard below the com/stat-board. He could see a coded, preliminary series of flashing lights begin to speed across the intruder/steward test section that he knew in a few seconds he had to read and copy out on his keyboard, following the computer's random choice of patterns he'd learned by rote in steward's school. A single error, he knew, could mean death by electro-shock.

He rose suddenly on his weakened legs, arched into the air, and fell into the base of the chair he was trying to reach before the test series began. His arms felt like fish meat, something foreign to the rest of him, yet he made them reach up to the stool and pull himself upward. Then, grasping the edge of the table above his hand, he struggled up enough to spill himself onto the seat.

Simon lowered his fingers onto the keyboard, but he could barely feel the plastic keys. Abruptly the test began. The streaming electrical series of multi-colored circles moved slowly at first; Simon kept pace nervously, dazed still, knowing the speed would increase until only a trained operator could track the racing patterns. His eyes followed the brightly moving patterns until they had sped to the point

where he thought he would lose pace if they increased their speed any farther. His fingers became more sluggish now, thick; his fear of pushing the wrong button, causing his own death, grew stronger and stronger. Once he pushed two buttons almost at once, but the test continued and Simon blurted out: "No, no, stop, stop it!" but the flashing symbols quickened their flight across the pattern board. The board changed designs second to second now, it seemed, until Simon knew he was no longer making conscious choices as the flashes and strobing letters and solid colors raced on uncontrollably. Then, as his fingers continued to press keys insanely, he saw that the test screen had gone blank.

Simon slumped against the face of the keyboard. His lips tasted salty, he thought. His breath was ragged. He covered his face with his hands. They felt heavy and swollen, and he noted dully he couldn't move them easily.

He looked up at the board again. There in the lower right-hand corner, burning steadily, was the simple end-phrase he never thought he'd be so glad to see:

**"MISADJUSTMENT TO
TRANSISTOR MODULE
#3457-lt. RE-EVALUATE."**

Simon rose slowly from the chair and picked out two pairs of electrically half-empty batteries from his belt pack. He quietly re-

placed the batteries in the module with the weaker set. He hesitated, his hands trembling, then switched the unit back into operation. The board requested immediate human evaluation and computation of the situation, and demanded readjustment or replacement of the faulty batteries.

His fingers begin to work again; he scribbled a false stores report into the computer. With no replacements available, he reasoned, the computers would accept his suggestion to rely on information from Onshore by separate system radio.

He returned to the first section of the compartment and typed out a request to use the ship's radio to raise the Onshore Command Station to request a time check. Permission was granted. He wheeled around on his stool and grabbed up a microphone in both hands. When the power light came on at the base of the mike stand he began anxiously, "Mayday! Mayday! This is the USS Keep, CA103; request immediate DIWcommand. Repeat: Urgent request . . ." He trailed his words off. A recorded voice coming over the speaker gave him the current international time in a mechanically dull tone. Simon stared blankly at the overhead speaker. In a moment the monotone message repeated itself. Simon sat back, feeling stunned and defeated. He realized then he had been connected to a vocally-

entered data bank, but that apparently, when he'd failed to speak the correct entrance code, the ship's computers had provided an overlay code to complete the sequence. Still, he thought, now they ought to realize something is wrong; but maybe not. If something had happened to the ship or its ability to receive the international time-check, the completed ID test and the act of using this radio probably seemed to the computers on shore as the answer to any problems; minor problems, as they saw it, at that. Unless he could block out the radio entirely, he thought, they now had no reason to believe there was anything wrong that couldn't, or hadn't, been handled on board.

Then he realized he didn't have to tell the computer anything he didn't want to. He had almost proven that when he'd made the computers believe there were no fully-charged battery replacements in stores. Even before that, hadn't he successfully rigged the time-lock meter to get, falsely, what he'd wanted? And with luck, he asked himself, how far could I go? He knew there were no computer servo's designed to compute time based on consumption of fuel, oil, or anything other than the time recorded on the wheelhouse time-lock meter, regulated through the unit he'd just put out of action. The ship's computer was waiting for his human determination, one

that he hoped it now had no other source to discredit. And since there were no computer servo's designed to compute the accuracy of his input, he reasoned the computer had to accept as fact whatever he told it. He knew he couldn't request emergency help now, or even advice from shore; still, he felt, he might have a solid chance on his own. He typed a false time into the computer, quickly, before he could let himself think about the possible consequence to either Boditch, or himself if he was somehow mistaken.

No alarm.

No order to re-evaluate his statement.

Simon shook back his head, hooted, and laughed aloud.

The great complexity of the ship's computers had always seemed so damned intimidating, almost overbearing. There had been times, too often, when he'd thought of it as almost human, with a dominant, over-intelligent personality; had thought of it as a heartless taskmaster who ran his ship with an infallible will. Now he could see that he was wrong, that was just what it had always really been: an emotionless hunk of bolts and wires, with interrelated parts spewing out predetermined programs like a pin-ball machine. How easy it had been to think differently, practically alone with his complex machine all these years. He knew suddenly he'd been com-

peting with the future for a place in the past. That was over now, he thought, but was it too late?

"The present time," he said aloud, "as far as the computer is concerned, is fifteen minutes before Boditch's door should open, releasing him to take the next watch. That should give me enough time to do a few other things."

He left com/central and rushed up to the bridge. He pounded the voice-box button exuberantly and told Boditch to get the things he wanted to take with him and meet him, Simon, up on the bridge as soon as the compartment was open. "I'm gonna disconnect the wires that lead to the alarm sirens," Simon said, "and turn on all the running lights, so we can see them from the raft. Then I'm gonna get some pipes from the bos'n locker to fix between the doors in the corridors in case anything goes wrong, which it won't, and we get stuck somehow below deck. I have a plan that might save the ship, but we've got to talk it over. If you're against it, we go over, if not, you can help me."

Boditch's reply was hesitant, but Simon didn't notice the reluctance in his voice, "You really think you can get me outta here, Si?"

"Take a look at your watch light — green, isn't it?"

"So far, — I haven't heard the bell."

"No sweat. I just want to be

cautious. See you upstairs."

"Right, later."

Simon climbed down the steps of the wheelhouse, feeling the ship pitch sharply in the dark crashing waves. He hung on for a moment and suddenly had thoughts about their chances in the open sea in an uncovered lifeboat. They weren't good at best, he knew, unless the weather did clear by morning, but what then? It would still be rough. He decided it would be wrong to leave the ship, regardless of what Boditch might decide. Anyway, he thought, a Ship's Captain would always rather go down with his ship, and all that, wouldn't he? He felt his plan was proving to be a sound one, sound enough to convince Boditch it could work. If they could convince enough of the ship's automated systems, he would argue, into believing only the information they fed into them, they might be able to completely blackout the ship's computers long enough to feed them false current-status reports. If that worked, they could gain full control of the ship before it smashed up against the wreck. If things went badly, he would say, they still had the lifeboat.

In the bos'n locker at the nose of the ship, Simon found the stack of metal pipes he was looking for. He stumbled back through his compartment corridor, passing Boditch's compartment door, carrying them sloppily under his arms.

The passageways seemed blanker and emptier, more devoid of any human influence, than they had ever been. Time was growing short, he thought. In a few minutes Boditch would be standing up on the bridge arguing with him over the scheme. He knew they'd need the freedom of several corridors, including the one leading down through the ship and to the com/central ladder, to do what had to be done. He placed the pipes across certain hallway doors so that they couldn't close, and went back up to the bridge.

Simon looked at the time on his watch. Six minutes to go, he thought, before Boditch's compartment door will unlock. He flipped the bridge voice-box open and called down, "Got everything ready down there?" There was no immediate answer; then Boditch's husky voice replied, "Yeah, I hope this works. The bell went off." Simon felt like cheering. He said: "It already has! Just be sure you pulled out the safety bar."

"Don't worry about that," Boditch said. Down in the stillness of his locked compartment, Boditch rested his meaty palm on the safety bar still firmly placed in the lock position against the door, and continued, "It's the first thing I did. Soon as it opens I'll be right up." He reached into the bureau drawer above his bunk, pulled out a loaded small-caliber revolver, and put it under his shirt.

Simon waited anxiously, spending his time bringing the log up to date and putting down his thoughts about the ship's computers. His written words were less structured, less the notations of what was once a legal document, and more now a reflection of himself:

0502 The worst of the storm has passed, but the swells are still large, black, and choppy. The fog will lift, according to the computers, in about an hour and a half. I figure to impact with the wreckage about half an hour after that: 0630. I'm certain that I can outwit the ship's systems now, since all the navigation systems of the ship are part of a main routine thought of as 'running the ship.' The individual parts, the subroutines, which are used as separate indicators of various conditions, are the system's weakness, because they aren't fed into a "decision-making" central bank, but into a "reaction" center. Whenever one of these separate sources, like the unit providing the ship with the international time-check, is disturbed, a security overlay activates a supervisory program to handle the situation. According to the book, if security can't find another source within itself to override the problem, the computer must, as a last resort,

rely on any information I may supply. (However incorrect, I find, that information may be.) My problem, then, is to invoke this response, consistently, throughout each of the separate systems. I've been trained to repair some sophisticated machinery, but most of the deep security programming is foreign to me. In the "unlikely event of boarding, this knowledge cannot be used against me," according to the stewards' manual. What bullshit! The whole fucking system robs us of our responsibility even for our own safety and that of our cargo; especially one like we're saddled with now. I believe I can use the knowledge I do have of the ship's automated systems to mis-evaluate and rig certain components of my ship's navigational equipment, and other computer readouts, to get the effect I want. The first proof of this will be when Boditch is freed from his compartment.

The crackle of the voice-box startled Simon into realizing how much time had passed. The wheelhouse was heaving and swaying. It gave him the sensation of staggering across the floor toward the box as if he were in a nightmare. His stomach tensed into a tight knot. Boditch's gravelly voice sounded strained and excited: "It didn't open! Jesus Christ, Simon! It

won't open up!" Simon's queasy stomach tightened again. He couldn't speak. Boditch's heavy forced breathing flooded Simon's voice-box. Boditch waited a moment for Simon's reaction, then continued, gasping, "Well, that's it." He paused. "You've done everything a man could do. You know what has to be done. I don't think you should wait any longer. So go on, will ya?"

Simon rubbed his palms across the sides of his face and pushed his fingers back through his hair. "I don't understand," he said. "I don't . . ." Hec interrupted him harshly, "There's nothing to understand, damn it! Now get off the goddam boat, before . . ." Abruptly he became dead silent.

Simon was frustrated, afraid there was a special security contingency working against him, one that could defeat his whole plan. The thought had raged inside him while Boditch spoke; now, suddenly, it erupted in a stream of anger and contempt for Boditch's fatalistic attitude, for the sudden loss of his renewed sense of self-dignity, and for the idea that the ship's computers had somehow bested him again. He screamed loudly, viciously into his voice-box: "No! Never! Never again! We both make it, or we both go down! You read that?" Simon angrily snapped off his voice-box speaker and pounded his fist into the open pages of the deck log. He grabbed up his elec-

tric pencil by the cord hanging at his side and frantically scribbled across an evaluation card. He fed the message into the stat-board terminal with the swiftness of a knockout punch:

**"FUCK YOU! YOU
MECHANICAL BASTARD!"**

In a moment an answer displayed itself in flowing yellow letters:

**"AVAILABLE DATA REFUTES
ENTERED STATEMENT.
RE-EVALUATE."**

Simon's eyes were held in place on the statement like flesh stuck to the side of an ice cube. If the ship was asking for an evaluation, he thought, it followed that there was no special security contingency because there *was* no "available data," just as there was no data to "refute" the false time he'd made the computer accept. This was just a simple catch-all phrase, then, designed to cover all information not acceptable, not current. Where any information, false or not, was current and in acceptable form, this phrase did not appear. The path, he thought, was open again. There had to be some other reason why Hec's compartment door hadn't opened, but he couldn't stop to figure it out now. There wasn't enough time left. He wheeled around to the voice-box, switched the speaker back on, and pressed the voice button for Boditch's compartment. He said determin-

edly, "Listen, Hec. I still think I can save the ship. It's up to me now, alone. I'll keep you up to date."

Boditch answered with a deliberation that puzzled Simon. He seemed only to have calmed himself to a point where he was either rational again, or to where he was so numbed by what was happening around him that he was willing to accept any solution because he had to. He said, "You got your mind made up, that right? Well, you go ahead and do whatever you think is best for you. We all have to do that in the end, don't we?"

Simon's reply was calm and sympathetic. "For one reason or another, I suppose." He lifted his finger off the voice button.

Under the dim, spraying red light of the lamp above the log desk, Simon started to map out which units and circuits were providing the ship with navigational readouts at points he could most easily and effectively reach and rework. Out through the bridge windows above his head, the shimmerings of alternating yellow and red light peaked through the waves and rainy mists. The floor under him slowly tilted to one side; he silently worked, dipped, and rose and fell again as the ship rode the swells toward the heart of the cold misty glowings in the distance.

Simon raised his eyes suddenly from the pages of the log where he'd been engrossed in his figures

for several minutes, and realized the warm darkness of the bridge was now echoing with the reflection of steady splashes of light from the wreckage. He realized, harshly, that his estimate of time until the ship would meet the wreck had been just that — a guess, a wrong one. Before he could focus his eyes clearly on the center of the hazy flares, the wooden doorway behind his left shoulder was sucked open, banging solidly, and chilling Simon like an icy electrical shock. He saw a dark giant figure blocking the doorframe.

"Sshit! You scared the hell out of me, Boditch," Simon blurted. He said, "How in . . .," then started to move toward Boditch's strangely quiet form, but pulled himself up short when Hec slowly raised his gun toward Simon's head. Simon's surprised expression went slack. His body tensed and his breathing became shallow, as if his breath might somehow disturb Hec's stubby finger curled tightly around the trigger of the gun.

The sudden realization for Simon was like a kick in the gut. In an instant he put together all the disjointed clues — the subtle, uneasy phrasings, the partially unanswered questions he'd been too unnerved and too unsuspecting to add up before now. It was all so unlike Boditch. It hurt and angered Simon, but he kept silent, unmoving, trying to find the words. For a

moment neither man spoke. Then Simon said softly, with traces of anger in his voice, with disappointment, the rotten feeling of being used and betrayed, "Then it is a hijack, and you're part of it."

Hec spoke abruptly. "We don't have time for this. I tried to get you to leave, but you wouldn't. I was never really sure you would. Look, Si, I don't want you to get hurt, so just listen: they said it would be a good idea if somebody was picked up who could say for sure all this was an accident. Give them enough time to make their way home."

"Which is?"

"Doesn't matter. Just start movin' slow toward the starboard hatch." He flicked his gun hand to the right.

Simon ignored the order. He saw the faint thrum of colored lights from the sea making rhythmic splashes across the backs of the engine-order-telegraph, the thick rectangular wheelhousing, the barrel-shaped sonar unit, all standing in a row catty-corner between Boditch and him, and then intermittently lighting Hec's somewhat embarrassed, almost vacant expression. Simon knew that the lights must seem much brighter to Boditch, if he was even aware of them yet, because his eyes couldn't have adjusted as fast as he was pretending. He looked nervous; he seemed somehow out of his depth. Still, there was a single-mindedness

about his words: "I don't want to use this thing on you, but if I have to wing ya, to get'cha into that boat, I will. And it'd be as much for my good, as yours, so you know I'll do it."

"Why not finish it here?" Simon quietly slid his fingers across the edge of the log table behind his back, trying to find the handle on the drawer, as he spoke: "It's no good now that I know everything."

"You *don't* know everything," Hec said uneasily. "Neither do I. And that's how I like it."

"I know enough." Simon's fingers touched the drawer's handle, then, gauging his words with his movements, he quietly started to pull the drawer open. "I know that within minutes after I'm picked up, they'll have aircraft from every sea-base around this area out looking for that sub. It is a sub, right?"

"Yeah, it's a submarine, all right. Now get moving. We haven't got much time."

"No!" Simon barked. "How in hell did you get yourself into this, Boditch? Don't you know what they'll do when you're caught? They'll bust you so far into the dark, you'll never see daylight again." Hec remained silent, listening nervously, not knowing what he should do, figuring Simon had a right to his say. Simon asked, "All this time I've been risking my goddamn neck to save you from drowning, you sat down there

knowing you somehow had your compartment door rigged so you could get out any time you wanted, right?"

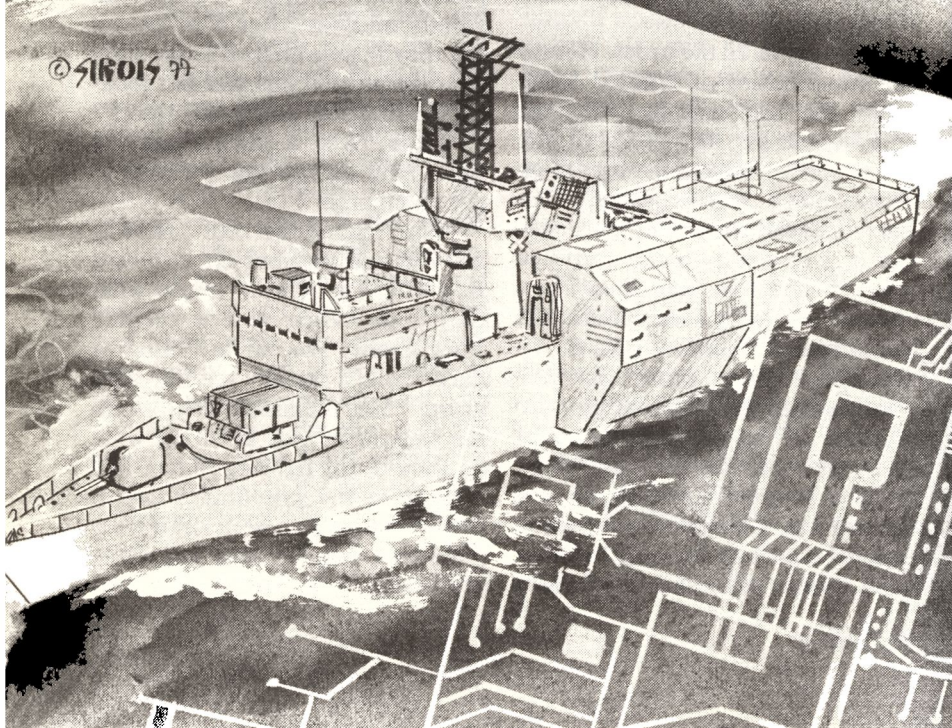
Boditch didn't answer. He shifted his feet around, frustrated, thinking it wasn't supposed to be like this. Not this hard. They had told him it would be so easy. He didn't really want to use the gun. He didn't *like* guns. It was supposed to be a last resort, and now he was forced ...

"It's supposed

to look like an accident," he said. "I ... I don't want to hurt you." The barrel of the weapon was trembling in his hand. "But, like I said before, you gotta do whatever's best for yourself in the end, when nobody cares how you end up." He was talking now, Simon could tell, like a man who was very tired emotionally: disturbed, confused by a situation and a role in it that was meant for someone else. Boditch waited, tried to tell himself he was all right, doing what he had to do to defeat everything that was against him, everything that had gone wrong in his life.

Simon felt guilty,
standing there,

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now facing more than a gun. He had himself to blame, he felt, for not seeing how disturbed Boditch had become, for being so involved in his own little world that he may have fed Boditch's illness with all of his talk about the past. He knew how powerful Boditch was, how dangerous he could really be, but he knew he had to reason with him if he could. He changed his tone: "Who are they, Boditch?"

"Just some kids ... what's it matter?"

"You don't see what's happening to you? They're terrorists. They'll use the cores to make atomic bombs, threaten to blow up some major city. Maybe *blow* one up. Is that what you want? He waited a moment, then went on. "Look, they won't need you anymore once I've been put off the boat. The truth is, they stopped needing you once you told them everything they needed to know, but they must have figured that if you *did* get me away, it was worth something, because when I told the authorities that we were hauling a radioactive cargo, nobody would . . ."

"No, no, it's not like that . . ."

"Isn't it? Didn't they pump you for information about the ship's security system? Didn't they ask your advice about what precautions to take? Didn't they want to know if I'd go along willingly, or have to be dealt with? Listen, the only thing they "needed" you for

is to make sure I put the netting over the side in case it became necessary to board the ship. Okay, you were supposed to get me off the boat, but you've screwed that up. What are things gonna look like now?"

"An accident. Just like before," Hec insisted.

"Why should I tell them that?"

Hec's eyes darted toward the bridge windows for an instant. "For me," he said. "You'll do it for me."

"I see. You think I won't spill my guts out of friendship. What kind of friendship is this? Look at you, with that gun. Look at what you're putting me through. Why the hell should I do anything for you? You're gonna get us both killed! I'll bet you haven't even been paid." Simon stalled, desperate to find what he wanted in the drawer, working his hand around slowly, carefully, without making noise.

"I'll get it!" Boditch exploded. "I'm getting plenty, don't worry about that!" He tried to keep himself under control. "You just shut up now, they'll be coming up soon. You gotta —"

"No they won't. They don't want to be seen."

"You're wrong! I know what's gonna happen."

"So do I. As soon as we pile up they're gonna pump a couple non-detonating fish into our belly to make sure we take on enough

water — ”

“You’re wrong, I tell ya! They wouldn’t do that! They ... They wouldn’t want to risk breaking open any of the pods.”

“They only need to open one of them, Boditch, and when the cargo booms on the wreck rip into our hull, it’s gonna happen anyway. It has to look like an accident, remember?” As he spoke, Simon clutched the flashlight he was groping for in the drawer and readied his finger across the on/off switch. It was the light, he knew, they used to make their way around the bridge in the darkness without flashing a bright white light. It had a large red-plastic lens screwed over its regular cap. It felt reassuringly long and hefty. He eased it out of the drawer, then slowly screwed off the red lens, saying, “When we ship enough water, they’ll send out divers to recover a few cores. That’s all they want; you’re just dead weight to them.”

Boditch hadn’t thought about any of the things Simon had just said. They confused and frightened him. He could see better now, was almost able to make out Simon’s dark stationary shape. Suddenly he became aware of the blinking lights from the wreck. As they flashed across his face, he angrily rejected everything Simon had said, feeling they were true, feeling taken in. He lashed out at the fresh burst of light in his eyes with his gun hand. “Just do what

I tell ya’!”

Simon suddenly clicked on the hot white beam of the flashlight and, with all of his strength, he threw it into Boditch’s face. The big man cried out when the edge of the flashlight met his cheek and eyes and split his lips. Instinctively he reached to cover his face, and dropped the gun between his feet. He tasted salt and felt blood trickle down his throat. Then Simon heard the gun scratch across the floor, kicked away into the darkness at his feet, as Boditch lunged blindly toward him. Boditch felt his feet, his left knee, the small finger of his left hand, all knock solidly against the wheel-housing and the engine-order telegraph; he stumbled around them, feeling sharp pains shoot into his side and across his hand. His face felt thick, wet with cold blood pouring from the torn flesh under his eye, running from the fat, open, stinging cuts on his lips and inside his mouth. Simon had vanished. Enraged, he swung his powerful arms through the air, bending, jumping wildly, growling like an animal, as he turned and whirled in his frantic, desperate effort to find Simon and rip him to pieces.

Simon felt blood and spittle fly onto his face as he crouched watching Boditch from the opposite side of the bridge. It was useless, he thought, to try for the gun. He turned to try to open the starboard hatchcover as quickly and

silently as he could, but suddenly Boditch found him and wrapped his huge heavy arms around his waist from behind.

Simon felt himself lifted away from the floor, felt his breath leaving his lungs in a hot rush through his mouth and his nose. His cheeks puffed and became hot, his eyes strained to see, his chest fought to steal breath. He heard Boditch's breath in his ear, then felt Boditch's bloody face on his shoulder as Boditch tightened his crushing grip around Simon's waist. Then, deep within his own body, he heard a sudden snap, then another, as two of his ribs cracked. Instinctively, Simon slammed his fist into Boditch's ear, then again, and twice more before Boditch loosened his deadly grip and stood back, head bent toward the floor, weakly covering the side of his head with both hands. Simon felt the floor rush up to his knees.

Simon toppled to one side, then slowly rose to a sitting position, now thinking the gun was really his only chance. Under the dim light of the new dawn and the regular beatings of red and yellow light that spotted the darkness, Simon frantically began to search the floor for the weapon. He kept one arm wrapped around his aching middle while he pushed his bruised fingers into the small spaces under the map table. Could the gun have slid away this far?

A deep gravelly voice broke the silence: "Here it is."

Simon froze, waiting for the bullet, but the shot didn't come. He crouched on the floor next to the edge of the map table, then felt his leg brush against a long, heavy object just out of Boditch's sight on Simon's side of the map table. He waited, feeling the searing pain of his cracked ribs shoot through his chest, and thought, *God, don't let him find me.* He reached for the handle of the flashlight lying at his knee. Boditch felt the side of his face for the blood running from his mouth. "Don't fight me no more," he said groggily. As his huge disheveled figure moved cautiously past Simon's hiding place on the floor, Simon gathered up his remaining strength and slammed the flashlight solidly into Hec's crotch. Boditch whimpered and doubled over, clutching his groin with both hands. Simon swung the flashlight into the side of Boditch's head and the giant fell in a heap across the floor, his head thudding against the deck. Simon assumed he had passed out, and turned back to the windows.

The alternating lights, Simon noticed, seemed to flash across the bridge much dimmer now. There in the distance he saw the wreck break through the parting mists, becoming visible now in all of its hellish detail. He thought sluggishly: *Time. There's no time.* Everything seemed dull, numbed

by the pain that streaked through his side. He limped to the log table, and bent down on one knee to search for the butt of the revolver, but then, as he strained to reach under the table, Hec's enormous hands suddenly clutched him from behind, around the throat. Simon felt Hec's stubby fingers dig savagely into his windpipe, closing around his neck like steel clamps. He felt his cheeks begin to burn and tears form in the corners of his eyes. He fell to the floor under Boditch's weight; Boditch slumped next to him, pressing rock hard fingers deep into his throat. He tried to scream, but his voice was a garble of coughing and choking. Boditch's arms shook with each new effort, each new exertion. Finally he forced Simon's head to the floor. He could feel Simon struggle less now, could feel his body relaxing.

Simon felt on the edge of blacking out, when his splayed fingertips came across the steely barrel of the gun lying near his face under the edge of the log table. He scratched at it desperately until finally he had pulled it into his palm. He pushed the barrel under his side between the floor and his own flesh, then began to squeeze the trigger harder and harder until it moved backwards slowly, then farther as his strength ebbed and his face became heated, white with the strain. Something cracked in his ears. A burning sensation spread

through his side. Boditch screamed out as the bullet ripped into his thigh, spreading muscles and veins, steadily burning the swelling tissues throughout his hip. Simon saw a stream of blood spurt across the floor.

Boditch lay back against the engine-order-telegraph facing Simon. He moaned and whimpered something Simon couldn't understand. Simon sucked large drafts of air into his tortured lungs. He coughed, spat, and sat up leaning back; he explored his swollen neck, and found the smeary red liquid soaking through his shirt. Several moments had passed, or possibly several minutes, when Boditch looked up and said quietly, "I didn't mean it, Si. I didn't ever mean it to be like this." He began to cry and moan softly to himself. Simon rose to his feet and looked out over the new morning. He said, "I know Hec, I know." He saw that the seas were much smaller now and that the sun was lifting itself slowly out of the sea. The deadly wreck in the distance seemed to loom over the ship. There might be twenty minutes, he thought vacantly.

For a moment he felt like sinking to the floor next to his disabled friend, to simply wait, but then his thoughts turned to the submarine, her crew, her Captain, waiting somewhere far below the waves. *They* were responsible for this. Hec was a confused, bitter man, he

thought, but a decent one until now. He'd only acted out of frustration and self-pity. Whatever he was, *they* were as much to blame for it as he, for using his disillusionment against him, for baiting him to accomplish their own selfish ends. The thought angered him the more he thought of it, watching the pitiable figure of his best friend lying there on the floor slowly bleeding to death. He began to wonder how he'd have acted in Boditch's place. Differently, yes, but how tempted would he have been? What could they have said to convince him to sell out Boditch? What kind of goddamned people were they? He decided then that he would fight — and he had a plan.

Simon wrapped a tourniquet, from his belt first-aid kit, around Boditch's leg. He felt there was still a chance that if he could stop the ship from slamming into the wreck, the sub would move off rather than risk being detected by the satellite warning system, since the sky was now clearing. He looked over the plans he'd started on the pages of the deck log, and figured out the rest of it roughly in his head. That would have to do. He knew if he made any mistake it was over for both of them, but now that didn't seem to matter in the same way as before.

He still felt a lot of pain through his chest, but he crossed the bridge and finished undogging the starboard hatch. He made his way

slowly up above the signalman's area to a small metal box fixed onto the side of the radar tower. He took out a pair of pinchers from his belt, put them on the deck by his knee, and picked out a wrench. There were only four bolts, he saw, holding the box's metal cap in place. He unscrewed them with short, jerking pulls, letting the bolts fall away in the salt breeze that tumbled them across the grey painted deck into the sea.

He put the wrench back in its place on his belt and grabbed up the pinchers. The salt air burned his throat as he worked quickly toward the proper wire inside the box, connected to one of the ship's telemetry circuit servo-mechanisms. He hesitated a split-second, then bit the wire in half. He left the cover where it had fallen and moved down inside the bridge to read the stat-board.

An Inoperable Equipment report glowed in red letters along the proper line. Simon hurriedly coded an evaluation card requesting another com/central working-order-pass. When the pass appeared, Simon took it and went out into the cold along the lower starboard side of the ship, where the swells and rolling motion they caused seemed diminished somewhat since he'd last been there. He undogged the hatch that led into the com/central passageway and entered, leaving the door open

as he stepped through. He scraped his ID bar across the deck-grey paint of the com/central door up to the identification-rectangle. He slipped his pass into the receptacle by the side of the door. The entrance zipped open. Once he was inside, the doorway automatically closed behind him. He typed out a request for a pass into the secondary part of the compartment and received a confirmation light. Then he tapped out a request for permission to rewire telemetry information to compensate for the aberrant readouts the ship was now receiving. He allowed himself to feel nothing when his request was granted. This was a game, he thought, but not with a thinking or reasoning animal, he reminded himself; it had only seemed that way. He knew his worst enemy, then, was his own inability to outmaneuver any security overlays he might find in the system unknowingly. Keep it simple, he thought. Don't outguess yourself into a hole. They spent a lot of money but no more than they had to.

He felt flushed, weakened both physically and mentally by the whole nightmarish thing, but he pushed himself ahead into the secondary section. He reset the telemetry control devices there to show a five degree variance from true course, then switched them back on the line. No alarm. He knew that as long as the magnetic

navigation system was working, this new reading wouldn't change the present course of the ship, but later, when the right moment came, this variance *would* be necessary to confuse things. And with luck, he'd just blocked any special-security telemetry parameter that might affect his gaining control of the ship.

He eased cautiously back into first part of the computer complex, past the shock-terminals, to the stool under the computer console, then requested a current magnetic position from the computer. He misquoted the information back into the console, claiming there was an irreparable malfunction somewhere in the system. The board instantly refuted his statement and requested his re-evaluation. For now, he ignored the order.

The pain in his chest was easing a little now. Choosing the shortest path back through the hatchway he'd left open, he edged himself along the starboard side up to the bridge, where he found Hec breathing shallowly — too slowly, he thought. But there was no time to do anything else for him now.

He stepped out onto the port deck in the wind. He found a sonar meter and unscrewed its protective metal cap to expose it to salt air. The board showed the mis-adjustment, but Simon ignored its re-evaluation order. Instead he attacked the board itself with a

pair of clippers. He found the place where imprints that came from the ship's sonar equipment were fed into the board, and then cut the sonar-jack from its lead wires. He hadn't ever had a reason to think of it before, but there were no special security devices he knew of designed into the bridge stat-board. There was no practical reason: anyone using anything other than the proper code was automatically denied entrance. A built-in safety factor, but no alarm. However, he thought now, since information coming into the board from his evaluation cards was either accepted or rejected through this terminal, there had to be a control, one capable of believing whatever he put on the cards under the right conditions according to the safety key. Yes, if things worked out he knew he could put commands through here to control engine speed, cables, and everything else needed to navigate the ship.

He fed in a report stating that sonar information was inaccurate, and played a request into the board to retract the sonar antenna from the water back up into the hull. He moved down into one of the engine rooms. When the motor lifting the sonar antenna came to a stop with the antenna in place for examination, Simon reached under the housing and ripped out the plug giving juice to the lowering device. He disappeared into a stor-

age compartment, then returned with a twenty-pound iron mallet. He looked up toward the tall metal ladder leading to the corridor in front of the galley, and gave the metal bar he'd placed between the edge of the door and the door-frame a hard look. He stood over the sonar unit for a moment preparing himself, then painfully raised the mallet over his head. His side ached with the effort, but he brought the hammer down forcefully, then again and again, thudding and banging away, bending parts of the unit that were sticking out, and causing a shower of sparks that fizzed and cracked into the air, then whistled out to silence.

When Simon returned to the bridge he could clearly see the massive floating hulks of twisted steel lying jagged and threatening in the crashing waves. They seemed so much larger now than he'd first thought.

He turned to the stat-board and saw it was screaming for human evaluations. He knew the com/central computer compartment would be a hotbed of deadly activated security devices, but going in there now should no longer be necessary. His next problem was radar.

He jimmied open the back panel on the semi-round body of the radar screen sitting next to the wheel, and found the route-connector leading from the power flow monitor. He separated the connector

from what he thought was the security overlay circuitry by dropping a piece of broken graphite, from the lead pencil in the weather log, between the two where they joined into com/central's main bank link-up.

A persistent request for re-evaluation brightened the big board. Simon smiled. He now had nearly every unit that was important to computer control of the ship off kilter.

But he felt himself growing weaker. He still had the problem of disengaging the magnetic navigation system from the central computer. He began preparing all of the false data cards he needed, but felt, as each moment passed, the terrible presence that the ship was nearing. His feeling of dread grew stronger, more physical, until it finally began to intrude on his ability to think. He was suddenly making up the phony cards almost by rote. He felt cold and fragmented, incapable of finishing what he'd started. He feared looking out the forward windows, afraid that the sight might, at the last moment, freeze him motionless like a wild rabbit under the brilliance of a strong light. In a few minutes he was finished with the cards. His head felt light, his stomach knotted. I'm bleeding inside, he thought. Can't stop, can't stop now, he told himself.

He looked at his watch. Minutes. Only minutes left. What else had

he wanted to do? Why couldn't he remember? He coughed and the warm taste of blood ran out over his lips. He wiped it away, coughing involuntarily again. Hec's unmoving body seemed distant on the floor only a few feet away. Everything became blurry. He shook his head to clear his vision, then slowly looked up through the bridge windows and saw, looming over the ship, what seemed to him a gigantic metal monster from some watery hell.

Simon scowled at the beast. He said slowly, hoarsely, almost under his breath: "Goddamn it, goddamn it. I'll beat you, I'll beat you yet!"

He edged toward the course recorder at the side of the stat-board — the final link between the computer and the ship's direction and speed. But what, he thought groggily, had he planned to do? Without fully understanding why, he used his fist to break the glass cover over the pen-arm keeping its record on the contact-graph. He picked out the broken glass, and lifted the recording arm away from the paper. With his other hand, he scratched around in his first-aid kit for something to secure it with: a bandaid.

He turned to the log table, ignoring the dull pain in his hand, and gathered up the handful of evaluation cards he'd prepared earlier. Except for one, the trigger card, which he placed in his shirt pocket,

he fed them one by one into the stat-board. The trigger card, when he was ready, would activate all the information on the cards he'd just put in. They contained every nonsense thing he'd been able to think of: a request for 'Special Security Permission,' a non-existent item, to reprogram faulty systems above his security level; a request for ten emergency-repair fid buckets; a requisition for thirty galley bacon-stretchers; a readout of the missing ingredients in the ship's water softening formulae. Dully, he reasoned that he might also receive access to international radio communication; yes, that was it, he thought. He stood there vaguely remembering he'd wanted that. He'd hoped the sub was monitoring the emergency bands.

He turned to face the large brass steering wheel, and saw it turn slowly to one side and back, then halt momentarily, and spin lazily in the opposite direction. He held up the last coded evaluation card: the trigger card. He had to hold on now, he told himself. Just a few moments more. With so many units providing inaccurate data now, the ship's systems, he hoped, would be forced to recognize him, 'give up,' and shut themselves off, invoking the final emergency response he so desperately needed.

He pushed the final card into the board.

Simon stepped behind the wheel and placed both hands around it.

The wheel tugged and fought him as he tried to force it to turn the way he wanted, but it was useless. He stood facing the garish, shining nightmare looming up squarely before his swiftly moving ship, and waited for the ugly jagged poles, thrusting out like giant spikes, to reach him. He watched the merchant vessel snap against the other ship, then rock back and forth a moment in the frothy waves. He wanted to sink to the floor, to close his eyes, to sleep. "Give it to me," he pleaded. "For Christ's sake, give it up!"

Suddenly the wheel went slack. It was free, but was there time to miss the wreck? He spun the wheel hard to starboard. The ship began to pull right, creating a terrific wash to port. Simon could hear the rudder supports screaming their pain through the hull of the ship. He watched the image of the tall wreckage bear down on him ... then fall swiftly beside his port windows. He straightened the rudder, angled away from the wreck, and left the wheel for a moment to take a look at the stat-board. It was quiet, lifeless, defeated; the ship was his to captain all the way to where it belonged.

Simon stumbled to the log table, and managed to code an emergency radio message to the US AIR GUARD. The message made no reference to either the sub or its hijack of the USS KEEP. He knew they could still take what they

wanted by open force, but that brought with it the risk of being discovered in the act of piracy, and too, the fact that the ship was now being observed stratographically was enough of an edge, he hoped, that they'd abandon their plans rather than risk exposing their identity. In aborting their mission, they'd have at least a small amount of time to begin their escape. Simon hoped the sub's Captain would realize what this meant: a trade, Simon's and Boditch's lives and cargo for the hijacker's chance at freedom.

Simon stepped out onto the open deck to look back at the wreck. He watched patiently, strangely calm, waiting for the last move of the game. Suddenly a huge explosion ripped through the air, then another. He saw huge balls of black smoke and fire roll up from several places between the hulls of the two wrecked ships. He heard the pounding echoes they made and saw, to his astonishment, the two twisted hulks quietly drift apart not two thousand meters abaft his stern. He knew

then the sub would be moving toward the open seas.

He turned his attention back to Boditch. Hec had lost a lot of blood, but he rested quietly after Simon gave him something for pain and made him as comfortable as possible.

Simon stood looking out of the forward windows. Ahead he saw bright skies with lofty white clouds that scudded peacefully toward the horizon on cool northerly breezes. He opened his log and wrote:

0632 USS Keep ship's steward, Simon Vermont has assumed vessel responsibility. Ship's steward second class, Hec Boditch, severely injured while acting as accomplice during hijack attempt against his vessel. Maintaining current position and status. Expect arrival US AIR GUARD ROBOT PLANE and medical stewards within two (2) hours.

I wonder, he thought as he took the wheel. What does the book say about a Captain recommending himself for a medal? ●

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BOOKS

Victorian Nightmares, edited by Hugh Lamb, 224 pp., Taplinger, \$8.95.

Whispers, edited by Stuart David Schiff, 226 pp., illustrated, Doubleday, \$7.95.

The Year's Best Horror Stories: Series V, edited by Gerald W. Page, 237 pp. DAW, \$1.50.

From the evidence in two of these three books, the horror story is experiencing a renaissance. (We'll get to the third book later.)

Whispers, edited by Stuart David Schiff, is a compendium of the best of the magazine of the same name, combined with seven stories published here for the first time.

The book begins with Karl Edward Wagner's "Sticks," a horror story in the best sense of the word. It's followed by David Drake's "The Barrow Troll" and Fritz Leiber's "The Glove," each a textbook example of how to write a weird tale. Next comes Robert Bloch's "The Closer of the Way," in which the author writes about a certain Mr. Bloch, a writer by trade, and how he deals with a very

**Craig
Gardner**

**Rosemary
Herbert**

**Tyler
Matthews**

annoying psychiatrist. It's all very tongue-in-cheek, and I loved it.

Four great stories, which alternately amused, amazed and frightened me out of my tree. I began to fear that *Whispers* would be filled with nothing but classics.

Such was not the case, however. The next five stories fell short, being merely very well written. They were all just a bit too obvious or a bit too obscure for my taste. One of them, "White Moon Rising" by Dennis Etchison, I actually didn't like!

I mean, we're talking classics.

I didn't hit another one of those until story #10 — Brian Lumley's "The House of Cthulhu" — among the best things Lumley's ever written. And after that — "Antiquities" by John Crowley, "The Inglorious Rise of the Catsmeat Man" by Robin Smyth, "Le Miroir" by Robert Aikman (brilliant!), "The Dakwa" by Manly Wade Wellman, and on and on. Every one was magnificent.

And then there's the piece that closes the book, Ramsey Campbell's "The Chimney," a horror story about, of all things, Santa Claus. Very effective, too.

I had read a couple of these stories before in issues of *Whispers* magazine. Both of them gained in the second reading, partly from the strength of the writing, partly from the distinguished company they keep in the book. The book has some nice illustrations from the

pages of *Whispers*, too.

In all, *Whispers* shows that Stuart Schiff is doing an excellent job of bringing new life to the weird tale. This is simply one of the best anthologies I have ever read. I recommend it.

If hardcovers are beyond your budget, or even if they're not, *The Year's Best Horror Stories: Series V* is an excellent collection as well. This is the second year Gerald W. Page has edited this annual for DAW. The first time around I was lukewarm to his efforts. Not so this year. *Series V* is a solid, entertaining collection.

The DAW collection is not as varied as *Whispers*. For one, it has only 14 stories to *Whisper's* 20. But what it does have is well worth reading. Some of my favorites: "The Service," the very *quiet* story by Jerry Sohl that opens the book, "Sing A Last Song of Valdesse," a Kane story by Karl Edward Wagner; "Shatterday," a doppelganger character study from Harlan Ellison; "Children of the Forest," basically a sympathetic troll story from David Drake; etc., etc. There is not a poorly written story in the book.

Consistently polished writing characterizes the stories in both of these books. I believe that, of all types of speculative fiction, the weird tale is generally the most difficult to write. Stripped to their essentials, the plots of most horror stories are either blatantly obvious

or downright silly. Something like: Man starts to look like fish and house falls down on him.

As I become better acquainted with the basics of the writing craft, I become aware of an awful lot of sloppy writing in sf. The effective weird story has none of this. It works only as well as the mood the writer manages to generate — a mood created by a precise placement of words. It's this mood that carries the reader on a swift path straight to the nameless dread or other wonder. But this mood, this overall weaving of words, can also be shattered by a misplaced paragraph, even a few inappropriate words.

The moods hold together very well in these two books, bringing off swamp creatures, dopplegangers, various psychotics, hairy beasties, and a few things too terrible to name. All in all, a lot of fun.

I had some trouble with *Victorian Nightmares*, although I suspect that half the trouble was with me. I was rushing to meet a deadline as I read *Nightmares* (right after finishing the two other books I've just reviewed). It was absolutely the *wrong* way to read it.

The stories in *Victorian Nightmares* are the product of an earlier culture. As weird tales go, they are more genteel — politer than those written today. Most of them give the feeling of tales written at leisure, which should in turn be read at leisure.

But deadlines awaited. So I rushed on through, Victoriana pil-ing on Victoriana.

This is editor Lamb's third collection of 19th century horror stories, and he obviously knows the field well. The tales are surprisingly varied. You do find some overbearing prose (more on that later), and things often seem to be provoked by an excess of passion (good old repressed Victorians), but the stories often hold an innocence and a novelty of approach that is refreshing in small doses.

One of the most interesting stories here is "The Battle of the Monsters," by Morgan Robertson, which is something of a Victorian "Carcinoma Angels," if you can imagine that. It works very well for 4/5 of the story, after which it degenerates into a rather silly dialogue between a cholera bacterium and a white blood cell(!). A lot of fun, though. Lamb also mentions, in one of his lengthy introductions to the stories, that Robertson had earlier written a story concerning a ship, considered unsinkable, which strikes an iceberg while crossing the Atlantic on its maiden voyage, causing great loss of life. Robertson's fictitious ship was called the "Titan." The story was written 14 years before the sinking of the Titanic. Now, *that's* speculative fiction.

Other good stories include two absolutely acid pieces from Ambrose Bierce; a short but very

effective story concerning, of all things, an excess of passion, from Guy de Maupassant; and a very dry, very funny story by J. K. Bangs, "Ghosts that have Haunted Me." Bangs goes on at great lengths on the overlooked benefits of ghosts; say — to keep you shivering on uncomfortably warm summer nights. There's also a nicely understated (!) story by Frank Norris, "The Ship That Saw a Ghost."

Around these gems are scattered fourteen other stories ranging in style from florid excess to incredible restraint. As I read the first few stories, I found I could appreciate each for its peculiarities; this one a little silly, that one a little quaint. As I got to the second half of the book, however, all the doomed lovers and excess of passion started to run together. Again, this is probably as much a function of my rapid reading as it is of the Victorian prose. If you are predisposed to this type of stylized horror story, I imagine you'll like this book.

In the meantime, I'll leave you with a few of my favorite lines:

"They're devils, fiends incarnate. They'll torture us, I tell you — torture us, by God. They'll cut us into strips and grill them before our eyes." (from "Coolies," p. 179)

"I sink into a chair, while a cold shudder creeps over me as I think of my poor child's dream — of her

fainting fit at Wiesbaden — of her unconquerable dread of and aversion from my departure." (from "The Man with the Nose," p. 131)

"Low by the dripping reeds crouched a small squat thing, in the likeness of a monstrous frog, coughing and choking in its throat. As I stared, the creature rose upon its legs and disclosed a horrid human resemblance." (from "The Devil of the Marsh," p. 17)

But enough. This way lies madness. Not to mention an excess of passion.

— Craig Gardner

* * *

Cosmic Kaleidoscope, by Bob Shaw. Doubleday & Company, Inc., 179 pp., \$6.95.

Stellar Science Fiction Stories #3, edited by Judy-Lynn del Rey. A Del Rey Book, Ballantine Books, 243 pp., \$1.95.

The Arts & Beyond; Visions of Man's Aesthetic Future, edited by Thomas F. Monteleone. Doubleday & Company, Inc., 205 pp., \$7.95.

Titles can be important, especially when cover design and packaging rise to the consistently superlative and striking level typical of books on today's science fiction market. It will be unfortunate if the uninspired title of Bob Shaw's new collection fails to snare

readers already bleary-eyed from the bright array of sf books vying for their attentions. At first glance, Shaw's title, *Cosmic Kaleidoscope*, along with a dust jacket blurb "Stories from out of this world..." impressed this reviewer as hackneyed at best and did nothing to prepare her for the anything-but-hackneyed stories she was about to enjoy.

Inside the book, Shaw rediscovered his formerly excellent ear for a catchy title — among his more memorably titled earlier works is *Tomorrow Lies in Ambush* — and immediately shows a talent for tale-spinning rare to the pages of sf.

The opening story, "Skirmish on a Summer Morning," is science fiction *cum* western which brings together an unlikely but very successful combination of characters including a "good-guy" cowboy who calls his newfound, hauntingly beautiful, pregnant ranch guest "ma'am" as he protects her from both known and unknown enemies; the aforementioned houseguest who turns out to be a time traveller and the mother of strange offspring; a down-to-earth prairie woman who takes on the role of midwife when necessary; and a group of "bad-guy" desperados in the old western tradition. Shaw combines the quick-draw action of the best westerns with an eerie sense of the fantastic, creating a story which is *both* fast-

moving and haunting, a rare, striking, and undeniably successful combination.

Shaw's next story, although entirely different in spirit, setting, and style is no let-down from the first, and the reader at once begins to appreciate the quick-changing versatility of this story-teller. In "Unreasonable Facsimile" an alien race of green men builds a replica of Mount Everest so that they may practice mountaineering in anticipation of their Cosmic Olympics, the "Galactic Games." This brief story relies on a light-hearted sense of humor, an excellent sense of timing, and a very winning gimmick or two for its success. It would spoil the fun to entirely give away the twist of this tale, but a hint won't hurt: the green beings are equipped with a space warp which takes them to the earthly Everest on occasion, as well as zip-on gorilla suits to protect them from the Himalayan cold.

Shaw's collection continues at almost breakneck speed to jolt the reader from one wild situation to another. One tale describes the ghastly fate of a mugger who discovers that his victim is not at all the beautiful, defenseless woman she had appeared to be, but is instead an alien capable of transporting him from his deserted park to a death ship in the stars.

Another tale, "The Giaconda Capers," sports with a heretofore

undiscovered, or *unrevealed*, invention of Leonardo da Vinci, the first moving picture machine complete with a peep show of the Mona Lisa.

In contrast to this humor, a terse, biting story called "An Element of Chance" may be Shaw's triumph of cynicism and understatement. A twist at the story's end is reminiscent of Mark Twain's bleak view of humankind as expressed in "The Mysterious Stranger."

Surprisingly enough, when one finishes the book and looks at its cover again, the title seems a bit more winning. Shaw accomplishes a purpose similar to that of the kaleidoscope; he entertains with a quickly-changing array of delights, twists the elements of good storytelling into new and surprising patterns, and plays upon the reader's urge for a brief but engaging glance at each fictional setup before he moves to the next.

After reading Shaw's *tour de force*, *Stellar Science Fiction Stories #3* is a disappointment; it simply fails to be as consistently engaging as is *Cosmic Kaleidoscope*, although it does contain a few individual stories that should not be missed.

Perhaps it is unfair to compare a collection of works by a single author to an anthology of works by several writers; certainly the

fact that *Cosmic Kaleidoscope* represents the work of one man must lend to the ease of movement from one story to the next. But the considerable editing skills of Judy-Lynn del Rey should be capable of putting together an anthology with more overall spirit than this one. *Stellar #3* is better read in bits and pieces than as an entity, but two of these pieces, particularly, are worth the price of the book and prove that Ms. del Rey has not lost a knack for filling at least a good number of her anthology's pages with some powerful fiction.

Once Ursula K. LeGuin asked whether in-depth character development is the province of the science fiction writer.* Now Mildred Downey Broxon's "The Book of Padraig" answers that question in the affirmative. In an inspired tale which combines bibliophilia with time travel, Broxon creates two of the most memorable characters to appear in short science fiction: an abbot whose pride in his Gaelic tongue leads him to create a priceless, hand-scribed record of Gaelic heritage, and an alien observer posing as a fellow monk who aids the abbot in the completion of the work and rescues it from the ravages of time.

*"Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown," by Ursula K. LeGuin, *Science Fiction at Large*, edited by Peter Nicholls, Harper & Row, 1976.

Not only is the character development in this story exceptional, but the author conveys an extraordinary sense of wistfulness as the observer experiences the passing of the years, and a sense of hope about the efforts of men to preserve knowledge.

Another outstanding story in *Stellar #3*, Clifford D. Simak's "Auk House," tells the tale of an artist exiled into a time warp by the corporate powers to be. His crime: the painting of a picture called "Unemployment" which effectively criticizes the corporate establishment. The story is full of surprising landscapes, including a reptilian world of dinosaurs which sports a modern high-rise office building!

In *The Arts and Beyond; Visions of Man's Aesthetic Future* we're back to the problem of titles again. Actually, this title is appropriate enough for an anthology of science fiction stories centered around art and artists, but the title is more likely to appeal to the librarian or scholar than to the browser in book shops.

Don't be put off by the title, however. The anthology is packed with well-written entertainment from cover to cover, and is further enlivened by illustrations by new, young artists, commissioned especially for this book. The artwork is

a refreshing change from run of the mill sf illustrations, perhaps because editor Thomas F. Monteleone sought out artists who had little awareness of the past body of science fiction art. For the most part, these new illustrations succeed in bringing a new outlook to the field. Robert Huntoon's Edward Gorey-like illustration for "Black Charlie" is particularly striking, while William McMahon's illustration for Roger Zelazny's "A Museum Piece" lends a still, serious air to an especially witty piece about several misfits who take up residence in a museum.

It is difficult to pick out "bests" in an anthology of such solid merit but J. J. Russ' (not to be confused with Joanna Russ) "The Masterpiece" takes technical risks and carries them off well, while telling the story of a frustrated artist who comes into his own during recovery from a serious car accident.

Ronald Cain's "Telepathos" wrestles with one idea of the ultimate goal of art, i.e.: the recording and *transmitting* of man's feelings, as an artist works telepathically with a new medium called palparium.

As for the big names, Monteleone has seen to it that Arthur C. Clarke and Harlan Ellison join Zelazny in lending not only their fame but winning stories to this successful production.

— Rosemary Herbert

The Land of Froud, edited by David Larkin. Peacock Press/Bantam Books, 46 color plates, \$7.95.

The Art of Nancy Ekholm Burkert, edited by David Larkin. Peacock Press/Bantam Books, 40 color plates, \$7.95.

The Worlds of Theodore Sturgeon. Ace Books, 398 pp., \$1.50.

E Pluribus Unicorn, by Theodore Sturgeon. Pocket Books, 211 pp., \$1.50.

Chrysalis, edited by Roy Torgeson. Zebra Books, 270 pp., \$1.95.

Records by Caedmon: *The Silmarillion* (excerpts), read by Christopher Tolkien; Frank Herbert, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Isaac Asimov reading from their own works. All \$6.98.

Problem of the day: how to review two books that are so wonderfully beautiful, so necessary to everyone's collection that I don't know how I can get around raving about them in terms that will make me sound like the publicity director for their publisher. Credibility is on the line here.

No praise is too lavish for these books; they're as good as you'd ever want art books to be. I rarely feel disposed to thank anyone in the publishing industry, but thanks are due to everyone connected with the Peacock line — the people who are Peacock Press, the Ballan-

tine's; the series' editor, David Larkin; the distributor, Bantam Books; and yea, even unto the printer, Regensteiner Press of Chicago.

The Peacock Press books are dedicated, as far as I can tell, to making available (at reasonable prices) collections of illustrations by leading contemporary artists, many of whom specialize in fantasy illustration. The books are 9 × 11, printed on high-quality paper, and feature, in addition to the dozens of color plates, introductions to the artists and their work. They're obviously assembled by people who care about what they're doing; that they're priced so (relatively) low is an added plus. These books would be good buys at twice what they cost.

As for the work of the artists in question, I can only say, "Oooh!" Many sf/fantasy readers are already familiar with Brian Froud and his gallery of delightful fantasy characters; this collection should gain him new legions of admirers. His gnomes, witches, elves, and fairies, and the landscapes they inhabit, are irresistible.

For all that, I was even more impressed by the Nancy Ekholm Burkert volume. Ms. Burkert, most of whose work seems to have been done for children's books, is probably not well known in the sf sphere. More's the pity, and I hope this collection changes that situation rapidly. Burkert is a simply

marvelous artist; the paintings here are tributes to the talents of someone who knows how to coax magic from her brushes and palette. She's a devilishly fine colorist, and the textures she creates are remarkable, too.

The winter gift season is almost upon us: put these Peacock titles (and any others you can find) at the top of both your giving and receiving lists.

Theodore Sturgeon uses words like a well-honed cutting tool, delicately carving out a mood here, slicing through a character's defenses to his innermost self there. Stories he wrote thirty-plus years ago read as though they were written yesterday, leading to the conclusion that the man is one of the very best writers ever to grace this genre with his talents. It's cause for rejoicing that some of his old collections are resurfacing; when you visit the bookstore and find more titles by, say, David Gerrold than by Sturgeon, you know there is truly no justice in life. Let's hope more Sturgeon will follow these two, *Caviar*, and *Some of Your Blood* back into print.

E Pluribus Unicorn features some deadly fantasy, and a smattering of Sturgeon sf (which is, really, unlike anyone else's). Almost every one will set your teeth, if not your mind, on edge;

try "Bianca's Hands" for starters. This edition is handsomely produced, too, by Pocket Books.

The Worlds of Theodore Sturgeon is not nearly so attractively presented (shame on Ace); the stories, however, would be worth reading on toilet paper in a thunderstorm. (The metaphorical equivalent, apparently, of a five-star rating.) It has one of my favorite Sturgeon stories, "The Skills of Xanadu," as well as some devastating character studies. Like *Unicorn*, it belongs at the top of your lists.

With *Chrysalis*, editor Roy Torgeson (the man behind the estimable Alternate World Recordings) goes a long way toward restoring an endangered species — the original anthology — to health. He's gathered stories from the likes of Sturgeon. Ellison, Lupoff, and C. L. Grant, and if not all of them approach their best work in this one, there are no clunkers, either (though the Monteleone comes close). This is a solid book, all the way through.

My favorite stories were Ellison's (which can accurately be characterized as a fucking riot), Spider Robinson's (for liking which I hate myself; it's nothing more than a reworking of the old obscenely-rich-person-decides-to-do-Good *schtick*, but boy, is it effective), and Grant's. A newcomer, Elizabeth Lynn, contri-

buted two stories which seem unfinished, but which pack a good deal of raw power. Ms. Lynn, with a little experience, is going to be a fine writer.

The show-stealer, to my surprise, turned out to be Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's "Allies," a very taut, fingernails-along-the-blackboard mood piece. Underneath the well-constructed plot, Yarbro employs a narrative device I've never encountered before, and it drove me pleasantly crazy. This story was enough to make me want to dig up more of her work; greater praise hath no reader.

The new batch of records from Caedmon (the world's largest spoken-word record company), although of uneven quality, is most definitely an improvement over most of their earlier ventures into sf. (See the books column in UNEARTH #3.) This time around, authors are reading their own work — in Tolkien's case, his father's work — which is vastly preferable to entrusting the manuscripts to actors. Too, the covers here are nice, excepting Sternbach's for the Asimov record, and the liner notes

— written by the authors — are generally quite interesting, especially Le Guin's.

Ms. Le Guin is the star of this group. She reads both stories on the record well, particularly the droll "Intracom," which comes from a British anthology, and may not be available here in printed form. I suspect it's more effective heard than read; whatever, it's a delight.

Once you become accustomed to Asimov's New York accent, this latest volume in the series of Foundation records is fairly enjoyable, providing you tune out the text, which has always struck me as being among the weakest of all sf "classics." Still, Asimov's diction is more than a little disconcerting, and kills whatever sense of wonder the story might otherwise impart.

Frank Herbert's reading of the banquet scene from *Dune* left me cold. He doesn't read particularly well, the main problem being his breathing, which is not controlled. The harsh little intakes of air soon become annoying. On the other hand, there's not a misplaced breath in the Christopher Tolkien record; his lovely accent and gentle, measured tones make the disc a pleasure to listen to. Strongly recommended for Middle Earth fans.

— Tyler Matthews

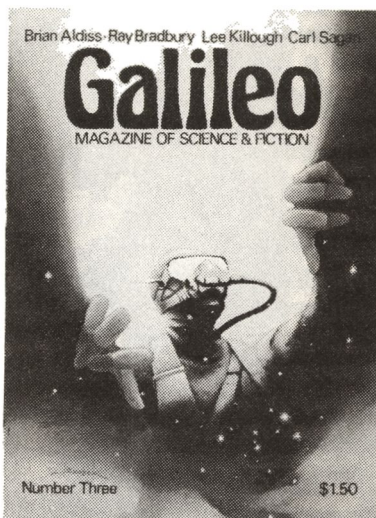
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The UNEARTH Story Contest

Write A Story With
Harlan Ellison!



WHAT IT IS

The UNEARTH Story Contest gives you the opportunity to co-author fiction with the most honored writer in science fiction. The contest is divided into two parts, each of which will have three winners. Here's how it works:

Entrants may choose either or both categories. The first part is based on the story beginning contributed by Harlan Ellison, which appears immediately after this introduction. Entrants will complete the story, adding no more than 5000 words.

In the second category, contestants will supply the first 250-350 words of a story. Mr. Ellison will finish the three he judges to be best.

WINNERS

The six winning stories will be published, with collaboration bylines, in future issues of UNEARTH. All winning entrants will be paid as sole contributors, at UNEARTH's current rate.

In the first part, winners will be free to resell the stories, **under their byline only**, and will keep all payments. Though they may not use Mr. Ellison's name in the byline, writers may add notes saying how the stories came to be written. Winning stories from the second category will be copyrighted in Mr. Ellison's name. He will re-market them — with double bylines — and will assign each collaborator 10% of the sale price from the first reprinting. Each reprinting will contain a note on how the story came to be written.

HOW TO ENTER

The contest is open to all writers who have never sold fiction to a professional science fiction magazine or anthology, except UNEARTH itself. (For questions of eligibility, contact UNEARTH.) All entries must be typed, double-spaced, and accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. **Contest closes April 15, 1978.**

OTHER INFORMATION

Winners will be chosen by the editors of UNEARTH and Harlan Ellison.

Due to the special nature of the contest, entrants whose work is returned will not receive, as is UNEARTH's custom, a personal letter.

All entries may be held until the contest deadline.

This is the beginning of a story to be used as material for a story-writing contest in *Unearth Magazine*. The object is to provide an intriguing opening for a story to be completed by novice writers that does not have so much material passim its plot that a wide divergence of development avenues are closed, yet has enough content to stimulate ideas from the writers.

working title:

UNWINDING
by Harlan Ellison
and

Once he knew he loved Melanie, he knew he would have to make up a list of the reasons *why*.

As curvilinear shapes were to Alexander Calder, so were lists to Morty Reagan. Some men breathe. Morty Reagan listed.

He sat down at his rolltop in the realty office, slid up the tambour door, and took the fine-nib pen from the antique inkpot. He drew a pad of yellow lined paper to him, and began to write ... nothing.

His brow furrowed and he bit his mustache.

Then he wrote, very carefully:

I love Melanie. Melanie loves me. I know what a shit I am. Therefore, any woman who would have the sick taste to love me, has got to be unworthy of my love.

He re-read what he had written. It was twisty, he knew; and there was a logical fallacy in it somewhere; but try though he might, he couldn't find it. It seemed to make terrible, awful, horrific sense.

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He decided he would have to see her, to tell her what he had come up with. He rolled down the desktop and turned off the lights in the office. And sat there for an hour trying to get up the nerve to go see her.

#

He watched her painting her toenails. She had the tiniest feet. The nails were the smallest porcelain chips. She applied the tip of the brush, incarnedined, first to the little toe, without touching the twist of toilet paper she had thrust between each member. A touch. The veriest tipping of horsehair to ivory. She withdrew the brush and the nail lay crimson against her flesh. Morty thought of the good conduct sticker glued to a grade-school deportment chart. The badge of teacher's pet.

She did the next three toes quickly, moving without pause and with a minimum of movement to the big toe.

It took her just seven minutes from start to finish, while Morty sat there trying to speak.

"How long does it take for your fingernails?"

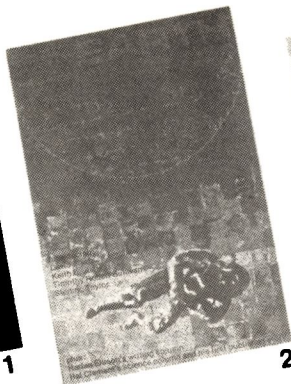
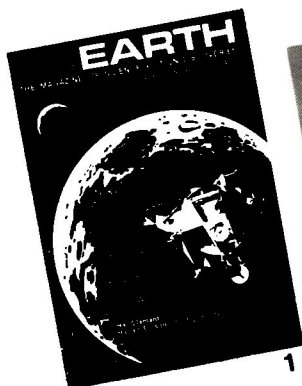
She didn't look up. "I don't do my fingernails. It looks tacky. Like a go-go dancer."

He didn't understand that. But it didn't matter; there were things, many things, that he didn't understand; such as why he was here trying to mess up a good thing. He added this latest mystery to the great store already stocked up in his head.

"Uh, how's your mother?" he asked.

"Oh, yeah, I'd almost forgotten. Mummy really liked you. She wanted me to ask you if you'd consider a threesome?"

Morty Reagan felt his brain pop like a bloated balloon.



#1, November 1976. The historic first issue, featuring the only reprinting ever of Harlan Ellison's first published story, "Glowworm," and Hal Clement's "Science for Fiction" column. \$2.00.

#2, February 1977. The first color cover, Hal Clement's first sale and science column ("right now the best being published" — *Science Fiction Review*), and "The Symbol Hunter" by Keith L. Justice — the most unusual piece of fiction in any sf magazine in 1977. Still \$1.00.

#3, May 1977. "I have long wanted [a Hugo] to go to the best issue of any magazine during the Hugo year, taking into account art and editorial

content; if such there were, I'd nominate this one." — Theodore Sturgeon. With Budrys' first sale, Clement on science, and Ellison on writing. Still \$1.00.

#4, August 1977. First issue with perfect binding. Norman Spinrad's first sale, Ellison and Clement. The biggest selling issue to date. \$1.00.

The first four issues of "the most innovative of the new [sf] magazines" (Richard Lupoff, writing in *A/go!*) are still available, individually or in sets. Single issues are available at the prices listed, plus postage and handling; sets are \$4.00 each, plus 50 cents postage.

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In addition, some of the field's biggest names regularly contribute columns and special articles. Harlan Ellison's column on writing and Hal Clement's science column are regular features. And that's not all! Each issue includes up-to-the-minute reviews of films, books, and records.

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FIRST SALE

**Kate
Wilhelm**

**Roger
Zelazny**

In this issue, UNEARTH presents a unique special feature twice — the first stories ever sold by two major authors.

There are writers in speculative fiction equally as skilled, but there are few — very few — better. Her style is at once spare and rich, and she uses it to create vividly-drawn characters who haunt the reader long after their stories have been read.

*She was the mainstay of the Orbit books during the decade that remarkable series of original anthologies flourished. Her novel, **Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang**, won this year's Hugo, and she seems to be on the brink of being the next sf writer (after Vonnegut, Heinlein, Le Guin, Herbert, et al.) to gain widespread critical and popular acceptance outside the genre.*

Here is where it all started, just over twenty years ago — "The Mile-Long Spaceship," the first story sold by Kate Wilhelm.

An Introduction

1953. Louisville, Kentucky. It is late autumn, rain is freezing as it falls, heavy fog is starting to fill the dips and hollows, and I am on my way home from the public library. I have eight books, the limit; at home there is an infant son, born in September, his brother four years older, and a husband who never reads anything. Within a week I'll return the books and check out eight more, and on one of these trips into town (we live in the country) before Christmas, two of the books I'll take home will be science fiction. I discover it with the start of recognition that I felt when at sixteen I came across philosophy for the first time.

I never knew until that fall that there was a separate category of fiction called science fiction. I knew I wanted to read all of it, and very quickly did read all of it in our library. I never saw any of the magazines until after I started writing, several years later actually.

I really don't know now if it was on one of those dreary nights, but probably, because that is the kind of weather Louisville has at that time of year. I don't know which anthology or novel I read first, and it doesn't matter; it wasn't one thing, but the attitude that I found irresistible.

1955. The two-year-old was a perpetual-motion destruction machine; the six-year-old just slightly less active. We lived in a housing development that was made up of duplexes, and the people who lived in the other half of our house were awful. The woman would not stay out of my side unless I kept the door locked, and if I did that my six-year-old could not get in and out to play. The walls of the houses were made of rice paper, and the neighbors played television all day and night. I was an insomniac and read for hours after everything became quiet finally night after night. But by then I had finished all the science fiction in the library, and too little that was new came in to keep me satisfied. One night in the winter of that year, I closed a book in the middle of a story I was rereading and said to myself, I can do that.

I started to write a story almost immediately after the Christmas holidays, January of 1956. When I finished it, I rented a typewriter to copy it, and then mailed it off to *ASTOUNDING*. In the backs of the anthologies were names of magazines, addresses, all the information I thought I needed. I still had not seen a magazine. It never occurred to me to get a book on how to prepare a manuscript; I assumed it was done like papers in school, start at the top, fill the page and go on to the next. That's how my manuscripts looked for

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years. I never talked about that story to anyone, or showed it to anyone. I didn't know anyone who would be interested.

I had rented the typewriter for a month. While I still had it, I wrote another story and copied it. This one I mailed to *AMAZING*.

Kate Wilhelm

A day or two before the typewriter was to be returned, I received a letter from John Campbell, along with a statement which he asked me to have notarized. It was a claim of authorship, a statement that I had written the story, etc. I thought all writers must have to do that. The check for my first story, "The

Mile-Long Spaceship," paid for the typewriter I had rented. I think there was enough left over to buy a notebook, or a little paper, but no more than that. It seemed an omen that the check and what I needed to buy the machine were so close.

AMAZING took the second story, and actually published it before *ASTOUNDING* published "The Mile-Long Spaceship," but the *ASTOUNDING* sale was my first.

I had always told stories to my younger brothers, and in high school I had written a lot, but when my teachers encouraged me to become a writer I thought they were kidding me. I didn't believe them for a second. I didn't go on to college. I registered, couldn't get a class I wanted, and never went back. I got married instead. The only training I've had to write has been on the job training. For years I didn't dare call myself a writer, not until I sold a novel in 1962.

I've always thought that the way I found science fiction, not separated, not in spite of anyone, but side by side with everything else I wanted to read, influenced me quite a bit. I never realized it was sub-literary, a pulp genre, trashy, ghetto fiction. It was good and bad, like everything else. To this day I don't really know where that line is that separates science fiction from other fiction. I never will know, I guess.

The Mile-Long Spaceship

Allan Norbett shivered uncontrollably, huddling up under the spotless hospital sheet seeking warmth. He stirred fretfully as consciousness slowly returned and with it the blinding stab of pain through his head. A moan escaped his lips. Immediately a nurse was at his side, gently, firmly forcing him back on the bed.

"You must remain completely still, Mr. Norbett. You're in St. Agnes' Hospital. You suffered a fractured skull in the accident, and surgery was necessary. Your wife is outside waiting to see you. She is uninjured. Do you understand me?"

The words had been spoken slowly, very clearly, but he had grasped only fragments of them.

What accident? The ship couldn't have had an accident. He'd be dead out there in space. And his wife hadn't even been there.

"What happened to the ship? How'd I get back on Earth?" The words came agonizingly, each effort cost much in pain and dizziness.

"Mr. Norbett, please calm yourself. I've rung for your doctor. He'll be here presently." The voice soothed him and a faint memory awakened. The wreck? His wife? HIS WIFE?

"Clair? Where's Clair?" Then the doctor was there and he also was soothing. Allan closed his eyes again in relief as they reassured him about Clair's safety. She would be here in a moment. The other memories receded and mingled with the anaesthetic dreams he'd had. The doctor felt his pulse and listened to his heart and studied his eyes, all the while talking.

"You are a lucky man, Mr. Norbett. That was quite a wreck you were in. Your wife was even luckier. She was thrown clear when the biwheel first hit you."

Allan remembered it all quite clearly now and momentarily wondered how he'd come out of it at all. The doctor finally finished his examination and smiled as he said, "Everything seems perfectly normal, considering the fact that you have been traipsing all over

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space for the last five days."

"Days?"

"Yes. The wreck was Saturday. This is Thursday. You've been under sedation quite a bit — to help you rest. There was extensive brain injury and absolute quiet was essential. Dr. Barnsdale performed a brilliant operation Saturday night."

Allan had the feeling the doctor was purposely being so loquacious to help him over the hump of the shock of awakening after almost six days. He was in no pain now while he kept his head still, but talking brought its own punishment and he was grateful to the doctor for answering unasked questions. The doctor waited by his side for a second or two, then in a professional tone he told the nurse to bring in Clair.

And again to Allan: "She can only stay a few minutes — less if you begin talking. I'll be in again this afternoon. You rest as much as possible. If the pain becomes severe, tell your nurse. She's instructed to administer a hypo only if you request it." Again he laughed jovially, "Don't let her talk you into it, though. She is really thrilled by that space yarn you've been telling and might want to put you to sleep just to hear more."

Clair's visit was very brief and very exhausting. Afterwards he rested comfortably for nearly an

hour before the pain flooded his whole being.

"Nurse."

"Yes, Mr. Norbett?" Her fingers rested lightly on his wrist for a moment.

"The pain —"

"Just try to relax, sir. It will be gone soon." He didn't feel the prick of the needle in his arm. But the pain left him in layers, gradually becoming a light enough load to permit sleep. And the coldness.

Space was so cold. No winds to blow in spurts and gusts, to relieve the cold by their absence, only the steady, numbing same black, empty cold. He turned his head to look over his shoulder and already Earth was indistinguishable among the countless stars and planets. Never had man, he told himself, seen all the stars like this. They were incredibly bright and even as he viewed them, he wondered at the movement of some of them. There was a visible pulsation, sometimes almost rhythmically, other times very erratic. A star would suddenly seem to expand enormously on one side, the protuberance around it glow even more brightly, then die down only to repeat the performance over and over. Allan wished he knew more about astronomy. He had only the most rudimentary knowledge that everyone had since the first spaceship had reached Mars. He had been out of school when space

travel had become possible and had never read past the newspaper for the information necessary to understand the universe and its inhabitants.

He shivered again and thought about the advantages of eyeless seeing. There was no pupil to dilate, no retina to burn or damage, no nerves to protest with pain at the brightness of the sight. It was, he decided smugly, much better to be here without his cumbersome body to hamper him. Then he suddenly remembered the ship — the mile-long spaceship. For an instant he sent his mental gaze deep into space all around him, but the ship was nowhere to be seen. He surmised it must still be millions of light-years from Earth. As he visualized it again he slowly became aware that once more he was aboard her and the stars he was seeing were on the giant wall screen.

He watched with interest as one planet after another turned a pale violet and became nearly invisible. He had grown accustomed to the crew of the ship, so paid little heed to them. Their voices were low, monotonous to his ear, never rising or speeding up or sounding indecisive. Completely expressionless, their words defied any attempt to interpret them.

"He's back," the telepath announced.

"Good. I was afraid that he might die." The navigator in charge went calmly about his duties of sighting and marking in a complex three-dimensional chart the course of the mighty ship as it ranged among the stars.

"He's recovering from his injury. He still can't receive any impulses from me." The telepath tried again and again to create a picture in the alien mind in their midst. "Futile," he said, "the differences are too great."

"Undisciplined," said the psychologist who had been waiting ever since that first visit by the alien. "A disciplined mind can be reached by telepathy."

"Can you see his world?" This from the astro navigator.

"Only the same intimate scenes of home-life, his work and his immediate surroundings. He is very primitive, or perhaps merely uneducated."

"If only he knew something about astronomy." The navigator shrugged and made a notation on his chart as two more distant planets registered violet.

"The names he associates with stars are these," the telepath probed deeper, "The Dipper, North Star, Mars ... no, that is one of the planets they have colonized." A wave of incredulity emanated from him, felt by the others of the crew, but not expressed in his voice. "He doesn't know the difference between single

stars, clusters, constellations, only that they appear as individual stars to him, and he thinks of them as such."

The navigator's calm voice belied the fury the others felt well out from him. "Look at his sun, perhaps that will give us a hint." They all knew the improbability of this. The telepath began droning what little Allan knew about the sun when the captain appeared through another wall screen.

He was accompanied by the ship's ethnologist, the expert who could reconstruct entire civilizations from the broken remains of a tool or an object of art, or less if necessary. The captain and his companions made themselves comfortable near the star screen and seemed immediately engrossed in the broken lines indicating the ship's flight in the three-dimensional reproduced outer spaces.

"Is he still here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he aware yet that we discovered his presence among us?"

"No, sir. We have made no effort to indicate our awareness to him."

"Very good." The captain then fell silent pondering his particular problem as the ethnologist began adding to the growing list of facts that were known to Allan about Earth.

They would have a complete picture of the present and the past. As complete as the alien's mind and

memory could make it. But unless they could locate his planet they might just as well go home and view space-fiction films. This exploration trip had achieved very little real success. Only fourteen planets that could be rated good with some sub-intelligent life, several hundred fair with no intelligence and only one he could conscientiously rate excellent. This mind was of an intelligent, though as yet unadvanced humanoid race. The planet it inhabited met every requirement to be rated excellent. Of this the captain was certain.

Suddenly the telepath announced. "He's gone. He became bored watching the screen. He knows nothing about astronomy; therefore, the course loses its significance to him. He has the vague idea that we're going to a predetermined destination. The idea of an exploration, charting cruise hasn't occurred to him as yet."

"I wonder," mused the captain, "how he reconciles his conscious mind to his subconscious wandering."

The psychologist answered. "As he begins to awaken other dreams probably mingle with these memories causing them to dim at the edges, thus becoming to his mind at any rate merely another series of especially vivid well-remembered dreams. I believe much of what lies in his subconscious is dream memory rather than fact memory." The

psychologist didn't smile, or indicate in any fashion the ridicule and sarcasm the others felt as he continued, "He has the memory of being always well fed. He has buried the memory of hunger so far down in his subconscious that it would take a skilled psychologist a long time to call it forth."

The telepath stirred and started to reply, then didn't. The alien's mind had been like a film, clear and easy to read. Some of the pictures had been disturbing and incomprehensible, but only through their strangeness, not because they were distorted by dream images. The psychologists never could accept anything at face value. Always probing and looking for hidden places and meanings. Just as he did when told of the world democracy existing on Earth.

"Most likely a benign dictatorship. A world couldn't be governed by a democratic government, a small area, perhaps, but not a world." Thus spoke the psychologist. But the telepath had been inside Allan's mind, and he knew it could and did work. Not only the planet Earth, but also the colonies on Mars and Venus.

The captain was still pursuing his own line of questioning.

"Has he ever shown any feeling of fear or repulsion toward us?"

"None, he accepts us as different but not to be feared because of it."

"That's because he believes we

are figments of his imagination; that he can control us by awakening."

The captain ignored this explanation advanced by the psychologist. A mind intelligent enough for dreams, could feel fear in the dreams — even a captain knew that. He was beginning to get the feeling that this Earth race might prove a formidable foe when and if found.

"Has he shown any interest in the drive?"

"He assumed we use an atomic drive. He has only the scantiest knowledge of atomics, however. His people use such a drive."

"The fact that the race has atomics is another reason we must find them." This would be the third planet using atomic energy. A young race, an unknown potential. They did not have interstellar travel now, but one hundred fifty years ago they didn't have atomic energy and already they had reached their neighbor planets. It had taken three times as long for the captain's people to achieve the same success. The captain remembered the one other race located in his time that had atomics. They were exploring space in ever widening circles. True they hadn't made any startling advances yet in weapons, they had found decisive bombs and lethal rays and gases unnecessary. But they had learned fast. They had resisted the invaders with cunning and skill. Their

bravery had never been questioned, but in the end the aggressors had won.

The captain felt no thrill of satisfaction in the thought. It was a fact accomplished long ago. The conclusion had been delayed certainly, but it had also been inevitable. Only one race, one planet, one government could have the energy, and the right to the raw materials that made the space lanes thoroughfares. The slaves might ride on the masters' crafts, but might not own or operate their own. That was the law, and the captain was determined to uphold to the end that law.

And now this. One mind freed from its body and its Earth roaming the universe, divulging its secrets, all but the only one that mattered. How many millions of stars lit the way through space? And how many of them had their families of planets supporting life? The captain knew there was no answer, but still he sought ways of following the alien's mind back to his body.

Allan stirred his coffee slowly, not moving his head. This was his first meal sitting up, now at its conclusion he felt too exhausted to lift his spoon from his cup. Clair gently did it for him and held the cup to his lips.

"Tired, darling?" Her voice was a caress.

"A little." A little! All he

wanted was his bed under him and Clair's voice whispering him to sleep. "I don't believe I'd even need a hypo." He was startled that he had spoken the thought, but Clair nodded, understanding.

"The doctor thinks it best to put off having anything if you can. I'll read to you and see if you can sleep." They had rediscovered the joy of reading books. Real leather-bound books instead of watching the three D set, or using the story films. Allan loved to lie quiescent, listening to the quiet voice of his wife rise and fall with the words. Often the words themselves were unimportant, but there was music in listening to Clair read them. They were beautifully articulated, falling into a pattern as rhythmic as if there were unheard drums beating the time.

He tried to remember what the sound of her voice reminded him of. Then he knew. By the very difference in tone and expression he was reminded of the crew of the mile-long spaceship in his dream. He grinned to himself at the improbability of the dream. Everyone speaking in the same metallic tone, the monotonous flight, never varying, never having any emergency to cope with.

The noises of the hospital dimmed and became obscure and then were lost entirely. All was silent again as he sped toward the quiet lonesome planet he had last visited. There he had rested, gazing

at the stars hanging in expanding circles over him. He had first viewed the galaxy from aboard the spaceship. Interested in the spiral shape of it he had left the ship to seek it out at closer range. Here on this tiny planet the effect was startling. If he closed out all but the brightest and largest of the stars there was ring after ring of tiny glowing diamonds hanging directly above him. How many times had he come back? He couldn't remember, but suddenly he thought about the mile-long spaceship again.

"He's back," the telepath never moved from his position, before the sky screen, nor did the astro navigator. Abruptly, however, the panorama went blank and the two moved toward the screen on the opposite wall.

"Is he coming?"

"Yes. He's curious. He thinks something is wrong."

"Good." The two stepped from the screen into a large room where a group watched a film.

The navigator and the telepath seated themselves slightly behind the rest of the assemblage. The captain had been talking, he continued as before.

"Let me know what his reactions are."

"The film interests him. The dimensional effect doesn't bother him, he appears accustomed to a form of three-dimensional films."

"Very good. Tell me the instant something strikes a responsive chord."

The film was one of their educational astronomy courses for beginners. Various stars were shown singly and in their constellations and finally in their own galaxies. The telepath dug deep into the alien's memory, but found only an increasing interest, no memories of any one scene. Suddenly the telepath said,

"This one he thinks he has seen before. He has seen a similar galaxy from another position, one that shows the spiral directly overhead."

The captain asked, "Has this one been visible on the screen from such a position?"

"Not in detail. Only as part of the charted course." The navigator was making notes as he answered. "There are only three fixes for this particular effect. A minor white dwarf with six satellites and two main sequence stars, satellites unknown."

The captain thought deeply. Maybe only a similar galaxy, but again maybe he was familiar with this one.

The orders were given in the same tone he had used in carrying on the conversation. The alien had no way of knowing he was the helmsman guiding the huge ship through space.

The telepath followed the alien's mind as he gazed raptly at the ever-

changing film. Occasionally he reported the alien's thoughts, but nothing of importance was learned. As before, the departure of the alien was abrupt.

With the telepath's announcement, "He's gone," the film flicked off and normal activity was resumed.

Later the captain called a meeting of the psychologist, the telepath, the chief navigator and the ethnologist.

"We represent the finest minds in the universe, yet when it comes to coping with one inferior intellect, we stand helpless. He flits in and out at will, telling us nothing. We are now heading light-years out of our way on what might easily prove to be a fruitless venture, merely because you," he held the telepath in his merciless gaze, "think he recognized one of the formations." The captain's anger was a formidable thing to feel, and the rest stirred uneasily. His voice, however, was the same monotone it always was as he asked, "And did you manage to plant the seeds in his mind as suggested at our last meeting?"

"That is hard to say. I couldn't tell." The telepath turned to the psychologist for confirmation.

"He wouldn't know himself until he began feeling the desire for more education. Even then it might be in the wrong direction. We can only wait and hope we

have hit on the way to find his home planet through making him want to learn astro-navigation and astronomy." Soon afterward the meeting adjourned.

Allan was back at work again, with all traces of his accident relegated to the past. His life was well-ordered and full, with no time for schooling. He told himself this over and over, to no avail. For he was still telling himself this when he filled out the registration blank at the university.

"He's here again!" The telepath had almost given up expecting the alien ever again. He kept his mind locked in the other's as he recited as though from a book. "He's completely over his injury, working again, enrolled in night classes at the school in his town. He's studying atomic engineering. He's in the engine room now getting data for something they call a thesis."

Quietly the captain rolled off a list of expletives that would have done justice to one of the rawest space hands. And just as quietly, calmly, and perhaps, stoically, he pushed the red button that began the chain reaction that would completely vaporize the mile-long ship. His last breath was spent in hoping the alien would awaken with a violent headache. He did. ●

Few writers have ever had so enormous an impact, so quickly, on sf: within a year of his first sale, he wrote a story ("A Rose For Ecclesiastes") that was to be voted the sixth best piece of sf short fiction ever written.

His writing made the Old/New Wave controversies of the sixties trivial; his style was so rich and arresting, his characters and themes so compelling, that he appealed to both groups of readers, and established himself as one of the genre's major talents in an unheard-of length of time.

The latest in his long list of awards was the 1976 Hugo for the novella, "Home Is The Hangman." He is currently enjoying a new surge of popularity as a result of the Amber series of novels.

He is a thoroughly remarkable writer: imagine an artist who uses thunder and lightning to paint a butterfly, and you will understand something of his phenomenon. We're pleased to present Roger Zelazny's first sale, "Passion Play."

I had wanted to write for many years, but did not have an opportunity until I had completed my master's thesis and taken a job with the government. I was assigned to an office in Dayton, Ohio for training, and I reported there on February 26, 1962. As I had decided to try writing science fiction, I spent a week reading all the current science fiction magazines and some random paperbacks. I then sat down and began writing, every evening, turning out several stories a week and sending them off to the magazines. I drew a number of rejection slips, and then in March I received a note from Cele Goldsmith at Ziff-Davis, saying that she was buying this story, "Passion Play." It appeared in the August, 1962 issue of *AMAZING STORIES*.

Whether it actually was or was not, it seemed to me an almost classic case of applied insight, because I had done something right before I wrote it which I had not done before. I had gathered together all of my rejected stories and spent an evening reading through them to see whether I could determine what I was doing wrong. One thing struck me about all of them: I was overexplaining. I was describing settings, events and

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character motivations in too much detail. I decided, in viewing these stories now that they had grown cold, that I would find it insulting to have anyone explain anything to me at that length. I resolved thereafter to treat the reader as I would be treated myself, to avoid the unnecessarily explicit, to use more indirection with respect to character and motivation, to draw myself up short whenever I felt the tendency to go on talking once a thing had been shown.

Fine. That was my resolution. I still had to find a story idea to do it with, as I was between stories just then. Now, I do not know how other people do it, but there is a certain receptive state of mind that I switch on when I am looking for a short story notion. This faculty is dulled when I am working on a novel, as I usually am these days, so that if I want it now it generally takes me a full day to set up the proper mental climate. It comes faster if I am between books. Whatever, in those days I kept it turned on almost all the time.

The government wanted everyone in my class to have a physical examination. They gave me the forms and I drove up to Euclid over a weekend to see the closest thing we had to a family doctor, to have him complete them. When I sat down in his waiting room, I picked up a copy of *LIFE* and began looking through it. Partway along, I came upon a photospread

dealing with the death of the racing driver Wolfgang von Tripps. Something clicked as soon as I saw it, and just then the doctor called me in for the checkup. While I was breathing for him and coughing and faking knee jerks and so forth, I saw the entire incident that was to be this short short. I could have written it right then. My typewriter was in Dayton, though, and I'd the long drive ahead of me. The story just boiled somewhere at the back of my mind on the way down, and when I reached my apartment I headed straight for the typewriter and wrote it through. I even walked three blocks to a mailbox in the middle of the night, to get it sent right away.

Cele's letter of acceptance was dated March 28, almost a month after I'd begun writing. Strangely, the day that it arrived I had gotten the idea for what was to be my next sale ("Horseman!", *FANTASTIC STORIES*, August, 1962). I returned the contracts on "Passion Play" and followed them with "Horseman!" I sold fifteen other stories that year. I was on my way.

I cannot really say whether I owe it to that resolution I made on reviewing my rejects, but it felt as if I did and I have always tried to keep the promise I made that day about not insulting the reader's intelligence.

Another factor did come into operation after I sold this story. It is a subtle phenomenon which can

only be experienced. I suddenly felt like a writer. "Confidence" is a cheap word for it, but I can't think of a better one. That seems the next phase in toughening one's writing — a kind of cockiness, an "I've done it before" attitude. This feeling seems to feed something back into the act of composition itself, providing more than simple assurance. Actual changes in approach, structure, style, tone, began to occur for me almost of their own accord. Noting this, I began to do it intentionally. I made a list of all the things I wanted to know how to handle and began writing them into my stories. This is because I felt that when you reach a certain point as a writer, there are two ways you can go. Having achieved an acceptable level of competence you can keep producing at that level for the rest of your life, quite possibly doing some very good work. Or you can keep trying to identify your weaknesses, and then do something about them. Either way, you should grow as a writer — but the second way is a bit more difficult, because it is always easier to write around a weakness than to work with it, work from it, work through it. It takes longer, if nothing else. And you may fall on your face. But you might learn something you would not have known otherwise and be better as a result.

These are the things I learned, or

fancy I learned, from "Passion Play" and its aftereffects. I do have one other thing to say, though, which came to me slowly, much later, though its roots are tangled somewhere here.

Roger Zelazny

Occasionally, there arises a writing situation where you see an alternative to what you are doing, a mad, wild gamble of a way for handling something, which may leave you looking stupid, ridiculous or brilliant — you just don't know which. You can play it safe there, too, and proceed along the route you'd mapped out for yourself. Or you can trust your personal demon who delivered that crazy idea in the first place.

Trust your demon.

Passion Play

At the end of the season of sorrows comes the time of rejoicing. Spring, like the hands of a well-oiled clock, noiselessly indicates this time. The average days of dimness and moisture decrease steadily in number, and those of brilliance and cool air begin to enter the calendar again. And it is good that the wet times are behind us, for they rust and corrode our machinery; they require the most intense standards of hygiene.

With all the bright baggage of Spring, the days of the Festival arrive. After the season of Lamentations come the sacred stations of the Passion, then the bright Festival of Resurrection, with its tinkle and clatter, its exhaust fumes, scorched rubber, clouds of dust, and its great promise of happiness.

We come here every year, to the place, to replicate a classic. We see with our own lenses the functioning promise of our creation. The time is today, and I have been chosen.

Here on the sacred grounds of Le Mans I will perform every action of the classic which has been selected. Before the finale I will

have duplicated every movement and every position which we know occurred. How fortunate! How high the honor!

Last year many were chosen, but it was not the same. Their level of participation was lower. Still, I had wanted so badly to be chosen! I had wished so strongly that I, too, might stand beside the track and await the flaming Mercedes.

But I was saved for this greater thing, and all lenses are upon me as we await the start. This year there is only one Car to watch — number 4, the Ferrari-analog.

The sign has been given, and the rubber screams; the smoke balloons like a giant cluster of white grapes, and we are moving. Another car gives way, so that I can drop into the proper position. There are many cars, but only one Car.

We scream about the turn, in this great Italian classic of two centuries ago. We run them all here, at the place, regardless of where they were held originally.

"Oh gone masters of creation," I pray, "let me do it properly. Let my timing be accurate. Let no ran-

dom variable arise to destroy a perfect replication."

The dull gray metal of my arms, my delicate gyroscopes, my special gripping-hands, all hold the wheel in precisely the proper position, as we roar into the straightaway.

How wise the ancient masters were! When they knew they must destroy themselves in a combat too mystical and holy for us to understand, they left us these ceremonies, in commemoration of the Great Machine. All the data was there: the books, the films, all; for us to find, study, learn, to know the sacred Action.

As we round another turn, I think of our growing cities, our vast assembly lines, our lube-bars, and our beloved executive computer. How great all things are! What a well-ordered day! How fine to have been chosen!

The tires, little brothers, cry out, and the pinging of small stones comes from beneath. Three-tenths of a second, and I shall depress the accelerator an eighth of an inch further.

R-7091 waves to me as I enter the second lap, but I cannot wave back. My finest functioning is called for at this time. All the special instrumentation which has been added to me will be required in a matter of seconds.

The other cars give way at precisely the right instant. I turn, I slide. I crash through the guard rail.

"Turn over now, please!" I pray, twisting the wheel, "and burn."

Suddenly we are rolling, skidding, upside-down. Smoke fills the car.

To the crashing noise that roars within my receptors, the crackle and lick of flames is now added.

My steel skeleton — collapsed beneath the impact-stresses. My lubricants — burning. My lenses, all but for a tiny area — shattered.

My hearing-mechanism still functions weakly.

Now there is a great horn sounding, and metal bodies rush across the fields.

Now. Now is the time for me to turn off all my functions and cease.

But I will wait. Just a moment longer. I must hear them say it.

Metal arms drag me from the pyre. I am laid aside. Fire extinguishers play white rivers upon the Car.

Dimly, in the distance, through my smashed receptors, I hear the speaker rumble:

"Von Tripps has smashed! The Car is dead!"

A great sound of lamenting arises from the rows of unmoving spectators. The giant fireproof van arrives on the field, just as the attendants gain control of the flames.

Four tenders leap out and raise the Car from the ground. A fifth collects every smouldering fragment.

And I see it all!

"Oh, let this not be blasphemy, please!" I pray. "One instant more!"

Tenderly, the Car is set within the van. The great doors close.

The van moves, slowly, bearing off the dead warrior, out through the gates, up the great avenue, and

past the eager crowds.

To the great smelter. The Melting Pot!

To the place where it will be melted down, then sent out, a piece used to grace the making of each new person.

A cry of unanimous rejoicing arises on the avenue.

It is enough, that I have seen all this!

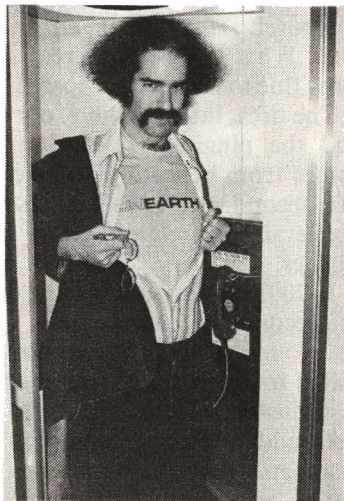
Happily, I turn myself off. ●

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"How Do We Get Into This Mess?"

On the run, that's how.

One of the most common reasons for the rejection of a story has virtually nothing to do with the overall impact of that particular piece of writing. An otherwise excellent story can find itself being stuffed back into the SASE and being dropkicked into the mail chute because it had a slow or redundant opening section. Though the characterizations are strong, the concepts imaginative, and the action sequences motor right along, if the story crawled on all fours from page one through, say, page eight, before it got to its feet and started sprinting, chances are good that the editor grew impatient and decided the reading of one unsolicited manuscript should not become his life's work.

No sense railing at this seeming callousness. The editor is only human. And to be absolutely pragmatic about it, freed of the maudlin self-pity and justifications unpublished writers substitute for logic, the editor is only a reader, albeit a more trained reader than the casual magazine-buyer. If you can't grab the editor's interest, odds are heavy against your being

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WRITING

Harlan Ellison

able to grab Joe or Joan Reader with that slow opening.

To state that communication is the bottom line of all writing would be to jackhammer a truism into the ground. If the communication isn't there from the git-go, the reader has — it seems to me — an unconscious reluctance to trust the writer. That means the writer must work ever so much harder to get the reader into that mind-warp we call the "willing suspension of disbelief." The longer it takes a writer to nudge, push or pull a reader into that state, the more chances the reader has of escaping the web of story.

So it becomes clear that we must snare the reader as quickly and as completely as possible. To this end, there are three devices I've found universally present in good writing. The first is the title, about which I wrote at length several issues ago. The second is the literary hook, the beguiling opening line, about which I'll discourse sometime soon. The third device is no device at all, but is one of the core measures of craftsmanlike writing. It is knowing how and where to *begin* the story.

In editing the *Dangerous Visions* books I've read more than my share of stories that I eventually published, but only after asking the writer for revisions that dealt with the opening pages of the work. And I've read many stories that made it into print even though

they suffered from the same flaccid lack of muscle tone. In working the Clarion conferences I've seen much the same thing. (And much less of that slow pacing at the beginning when I've bludgeoned my students into writing a story a day. When they have to write fast, they automatically understand that there is limited time available to them to grind out a complete story, so they instinctively reject superfluous or repetitious backstory, compress rambling scenes, find side-roads that shortcut lumbering, dead patches of exposition and, in the words of the television industry, they "cut to the chase" immediately. In most cases it tightens the plot and drags the reader along.)

Understanding where to begin a story is a facility that comes with years of writing many stories. It's awfully difficult to try setting down hard-and-fast rules, because it's different every time; and no set of rules really works. The best I can do, I guess, is try to give some examples and then examine them, and hope that I'm being clear enough so you can apply the lessons to specific stories on which you're working. But do please take this *caveat* into consideration as you read these comments: this is just a general rule of thumb, and you must masticate the information for individual assimilation. Not to put too fine a point on it, do as I suggest, not as I frequently

don't do it myself.

All right, then. To it, with vigah!

Let's suppose a story. Um. Okay, how's this:

Bizarre story about a guy who has nothing but shitty relationships with women, who cannot cop to his own fractured persona. Argues with his lovers, brutalizes them, intimidates them. But though he's given to some low-level self-analysis — he's rather bright — he always manages to rationalize the encounters so he comes off looking good and the women always come off, in his mind, as immature or castrating or just plain fucked-up. So he sinks deeper and deeper into despondency, until he decides he'll never be able to find a woman who is good enough for him. Meaning, of course, a woman whom he can dominate while she manages to retain a sense of her own identity that doesn't threaten him. From this lightless perception of the world, skewed as it is, he comes across an advertisement for android companions, programmed to suit every need. So he gets one, a beautiful woman who seems just right, because he has gone through extensive bio-medical brain-scanning that has pulled out of him and his needs a template that forms the basis of her identity. He marries her. Everything goes well for a "honeymoon" period of six months, and then he discovers that his android wife is having an affair

with another man. He is so enraged by this, that he plans to kill her. But is it murder if you kill an android? Is it rational? Should he take her back into the shop to be re-programmed? Or will he finally understand that the flaws are in *him*, that he sows the seeds of interpersonal destruction because of his narrow view of other human beings?

Now. That's the basic idea. It's *not* a story, friends. (That's something else I'll belabor at length in the future: knowing the difference between an "idea" and a "story." But not now, not now; stop pestering me.) But it's all we need to examine the point of entry *into the story*.

There is a kind of literary magic, the inarticulate power of certain auctorial magicians to transmute base metal ideas into the pure gold of a compelling story opening. Sheckley has the power, so does Kotzwinkle, and so does Phil Dick. I could list dozens who lack that power, but I don't need to; you can do it for yourself. So where do we tap with that magic finger to start our story?

Well, here's one way:

Walter Nesterman tried desperately not to hate women. He walked away from Francine's monad cursing her, cursing himself, cursing his inability to have said what he wanted to say to her. The French called it l'esprit d'escalier, the spirit of the stairs, or as

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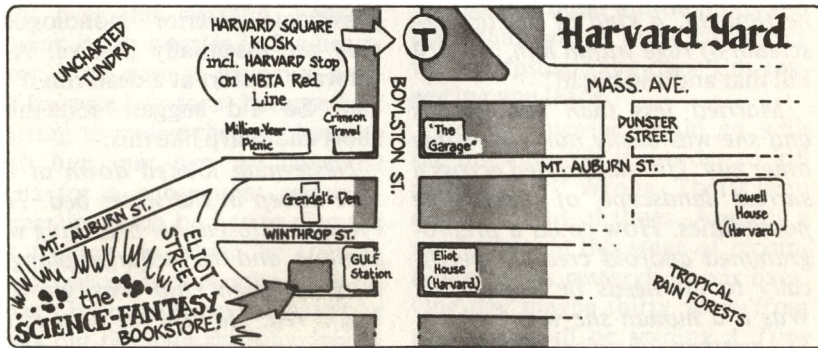
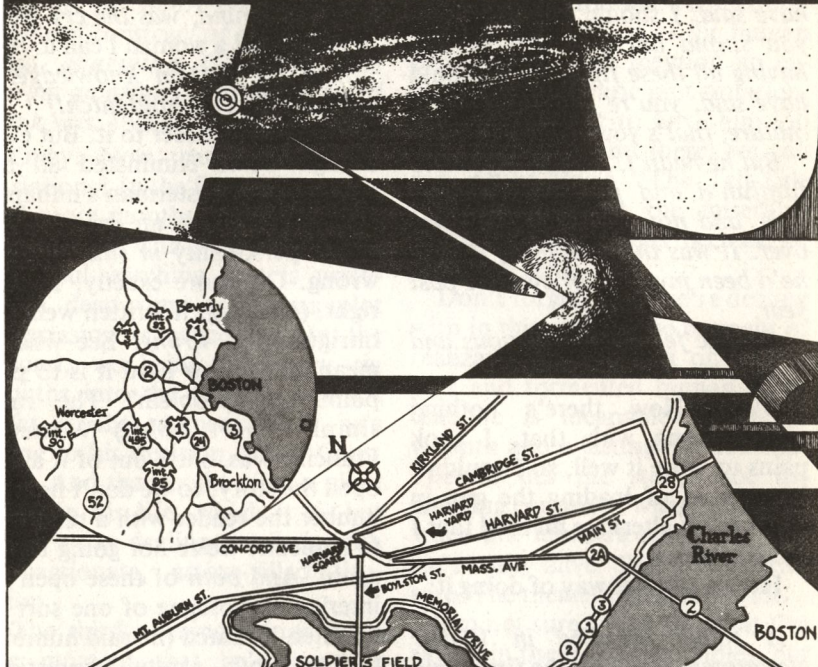
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JAN

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close to translation as could be managed in English, the mood of thinking retrospectively, as one walked down the stairs away from the argument, what one should have said. I should have told her, you stupid bitch, if you weren't having all these fights ... I should have said, you're just flat out immature, that's your problem...

But he hadn't. He had raged and fufufuh'd and gotten red in the face, and now another affair was over. It was the fifth lousy liaison he'd been involved in over the past year.

And he felt at once furious and guilty.

Okay. Now there's nothing much wrong with that. I took pains to write it well, so I couldn't be accused of loading the gun in favor of an alternate method that I think is better.

Here's another way of doing it:

A snake uncoiled in Walter Nesterman's gut and the first thing he thought, a kind of inarticulate scream of rage within him, was I'll kill that android bitch!

Married less than six months and she was busily humping some other guy. His mind reeled across a surreal landscape of impossible possibilities. How could a preprogrammed android created specifically to his needs be unfaithful? Was it a human she was fucking, or another chemical construct? How was she slipping out to see

him? Was the flaw in himself, in the brain-scan that had been pulled out of him to form her template?

But most of all, mournfully whistling like an Autumn wind across his mind, was the cry Am I never to find a woman I can love?

And the certain knowledge: I gotta kill that android bitch!

Now that's closer to it. But even though we've eliminated all the backstory of Nesterman's unhappy relationships and an examination of his personality *in situ*, it's still wrong. Or, more exactly, it ain't right. (*Nothing*, if written well and intriguing, is *wrong*. See what I mean about how hard it is to pinpoint this problem? The rules simply don't hold.) Whoever Francine was, she's out of it as we open the story, so we don't need to lumber the reader with a reference to someone we're not going to see again. And *both* of these open on interior monologue of one sort or another. Granted (he said humbly) they're both pretty interesting, passionate interior monologues, they are essentially passive. And we want to start at a dead run if we can. So I'd suggest something short and sharp like this:

Nesterman looked down at his wife asleep in the water bed. Her eyes were closed, her breathing was shallow, and the recharger plugged into her right hip was glowing bright red. He held the laser knife tightly and warred within himself. Cut her lying android throat, or

simply take her back to the shop and have them turn her into slag?

He couldn't escape the awful reality: not even an android, built to satisfy his every need, could be faithful to him. His beautiful chemical construct of a wife, beautiful charming Charlene was having an affair! And all he could think was: I've gotta kill this bitch!

Okay. Now, can you see the variations? In the first, we start six and more months before the nub of the story, with a lot of backplot and soul-searching that is pretty much dead time as far as plot progression is concerned. In the second, we bring the story six months into the present, but it's right at the moment when he's come to his decision to kill Charlene. And that might seem a pivot point in his life, which it is, but again we're dealing passively with a passionate, action-filled situation.

The third opening brings us to the moment that he's standing right over this sleeping, helpless woman, with murder in his heart. Now, if we want to have him back off because he's torn, because he's starting to realize the problem lies with *him*, not *her*, we have the basis for a subsequent series of scenes in which he has to disguise his feelings, in which he tries to draw out of her an admission of what's been going on, in which he seeks out the man she's having an affair with, in which he goes back

to the company that made her and tries to find out what went wrong (nice idea: a psychologist who ministers to the fluxes and flows of both human and android principals) ... an infinitude of possibilities for examination of the human condition, not to mention an expansion of the basic plot situation.

Or if we want to have him kill her, right then and there, we can run it like Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" and have the miserable fucker going bananas because of what he's done.

Don't forget, what we're dealing with in this story is the moment of realization on the part of a complex and tormented human being that he is incapable of decent warmth and a lasting relationship. *Therein* lies the story, not the amusing conceit of what is entailed when one murders something that isn't really alive. That's the furniture. The theme is human travail.

I'm not sure if you get what I'm saying in these three examples, but I'll bat it around a little more and hope that one or more comments will encapsulate the rigor I'm suggesting you learn.

Look: a novice would go with the question "Is it murder to kill an android?" Wrong. That's been done. Dozens of times. And it's a moot point at this stage of recombinant DNA research in our lives. One day maybe thirty years from now, we'll all be reading a *Time* essay on the moral and philosophi-

cal conundrums inherent in such a real-life case. But right now all we have to work with is human beings, and this kind of story (it seems to me) is only valuable for us if it explores the labyrinthine byways of the human heart. It's an allegory, if you will. A paradigm. Using it as such, we can find out — if not for the entire world, then at least for ourselves as writers — what fucks up *human* relationships. And to do that in a story-telling way, we have to get into the situation when it's already fully formed. Building to it *can* be interesting, but diving in while the action is transpiring around us makes it *immediately* arresting.

One way to do this sort of thing would be to start it at whatever point your own skill dictates, write on for a couple of thousand words, and then set it aside for a day, or even a few hours, whatever your work-habits require.

When you go back, re-read it and ask yourself, How much of this tells itself through context? How much is revealed by the actions of the characters without *telling* the reader through static narration? How much can I show with scenes, rather than dropping in lumps of undigested exposition? How much of this is stuff *I* needed to know, as background, but is also stuff the reader need *not* see specifically?

Then cut. And once you've cut it, cut it again. And when it is clear

that nothing else can be cut . . . cut it again. Go to the muscle and the bone. Strip away the rhetorical flab. And then . . .

Cut it again.

Boil down that first two thousand words of bible and self-revelation to a paragraph of hard, mean prose. And you will very likely have gotten to a place in the story that originally found itself on page eight.

Take the writing of screenplays as a model. Never write a scene where someone sits alone in a room and there is a knock on the door, the person gets up and goes to the door, answers it, meets the visitor, invites the visitor in, they seat themselves and begin to have a long discussion that ends with a fist fight. Cut to the chase. Open the story with the first punch being thrown. Fredric Brown did that sitting alone in a room routine, and he called it "Knock." Except his first line was a technical masterpiece: *The last man on Earth* — or in the universe, for that matter — *sat alone in a room. There was a knock at the door. . .*

So unless you can beat what a dead man did perfectly, you can forget it, chum.

I've digressed on that man alone in a room situation, because I know sure as God made little green apples that some wiseass fan would take my using that as an example of dull writing and say, "Yeah, but what about the Fred Brown

story?" And it's a perfect example, so I wanted to close up the rat hole.

What I'm suggesting is that *any* scene you care to open with can be cut in half, opened like a ripe orange, and the meat in the middle has *got* to be more tasty than the skin. So go to the middle of a situation, go past the backstory material that got you interested in the first place, the stuff you thought first when you said to yourself, "Hey, wouldn't it be interesting if..." It's what happens *after* that initial idea that makes for story.

Cut to the chase. Go to the first punch. Start at the instant the fire ignites. Disabuse yourself of the misconception that to write well, to write interestingly, to write with

class and verve, one must try to emulate Proust or James. Those were storytellers of a different time, who worked in a medium that has changed enormously. We read faster now, we think more quickly, and clarity can be as complex as obtuseness.

The job is to tell the story feelingly, and at a dead run if at all possible. To do that, you must consider the point of entry and make certain it is one edged with fish-hooks. Once having snared the reader, you'll find you're telling a story that has snagged *you*, too.

And by the way, I may eventually wind up writing that story about Nesterman and Charlene, so stay away from it, you turkeys! ●

Attention Ellison Fans:

Even if you missed the one-of-a-kind Harlan Ellison Roast (with Ellison and featured speakers Alfred Bester, Edward Ferman, C. L. Grant, Charles Platt, Norman Spinrad, and Roy Torgeson) in Boston on November 9, you can still enjoy the evening's highlights. UNEARTH and Alternate World Recordings, Inc. will soon be making available a cassette featuring the high (and low) points of the Roast, **plus** excerpts from the November 7 Evening With Harlan Ellison at M.I.T.

Price and release date of the 60-minute cassette had not been set as this issue went to press. For further information, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to UNEARTH, 102 Charles St., #190, Boston, MA 02114. If you enter a subscription to UNEARTH when requesting details, you will become entitled to a 20% discount off the cassette's list price. Current subscribers will automatically qualify for this discount.



They had to
follow the
strange object
from the sky —
even if it led
them to their
worst enemies.

Act of Mercy

by D. C. Poyer

It is cold in the Sahara at night, cold enough to freeze the water in a sleeping man's canteen. Cold enough, if a Legionnaire is unprepared, to kill him.

And tonight feels like the coldest night of the year; bundled up as I am for guard duty, I'm shivering as if with malaria. My rifle is cramping my right arm, so I shift it

to my left. For the thousandth time tonight I sigh and wish for a cigar, for one of the long black ones they sell back home in France.

I console myself with the thought that my watch will be over in a few more minutes, and turn and look over the wall at the Sahara. The moon is full, and its light glistens on the dunes, making

them hills of silver dust. It is a beautiful night.

Me, Jean-Paul Bergaine, I am not much of a soldier. As the girls say of me in the brothels of Mers-el-Kebir, I am a lover, not a fighter. So why did I join the *Legion Etrangere*? Ah, now, there's a question I ask myself a hundred times a day. Why did I lose myself in this empty place, this place that is not my own, this hell that perhaps can belong to no one but the desert Arabs? A hundred times a day I ask myself this. I spit over the wall and am in the middle of a vast yawn when the alarm bugle sounds behind me.

I spin, stuffing cartridges up the magazine of the Lebel, and at first I see nothing, because my eyes are sweeping the ramparts for Arabs. But then I realize that, in the flickering blue-white light, I can see the walls clearly and even the mountains far beyond them, and I look up at the ball of flame overhead.

I have not had much schooling, but I know what it is, the ball of white fire and red sparks that moves so slowly in the sky. It is a *bolide*, a meteor. But how slowly it moves! It must be very high. Every man in the post is awake now, craning his neck upward, but we hear nothing. The bluish light is harsh on the upturned faces, and shadows are sharp on the dark sand.

The *bolide* takes many minutes

to disappear. It seems to be traveling south, into the desert. A good place for it, too; only the desert Arabs go far into the South Sahara. It will hurt no one. But it has put on quite a show for us; unless we should have women or a skirmish, it will furnish us conversation for days to come. My relief arrives, and I go back into the barracks. Spinelli and Petit and I speak wonderingly of it for a few minutes before we pull the blankets over our heads again.

*

The mud-walled office of the post commandant was very sparsely furnished; a battered wooden table, carried to the post over two hundred kilometers of camel-trail, and two rickety cane chairs were the sum of its appointments. The two men in tropical uniform rose politely as a short, perspiring man in a dirty white suit brushed aside the curtain at the door and entered the room.

"Ah, M. Paul-Boncour! It is indeed an honor to be able to assist the National Observatory!" said the older officer, ushering his junior forward with a gesture. "This is my assistant, Lieutenant de Dissonville. If you approve, I should like to send him with you on your expedition. Lieutenant, would you step outside and ask the orderly to bring in some wine? Thank you. Professor, a seat?"

"Thank you." Paul-Boncour

sat down heavily. "I am happy to see that you appreciate the importance of my mission; I've been riding that damned camel for four days to get here. According to the calculations of the flight of the *bolide* I made at Koufra, it should have landed in the desert about fifty kilometers southeast of here. By the way, did you happen to time the passage of the object across the heavens?"

"Ah ... no; we were, to be frank, startled by the apparition, and had no idea such a procedure was called for ... but, monsieur, you say that you expect to find the *bolide* *southeast* of here?"

"Yes. Estimates made by myself, and also by Rawlings of the Royal Observatory, who happened to be vacationing in Koufra, agree that the low speed and southeasterly heading of the object would bring it down in an area just beyond your post. But — why do you look at me so strangely?"

The Army officer shifted his eyes to the scarred tabletop for a moment, brow furrowed in concentration, before he answered. "A *bolide* is a ballistic object, is it not? Falling through the air much like an artillery shell?"

"In general, yes. It falls in a straight line across the earth's face, and downward in a parabolic arc."

"But this *bolide*, Professor ... when it passed over us, it was

going due south, monsieur! How could that be?"

The fat, sweating civilian and the officer in his wilted khakis regarded each other over the rickety table.

"Impossible," said the professor flatly.

*

It is a blazing hot day today, much hotter than yesterday. After five years in Africa I am an old hand, a seasoned, sun-blackened *vieillard*, but the days like today are too hot for any European. The Arabs can stand the heat, though. When the column has fallen out for five minutes rest, and the men cannot regain their feet for the fatigue and thirst, we see them sitting far off on the horizon, watching our agony from atop their camels. And enjoying it. They are not like us, the desert Arabs. They are bred to the savagery of the desert, and sometimes I wonder if we French will ever succeed in wresting it from them. But that is a silly thought; we are a cultured race, while they are uncivilized savages who enjoy nothing more than torturing a stranger to death. I have seen some of my comrades' bodies after the Arabs were done with them, and I would die before falling into their hands. Only our modern rifles keep them at a respectful distance from us as we march.

We started this morning from

the post and marched south all morning. The fat civilian, who is riding a mule at the head of the column, has a compass, and we must go in a straight line. *Diable!* A mule — just so he can rest his fat ass! Even the lieutenant, that spoiled Parisian mama's boy, is marching. Mule or not, a fat man like that won't last the day out. When he faints, he'll fall off, and we can stop for a rest and perhaps a drink of water then. *Vive le soleil!*

We slog on through the heat of the day, and that night make camp on a small plain of gravel surrounded by sand drifts. We are slowly moving into the sandy part of the South Sahara, away from all the settled portions of the country. There are not even Legion posts ahead of us. After the sentries are posted we sit in small groups and shoot the bull for awhile. Spinelli tells an old story about lost treasures in the South Sahara; Palewski laughs, telling him that there the only gold is on the buttons of dead Legionnaires. They are good comrades. We eat our hard bread and blood-sausages cold, and turn in.

*

The nineteen men marched onward the next day, and the next, through a lifeless, hostile and mo-

notonous terrain of gravel and drifted sand.

In the lead walked the young lieutenant, pushing himself mercifully to stay ahead of the common soldiers. His short hair was soaking wet under the neck-cloth of the cap, and the stinging sweat trickled into his eyes. Near mid-afternoon he began to feel nauseated, feeling the onset of heat exhaustion, but he kept his flushed face set forward, toward the emptiness ahead, and walked on.

Behind him, trailing him by ten or twelve paces, rode the savant. He slumped in a torpor on his mule, which plodded slowly along, lolling its tongue and panting loudly. From time to time the professor roused himself for a moment, glanced at a compass, and stared slowly around at the horizon before relapsing into semiconsciousness. A filthy red bandanna peeped from the neck of his shirt.

The sergeant, Kruger, marched at the right of his column, gliding across the sand with a snakelike, fluid step, wasting not a millimetre of motion. In the breathless silence that surrounded them his occasional low commands rang out like the crack of a revolver.

The men marched in silence, their heads low like a herd of animals, their turned-up collars, caps and packs concealing their faces from the sun. They, too, glided across the sand, moving as if on parade in a compact body that

moved among the low dunes like a many-legged blue caterpillar.

At eight in the evening the lieutenant held his arm above his head to halt the column, and heard behind him Kruger's soft voice commanding, "Legionnaires . . . *arretez-vous.*" He turned to the scientist, who was slumped like a lump of melting lard on his saddle, eyes closed.

"With your permission, *M. le Professeur*, we will make camp here for the night," he said.

The mule had stopped when the lieutenant had halted, and stood with its knees locked and eyes closed. It looked as if it had died upright.

"*Monsieur*," said de Dissonville again.

They pulled the scientist from his perch, rubbed his face with a handful of water, and made camp.

*

They marched south for five days.

"The men can eat it, anyway," said de Dissonville. "It will be a change from marching rations."

The professor gave the carcass of the dead mule a final kick and turned away. "It was healthy enough yesterday," he growled. He looked different; his face was becoming browned, and he had lost much of his corpulence. The wrinkles around his face made him look a great deal older. The lieutenant, too, had lost some of his

awkward youthfulness and was beginning to walk with the fluid, swaying motion that made marching in the desert bearable.

"I can't understand it," he said. "Professor, you were sure that the thing could not have landed more than seventy kilometres from the fort. We have gone three times that, perhaps more. Perhaps we've already passed it; it could have been on the other side of a dune. With all respect, *M. le Professeur*, I think we should turn back toward the post. We have enough water and food left, with the mule dead, to get back without trouble."

Paul-Boncour pondered, then shook his head. "You don't understand at all. My computations indicate a very large body. A mass like that striking the earth would cause an explosion many times more powerful than that of a powder magazine. It would leave an immense crater."

"Like that of an explosive shell?"

"Yes, but perhaps a kilometre across. Doubtless you conceived of the meteor quietly resting on the sand where it landed. But I suppose they don't teach you much science at Saint-Cyr, do they?"

De Dissonville began to reply, but Kruger signalled suddenly for silence. Over the baked sand stretching for miles ahead of them they heard two more pops of musketry, and then a rattle of fire all at once. Then silence again,

covering the small group of men like a blanket.

"*Allons! Allons!* Sergeant Kruger, get these men in column!" shouted the lieutenant. "Quickly! Check your rifles as we march. Let's go!"

*

I am huddled under a small overhang of the thing, where one of the spheres joins another. My arm hurts, but the bleeding seems to have stopped. I can't tell if Spinelli, a few metres in front of me, is still alive, but if he is not dead yet he soon will be. He has a musket ball in his guts and the sand under him is dark in the rapidly fading light. If the Arabs leave us alone for a few more minutes I will crawl over to him and give him a drink if he wants it, or maybe tell him a joke. He has not made a sound since he was hit, though.

It happened fast. After we heard the shots we fell in quickly and marched in their direction. The lieutenant had us check our rifles and the sergeant told us to take a long drink from our canteens, to fix our bayonets, and to loosen our cartridges in their belts.

We marched for about a kilometre, the deep sand deadening the noise of our boots, the lieutenant and the professor ahead. The fat one was talking to the lieutenant, and took his arm once, but was shaken off. The lieutenant handed

him one of his pistols. The civilian said something else and then the lieutenant put out an arm and Lard-Face went on his back in the sand. We marched by him and he got up and ran after us. I was near the rear of the column and he ran up beside me, wheezing, and asked me if I knew where I was being led. I said, Yes, *Monsieur*, those were the muskets of the Arabs we heard. He said, It is not part of our mission to chase natives. That was not a question, so I said nothing. He said, Do you not care that there might be a hundred savages there? That that *enfant* could be leading all of us to death? I said, *Monsieur*, I am not an officer; you waste your time speaking to me. Sergeant Kruger had come back to the end of the column by then and he said to him, *Monsieur le Professeur*, the lieutenant sends his compliments and begs you to guard our rear while he conducts a reconnaissance in force. The professor stopped and I looked quickly around at him after a few steps and saw him standing kneedeep in the sand examining the service revolver the lieutenant had given him.

We marched over the edge of a small dune and there it was, about a hundred metres ahead of us, and beyond it were about fifty Arabs, some cross-legged on their camels and some standing in a small circle on the sand. They spotted us and the lieutenant saw right away that the only cover would be the big sil-

ver thing and so he shouted charge and as they ran for their camels and their rifles we ran for the shelter of the big thing. It looked like five great big shiny cannonballs welded together in a row, but what was important was that we were in the open and if we could get it behind us and throw up some sand as a breastwork we couldn't ask for a better place to fight from.

But the sand was deep and we couldn't run fast enough and the Arabs got the lieutenant and Kruger and twelve others, and I got a ball in the arm, before we got to the thing and dug ourselves in. After the three of us were under cover we watched them drag away the men who were still alive and begin cutting them up. They must have been using very small, very sharp knives. We could hear the screams for hours.

So now I am on this side of the thing and Petit and Palewski are on the other side, so I guess they can't take us by surprise anyway. I don't know what we can do if they attack in the dark. I guess I will have to shoot Spinelli first and then myself so they can't cut us up.

*

The fat man had waited all night behind a dune, peeping over it from time to time at the reflections of starlight and, later in the night, moonlight on the multiple spheres of the object in the depression below. When it began to grow

brighter in the east, and he still saw no signs of the Arabs, he finally rose and walked down the gentle slope.

"Soldier," he said to the man huddled under the curving side of the object. "Soldier, wake up." The man finally did wake up, and blinked his eyes slowly before focusing them on Paul-Boncour.

"Lard-Face," said the man, seemingly speaking to himself. "Then it is morning, and we are still alive." Then his eyes widened, and with a sudden lunge he flattened the savant on the sand. "Don't make a sound," he whispered. "I don't know why they didn't kill us while we slept, but if they see you walking around they'll be on top of us. And we are only four."

"Let me up, you fool," said Paul-Boncour loudly. "Do you think I would have come down here if those savages were still around? Get up. Act like a Frenchman! Where are the others?"

The Legionnaire stood up slowly and scanned the desert, warily at first, and then with a flicker of hope in his expression; finally he smiled broadly. He helped the sprawled scientist to his feet and called to the others. "Petit! Palewski! *Reveilleez-vous!* The Arabs have left!" There was no answer. Still smiling, he shouldered his rifle, said to Paul-Boncour, "I'll go wake them," and disappeared around the end of

the object.

The professor, left alone for a moment, investigated the corpse that lay huddled a few yards in front of Bergaine's little sand-mound emplacement. He prodded it with his boot; frozen. A bad wound too, judging from the dried blood on the sand around the body. Silly ass, he thought; it was his own fault for following wherever he was led. Still, it was too bad. A total waste of money to train and arm the man, to have him die here like this; and Paul-Boncour was, after all, a taxpayer.

The wounded Legionnaire reappeared from the other side of the object. He looked sick. Paul-Boncour swung on him. "Well, where are the others?" he asked. "You did say there were two others, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"They're dead," said Bergaine. His face was pale. "The Arabs..."

"Well," interrupted the civilian, shielding his eyes against the rising sun, "Too bad. But we've found our *bolide*, at any rate. Let's investigate it."

*

So every man in the platoon is dead, except me. I guess the professor's in command now; at least he has a compass, and a map. Even he can get us back to the post, now that we have the food and water the others won't be needing any more.

I am scraping a shallow grave in

the sand for Spinelli, using my rifle butt, when the professor comes over to me and pulls me away. Follow me, he says. I say that I have to bury Spinelli and the others. Oh, they'll keep for a couple more minutes, says he, come here, I want you to be able to corroborate some things for me when we get back to civilization.

I don't understand what he means by 'corabolate,' but I follow him. First he shows me some lines, like the outline of a door, on the side of the silver thing; I say yes, I see them. He shows me some things like cannon muzzles at one end. I say yes sir, I see them, can I go bury Spinelli now, He says that there is one more thing that I have to see. I follow him, but I'm getting a little angry; after I get done with Spinelli, I am going to have to bury what is left of Petit and Palewski, and I am not looking forward to that.

This last thing he has to show me is a trail, like a trough or a shallow groove in the sand, with marks at intervals along the sides. There are stains in the sand, as if something had leaked into the ground here and there along the trail. I ask him what it is.

Look where it leads from, he says, and points back toward the thing. Sure enough, I can see that it leads right to the door-like markings, and I see also that at one place on the trail the sand is all scuffed and stamped over, as if a

group of men had been dancing or fighting on that spot, and there is a great deal of the funny-looking stain around there.

They were waiting for it when it came out, I say. The professor is surprised, and says that for a common soldier, I am very quick. I say nothing; that is not a question. I ask him again if he will let me go and finish the burying now so that we can start back to the post before the Arabs decide to return with some friends and show off their work.

He looks surprised, and says, Start back? Of course we do not start back. Not now. Don't you understand what all this means? A creature of another celestial sphere has visited our planet for the first time. Perhaps he comes in peace, and then again, perhaps as a scout for a warlike race. It is our duty, to Science, to Humanity, to find this *etrangere* and to fathom his intentions toward mankind! He is shouting and waving his arms at me as he finishes his little speech.

I am beginning to think that the professor has gone just a little bit crazy from the sun and the deaths. After all, he is a cultured man and not used to such things. I look at him directly and say gently, *Monsieur*, we can carry enough water to get back alive only if we start walking now, while we are still strong. We must not linger here or the Arabs will return and find us. We must go back now. I speak

very slowly, so that he knows I am in absolute earnest. Otherwise, I say, I will take the compass and the map and start back alone, and you can go after your creature, which is probably dead from the cold and the attentions of the savages anyway.

The professor pulls the lieutenant's revolver from his pocket and points it at me. We are going after the creature together, my brave Legionnaire, he says, with a little smile. Gather up the food and the canteens. And leave your rifle here, with the dead ones.

*

It was plain to Paul-Boncour that the creature, whatever it looked like, was badly hurt. The trough in the sand was deeper on one side than on the other, and on the deeper side most of the stains appeared. As the two plodded on, the stains became more frequent, forming a discolored line on the sand.

"The creature that left this trail," said the scientist to the soldier, "is not only badly hurt, but, I think, unused to the gravity of this planet; as you will note, the trail avoids any suggestion of a grade, winding between dunes rather than attempting to scale them. From the depth of the trough, I would estimate its weight to be about that of a man — perhaps a little less."

The soldier did not reply. He

was bent under the weight of the rations and canteens taken from the dead men, and followed the scientist, walking in the track they were following. One of his arms was roughly bandaged, and he carried it thrust deep into the pocket of his overcoat.

*

The professor does not notice the difference in the air this afternoon, for he is unused to the deep Sahara; but I notice it, and I can tell that the sand-storm the desert is preparing for us is not one that two men on foot should face in the open. But I walk on behind him, saying nothing.

When the first gust of sand-laden wind buffets us, and the darkness covering the sun suddenly shrouds us in a roaring brown-yellow night, the professor is startled from his concentration. He turns to me in terror and I shout in his ear above the roar of the wind, It is a dust-storm, we must lie down and cover our heads. He throws himself full-length on the sand and covers his face with his hands.

It is then that I fall upon him in the shrieking darkness and smash his skull with a metal canteen. He makes not a sound as he dies, or if he does, it is carried away by the wind. I can no longer see for the sand in my eyes, cutting and stinging; I pull the revolver from his belt, and standing crouched over

him pull at his pockets for the compass and map. A gust of wind, heavy with flying sand, knocks me down and I roll over and over before the fury of it.

It is evening, and I am following the trail of the creature alone. Why? Because there is nowhere else for me to go. After the storm was over I dug myself out and looked for the professor's body but it was useless. He is under at least a metre of sand — a better burial than he allowed Spinelli and the others — and all of the dunes have changed. It is hopeless to look for the body, and without the compass and map there is little possibility of my finding my way back to a fort. But at least I will not die from slow thirst; I have five cartridges remaining in the lieutenant's revolver. So now I am more or less amusing myself until I decide that I have lived long enough.

I feel that I am very close to the creature now. The trail is obviously fresh; it was made after the sand-storm. It must have been very close, perhaps on the other side of the dune, when I killed the professor.

Its trail seems to curve around the end of this dune, perhaps to circle back again; the creature, fleeing from the Arabs as our little party distracted them from their sport, is as lost as I am. No, even more than I, for I at least stand on the planet and breathe the air

native to my kind. But I can comprehend, now, a little of what it must feel, if it feels as we do at all. I decide to try to second-guess it by climbing over the dune.

It lies in the depression between two dunes, not moving at all. It is of a silvery color, like its craft, and is smaller but longer than a man, with many small legs or arms along its body. I half-walk, half-slide down the dune toward it. It begins to move spasmodically as I near it; I stop and wait for a moment. Its movements cease, but I can tell somehow that it is watching me.

I walk slowly toward it, and stop and crouch in the sand about a metre away. It is panting, breath-

ing with a thin whistling sound. With each heave of its sides, small drops of fluid run from dozens of tiny slashes and wet the sand under it. I recognize the cuts. The Arabs had only started with this creature.

Then it moves again, and I look up; there they are atop the dune I have just crossed, a dozen or more dark, silent men in flowing white. They sit on their motionless camels, watching us.

My hand closes upon the revolver, and I glance back at the alien. For the savages I have three cartridges. But the last two are for me and my comrade.

Call it a favor from one stranger to another. ●

in our next issue.....

Tops among fiction in issue #6 will be Daniel Gordon's "Uphill Racer," the story of an athlete who has reached the top of his dangerous sport — and who knows he will be its last practitioner. James Blaylock, whose "Red Planet" led off issue #3, returns with a stirring tale of the day the alien landed in Victorian London.

The First Sale will reprint (for the first time ever) Damon Knight's first published story, and Harlan Ellison and Hal Clement will contribute columns on writing and science. And, film critic Craig Gardner will take a close look at what happened when the wraps came off Hollywood's mystery movie of 1977, "Close Encounters of the Third Kind."

Callahan was tired of being used. It was time to learn the rules of the game

Downward to Darkness

by Timothy Robert Sullivan

Part Two of Two

SYNOPSIS:

Sean Callahan, Captain of the C² ship, Sophus Lie, and his crew have passed through the great black hole at the center of the Galaxy. Emerging in some unknown place, they discover that great blobs of hot plasma exist in lieu of suns. Fortunately, they find one with a habitable planet, in a swirl of incandescent gas. They

attempt to land on the planet — since there is no chance to go back — but their lifeboat is forced down by a huge, ropery organism. The crew survives the crash, but the boat is damaged beyond repair. Eventually the crew-members make their bid for survival amid a nightmarish landscape populated by animate vegetation and monstrous animals.



Soon the crew is discovered by a group of intelligent beings who take them to their camp, in the middle of a clearing in the jungle. Rather than welcome the humans, however, the leader of the creatures — Javak — puts them to work clearing foliage with the aid of herbicide-spewing devices. This earns the humans the enmity of jungle-dwelling arachnoids, which the humans dub "buggers," and which kill their prey by injecting them with lethal toxins. The humans defend themselves against the buggers by means of energy weapons they call "wirepoint burners," which operate only when the aliens turn them on by remote control.

As the story opens, only four of the humans remain alive: Sean, Biotech Rachel Alyosha-Lermontov, Executive Officer Frederic Gruber, and Brightwork Technician Andrew Mead. They are reluctant to go into the jungle, but are forced to do so by pain: something they have never seen is used by the aliens to inflict agony through the nervous system. The humans called it the "prod."

Inside the jungle, Sean and the dour Gruber argue about the possibility of the buggers' intelligence, Gruber claiming it is impossible. That same day they are attacked by the creatures in force. Mead is killed. The others repulse the attack, however, and make it back to the camp.

Sean is becoming increasingly confused, finding it more and more difficult to cope with reality. Rachel is in love with him, which only makes matters more difficult in his eyes. Complicating matters still further is Gruber's increasing irrationality and antagonism toward Sean; he envies Sean's rank, despite the fact that there are now only three of them left alive.

That night after the battle, Sean is awakened by Gifon, one of Javak's assistants. Gifon, for some unknown reason, gives Sean a mysterious artifact — a tetrahedron — which is infused with great power, and an intelligence of its own. In dreamlike fashion, this life-force enters Sean's mind.

The humans soon have an opportunity to escape, and with the tetrahedron in his possession, Sean is confident they can succeed. They make a break for it, apparently outdistancing both Javak and the prod.

Eventually they find a clearing with a building standing at its center. They approach it. An aircraft of sorts appears. It is composed of rings lined up like a skeletal cylinder, held together by nothing visible. Inside it are Javak and his assistants. It becomes evident that the escape was nothing more than a monstrous game of cat and mouse. Sean wonders if Javak used the tetrahedron as a homing device, as the humans again feel the torture of the prod —

"He forced us into a trap!" Gruber shouted through the pain. "He let us think we got away — that goddamn Javak!" He was looking up at a ship thirty meters long and fifteen wide, if it could be called a ship: not only was there nothing visible that could have powered it, but there was also nothing to support the weight of the alien passengers, and nothing to link the large, circular metal rings that enclosed them. Their feet rested on thin air. "That goddamn Javak!" Gruber repeated.

Javak's neck craned; he looked down at Gruber, olive eyes rolling in curiosity. He spoke to his companions in a calm, self-satisfied hum.

"Javak!" Gruber screamed. "I'm talking to you!" He leaped impulsively and clutched one of the metal rings, trying to pull himself up.

The aliens stared at the man dangling from their ship. They must have been surprised, since they had doled out a generous shock from the prod only moments before. Although they had ceased their conversation, they did not seem particularly intimidated by the outburst, only curious.

Gruber chinned himself, then threw one leg over the ring and stood, facing the aliens. "I'm not

going back!" he shouted. "You'll have to kill me here, Javak!" He charged and barrelled the alien over with his powerful body.

"Gruber!" Sean yelled. He made a motion toward the ship, but wirepoints were raised menacingly by two of the aliens. Their impassive faces stared down at him, intentions masked by their strangeness.

Gruber was throttling Javak, pounding his tormentor's head against the hard curve of a metal ring. Javak's limbs flailed helplessly, and he made a fearful rattling sound. His life-fluids boiled furiously beneath his transparent skin.

Suddenly Gruber went rigid, then snapped back as if he had been kicked in the head. He fell, sprawled between two rings, his back pressed against nothing, a meter above Sean and Rachel.

"They're killing him," Rachel whispered, as though she had long expected it.

A bubbling sound escaped Gruber's lips as a string of saliva dribbled from between them. His body slowly went limp, but his raspy breathing continued in the stillness. He was still alive.

"The prod," Sean said. "It can be used selectively."

"How do they do it?" Rachel asked. "None of them made a move."

The ship began to glide slowly toward the stark structure in the

center of the clearing. The wire-points were again trained on Sean and Rachel, indicating that they should walk in the same direction.

As they approached the building, Sean heard the aliens start to converse once more. He listened for variations in length and tone while they walked a winding path through the magenta shrubbery. If he could just get a fix on some aspect of their language, he could figure it out. Then he could reason with them, in spite of the situation. He certainly was in no position to bargain. Yet there had to be some common ground from which they could communicate.

But was there? he wondered, as Javak, who had recovered from Gruber's attack with remarkable resiliency, leaped down from the ship and landed with an unsteady plop on the path next to Rachel.

"He can't bear to stay away from me," she said.

Javak ignored her and went ahead to the building. He lifted a panel in its smooth, rounded side. The panel was hinged at the top, clunking into place between two of the six rectangular shafts projecting upward from the roof. Javak turned and faced Rachel and Sean.

"He wants us to go inside," Sean said.

The interior was a refreshing change after weeks in the stifling heat; it was cool, the walls like burnished ice. There were no furnishings or decorations. There were,

however, six openings with a thin layer of clear, shimmering metal over them. Javak steered them toward one of these.

"Does he expect us to go through that stuff?" Rachel asked.

"I think so," Sean said. He reached out and touched it tentatively. It was cold and liquid. With a shrug, he walked through it.

On the other side was a low, narrow passageway that rose precipitously. Sean recognized it as one of the building's projections seen from the inside. He turned and waved Rachel on. She came gingerly through the passageway's odd covering and joined him.

The angle was so steep that Rachel was afraid she would slip on the slick surface and tumble back, head-over-heels. Her feet, however, somehow adhered to the floor. Perhaps, she thought, the shimmering, liquid metal might have something to do with it. It might demonstrate that the attraction was working, for example; it might even be the agent for it.

Light came from above, distorted by the shimmering metal; prismatic patterns were juggled and thrown on the walls of the passageway. A tunnel through a kaleidoscope.

At the end, Sean stuck his fingers through the liquid wall. He felt the heat of outdoors sear them, and allowed his shoulders and head to pass through, so he could take a look.

Gathered around him were the five aliens aboard the ship; his eyes were on a level with their six-toed feet. He stepped through, involuntarily thinking of falling; suddenly his perspective was bird's-eye-view. His feet were planted firmly on something, but he seemed to be floating in mid-air several meters above the landscaped clearing.

He felt a light touch on his elbow; Rachel had joined him. Behind her was Javak.

To their left, the crawling jungle went on for as far as they could see. In front of them was a zig-zag trail of circles cut into the green foliage: the clearings that the humans had been forced to create. To their right was a mountain range.

Sean tested the solidity of the invisible field with his boot. Its fuzzy firmness reassured him.

Out of the jungle for the first time since the boat had been forced down, Sean was impressed by what he saw. He was engulfed by the vastness of the land as it fell away on all sides. The structure in the clearing became a child's playhouse; the clearing, a small hole in the wriggling jungle. The ship was leaving its mooring, rising into the flickering sky.

"Gruber," Rachel said.

Sean took her hand and made a tentative step in the direction of the fallen man. The aliens were in their way, but parted, allowing them to go to Gruber's assistance.

"This method of travel is going to take some getting used to," Rachel said, holding onto her head with her free hand.

"Try not to look down," Sean replied. He shook his head to rid himself of dizziness, then knelt next to Gruber.

Gruber looked at him through eyes trapped inside a body that did not dare move. "I almost got him," he said. "I almost killed the bastard."

"Yes," Sean replied. "But look what your reward was."

"I don't care. It was worth it."

"Are you all right, then?" Rachel asked.

There was a pained look in Gruber's eyes as he turned away. Without speaking, he surveyed the land rolling out beneath them.

The ship lifted high above the jungle and headed toward the distant mountains. The peaks rose stark and rust-red, out of the riotous color, dwarfing everything near them. They grew larger, no longer misted with distance. Their details became clearer: symmetrical clumps of ruddy, crystalline rock thrusting upward in starburst patterns, connected at their extremities by fallen shards. They looked as if they had grown out of the jungle — colossal stone flowers.

"How beautiful," Rachel said.

"Yes." Sean watched the wind play with her hair. He saw her thin frame, bruised and criss-crossed

with cuts, her soft skin caked with grime; she must have been exhausted, mentally and physically. Yet she retained her sense of wonder, curiosity, and good humor through it all. For once he asked himself why he could not love this woman.

Slowly, the skeletal machine banked, turned ninety degrees, and headed away from the mountain range. Endless tracts of creeping jungle stretched across the horizon as the ship gathered speed.

"They're going to take us back down there into the jungle!" Gruber shouted. "They're just playing another trick on us!"

"No, no," Rachel said. "We're not going back — they're taking us someplace new."

"How do you know that?" Gruber demanded. "How do you know we're not going to spend the rest of our lives in that stinking alien jungle...?" He frowned, as if he had forgotten something. "The rest of our lives. How long can that be?"

"Look, Gruber," Sean said. "It doesn't seem like they're taking us back. We seem to be going off in a different direction altogether." Furthermore, he thought, there is a new alien in the group. Maybe this one had come to take them somewhere. At any rate, he noted that Javak and the assistants gathered around the newcomer's comparatively diminutive figure, barely two meters tall. It seemed that Javak

had been replaced; he was apparently not in charge of this expedition.

"We don't know that," Gruber said, disdainfully. "Javak might just be taking us to a different part of the jungle. Can't you see him standing over there, laughing at us?"

"I see him," Sean replied. "But he's not laughing — Javak can't laugh."

Gruber glared at the alien. "You sickening thing," he said. "I'll kill you yet, Javak."

Javak's head snapped around at the approximated sound of his name.

"Calm down, Gruber," Sean said. "Calm down. He's watching."

"Let him watch," Gruber said. "Let that goddamn geek watch. If he comes near me, I'll break his neck."

As if on cue, Javak walked across the transparent deck toward them, gesticulating and muttering enigmatically in short, humming bursts. Sean could see the dark rush of fluids beneath the clear skin. He perceived that the all-too-human green eyes were quizzical; interest was in them.

"Ja-vak," Gruber said, splitting the word to mock the alien speech patterns.

"Gruber, don't —" Sean started to caution him, but it was no good. Gruber had sprung to his feet and lunged.

Gruber had barely moved, however, when the prod stiffened him. While the jungle panorama spread out beneath him, he did an exaggerated dance of pain in the open air. He screeched like a wounded beast and fell to his knees, pounding his head with doubled fists. Tears welled from the crinkled slits of his eyes.

"Jee-zuss!" Gruber cried in a high-pitched voice that could have been comical in another time and place, but was terrifying then and there. Lunging to his feet, he hurled himself furiously between the two foremost metal rings, trying to jump to his death. He bounced back like a rubber toy and lay, limbs quaking spasmodically. He whimpered, floating absurdly on his back in the glimmering light.

Watching, Sean suddenly realized that Gruber couldn't have climbed aboard the ship and attacked Javak unless the aliens had let him. When, he wondered, does the game end?

7

Below, the jungle began to thin as the ship followed the curve of a broad river. Occasionally a cluster of buildings could be made out in the vegetation along the river bank. Once, Sean saw a looping thing rise sinuously out of the jungle, far away, but it twisted out of

sight before he could tell what it was like — although he was sure it was similar to the thing that had brought down the boat.

As the ship had gathered speed, exposure to the wind had been suddenly cut off as if by magic. They were now sealed inside an invisible cocoon.

"How could this thing possibly work?" Rachel had asked, at the time the shelter had been provided. "It defies everything we know."

"I think there's some wild card aspect of this universe that we just don't grasp," Sean replied.

"The laws of physics seem to apply here," she said, "at least in most cases. It's really only the technology that's so strange."

"The laws of physics. Sand dunes in an unknown desert, about to be blown away." Sean found the inexactness of the metaphor exasperating, yet it conveyed something of what he meant.

"Sean, even if we are in another universe — not just some uncharted part of our own — things are very similar to what we're familiar with."

"Are they?" he asked. "Do you see a sun up there? Face it, Rachel: We're on the other side, and there's no way back."

"The other side," she repeated. Gruber giggled.

Now, as they slipped through the air in the gathering darkness, the little settlements became towns. Other flying ships appeared, with

more and more frequency; these soared delicately or circled the huddled structures.

"Civilization," Sean said.

"Civilization on the other side," Gruber said in a sing-song voice. "Civ-il-eye-zay-shun on the oth-a side."

"Are you all right, Frederic?" Sean asked him, chilled. There was something about what Gruber was doing that told him it was no joke, no mere attempt to anger him.

"*The other side*," Gruber sang to the tune of the opening notes to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.

Strains of the actual symphony were audible to Sean. "Do you hear that, Rachel?" he asked.

She had been listening to the soft hum of the aliens, who were gathered in conversation at the far end of their ship. "Yes," she said. "I've been trying to crack their language, too. I haven't had any luck. Their oral structure is so much different than anything I've ever heard of."

"That's not what I'm talking about," he said. "Do you hear a symphony?"

"Symphony?"

"Yes," he said. "Bethoven's Fifth—" No, he thought. Something else. "Now it's Mozart's something-or-other. Now something I don't know — snatches of different works. Don't you hear it?"

"No, Sean," Rachel replied, frowning.

He was silent, listening to the music in his head: a mad whirlwind of trilling airs and chamber music, booming orchestrations and solos of resplendent virtuosity. No piece was ever finished, each dissolving into another as soon as it had made an impression.

"Sean brought us over to *the other side*," Gruber sang, harmonizing with the melody currently passing through Sean's mind.

"He hears it, too," Sean said.

As Gruber sang, the smallest of the aliens turned to stare at him quizzically through glaucous eyes. He approached the broken man and placed his six-fingered hand on a beefy shoulder; his skeletal structure, internal organs and circulatory network were outlined against the auroral night sky.

"Thin-skinned on the other side," Gruber crooned in a nursery-rhyme chant. He laughed hysterically at some secret joke.

The alien's voice crackled in clipped syllabic spurts. "Groobah," he said.

Gruber stopped laughing and stared up at the inscrutable face, a childish curiosity in his blue eyes.

Javak hustled over to the figures with an odd side-to-side rocking motion. He spoke to the smaller alien, addressing him as something like "Pomuz."

Pomuz spoke, waving Javak away. Javak stepped back obeisantly, life-fluids in his veins rush-

ing slightly faster than usual.

Again, Pomuz touched Gruber's shoulder. "Groo-bah."

"They know my name on the other side," Gruber said, grinning foolishly at the alien.

Pomuz patted his shoulder and looked over at the two other humans. "Ray-chel," he said. "Kal-han."

"My God," Rachel said. "He's talking to us!"

8

That night, a flock of flying creatures sailed by the ship, their kite bodies quivering in the wind. There were bulges at their four extremities and in their middles, but other than that they seemed made of paper, with popping eyes clustered here and there, staring ludicrously at Sean and Rachel.

Pomuz had made no further attempt to communicate with them, leaving them to wonder about just how much of their language he knew. He and the other aliens were resting, seated cross-legged as if in meditation. Sean and Rachel were still awake, staring down at the strange vistas illuminated by the nocturnal light.

The phantom music was gone from Sean's mind. He didn't know how it had come, or why, but it had disturbed him greatly. It seemed to be a direct link between

his mind and Gruber's. He said as much to Rachel.

"But how could that be?" she asked him. "Something about this ship? Do you think it's run by TK?"

Sean wanted to tell her about the meeting with Gifon the previous night, but hesitated. He suspected that the tetrahedron was related to the incident with Gruber's music. He did not explain this to her because he didn't understand it himself — it was nothing more than an intuition — and because he didn't want anyone else to hear about the tetrahedron. If Gruber knew Sean could hear what he was thinking, there was no telling what the consequences might be. Besides, he didn't know how much Terran the aliens had learned.

9

The raging fire of the alien dawn illuminated terrain that was markedly different from the day before. Forests were still abundant, but not in such overwhelming profusion. The ocean of jungle was no more; instead, islands of dark trees were haphazardly scattered against an ochre carpet of vegetation. Gently rolling hills blended gracefully with the scenery. Sean and Rachel were not sure at first that these were towns, so skillfully did they complement their surroundings.

At times the husks of cities were seen in the distance, hazy giants sleeping in the flickering light.

Later in the day the music started again, booming symphonically into Sean's consciousness in a loud *scherzo*. This continued for some time, finally mellowing to a harmonious *lento*. At least Gruber was sticking to a single work, Sean thought. He might even learn to enjoy the orchestral accompaniment, given time ... if he hadn't had the disconcerting notion that Gruber knew he was listening, and had even gone so far as to comment on Sean's thoughts with a well chosen musical passage or two. But this was nonsense, he told himself; Gruber was incapable of such subtlety. Of course, there was really no evidence of that; Gruber could be musically sophisticated, for all Sean knew. Nobody on the ship had known a thing about him. He could have been a concert violinist.

Where else could the music be coming from, Sean asked himself? Rachel knew nothing about it. It couldn't have been the aliens. The whole business began to get on his nerves.

"Sean brought us over to the other side," Gruber sang, accompanied contrapuntally by Stravinsky's "Firebird."

Sean spun on his heels angrily. "Shut up, Gruber!" He bared his broken teeth in a feral grimace.

"Sean." Rachel grabbed his

arm. "He has to have some way to relieve the pressure — he can't get at Javak."

"He's not going to take it out on me!" Sean snapped. "I'm not an empath."

"Just have a little patience."

"I've had patience all along," Sean shouted. "I'm tired of making excuses for him."

"Sean, they're listening."

He glanced over at the group of aliens huddled at the far end of the ship, around the forward ring. Two of them were looking at him: Gifon and Pomuz. The others were engaged in some sort of ritual massage, gathered in a circle with their heads down, arm over arm. Or were they communing? They stroked each other's gelatinous flesh tentatively, groping. If they were linked mentally he might be able to listen in, as he had listened in accidentally on Gruber's thoughts. He concentrated.

Closing his eyes, he blanked his mind, as he had been taught in Zen training. He straightened his spine and began to count his breaths, one for each inhale, one for each exhale. At length there was a stillness in his mind, balanced by the cadence of his breathing. Through the quiet flitted occasional random ideas; these he neither tried to capture nor block out, letting them vanish as they would. Finally, even these few involuntary thoughts were gone.

The stillness rippled, as water

mildly disturbed. Something emerged, vibrant and complex. It grew, a nebulous mixture of thought, sensation and emotion; it began to sort itself out, giving individual substance to the components of the alien jumble. These components became clearer; they were —

“The o-ther side.”

— gone.

The orchestra, at the peak of a crescendo, was drowning out the aliens.

“...on the other side,” Gruber’s incongruously pleasant voice crooned. “Sean brought us over to the o-tha-ha si-eye-ide.”

10

When Sean first opened his eyes and saw the spire reaching up toward him, he thought he was still dreaming. The ship came in nearer to it, then veered away and circled. It was an enormous needle, bristling with quills, thrusting up from the depths of a sprawling network of orderly movement. A city.

As the ship drew closer, Sean saw that the quills were actually rectangular moorings, like the one they had used to enter the ring-ship. Nearer the ground was a level where dozens of unoccupied ships hovered. It was an airport, centrally located in the metropolis.

The breeze began to whisper through the ship once again, as it

closed with the mooring and aligned itself.

Javak motioned for them to go out through the shimmering metal screen at the mouth of the mooring tunnel. Gruber rose first and stepped through soberly. There were no gaps in the stuff as he moved through it.

Sean and Rachel exchanged apprehensive glances. Biting his lip, Sean took Rachel’s hand and they went in after Gruber. He was just ahead, walking downward through the kaleidoscopic patterns thrown on the tunnel walls, humming to himself. The six aliens came through behind them.

Silently, Rachel and Sean walked with cautious steps. Though their feet still clung, their bodies underwent a curious sensation of buoyancy as they went farther down the tunnel. When they reached the liquid-metal screen at the end they were nearly floating.

Gruber dived through the stuff in slow motion, a distorted silhouette of his form visible through it for only an instant.

“Well,” Rachel said. She pushed herself forward, and was absorbed by the shimmering metal. Sean took a deep breath and followed.

Falling! screamed the wrenching and twisting in his gut as he stepped into open space: the building was nothing more than an enormous cylinder. Figures were bobbing in mid-air at various levels. Convulsive gasps ripped at

Sean's throat as he shot his hand back through the cold, wet metal, grabbing the edge of the aperture.

In front of him was the floating figure of Gruber; a grotesque, laughing foetus. "Come on in," Gruber said. "The water's fine."

Sean was still holding Rachel's hand; like Gruber, she floated free, laughing.

"Gruber's right," she said. She disengaged her fingers and swam outward.

Holding his breath, Sean watched her. He didn't want to follow, but Javak's sonorous hum came from behind. He imagined Javak was urging him on, and, even though Pomuz had been a calming influence, he didn't want to try his former taskmaster's patience. He jumped.

Somersaulting, Sean passed Rachel and Gruber. His body spun rapidly, then slowed. The aliens, clucking among themselves, stepped from the shimmering aperture and floated effortlessly toward him, one by one.

With a rolling motion, Pomuz flipped onto his back, and began gently to descend. Javak kicked, frog-like, until he was next to Gruber. He received a hateful stare from the big man as he pushed him after Pomuz.

The group descended to the bottom, passing others on their way up. At the base they dropped lightly to their feet. Around them were tunnel mouths, recessed in

the curve of the building's interior. They entered one.

For some time they walked through featureless passageways, snaking first one way, then another. Weightlessness gradually decreased, and was finally gone altogether. Waves of reverse-charge gravitons, Sean hypothesized, centered in the building by, perhaps, the same power that flew the ringships and ignited the wirepoints — the power that inhabited the tetrahedron.

"Where are your friends taking us now?" Gruber asked him, grinning.

"My friends?"

"Yes," Gruber said. "You brought us to see your friends, didn't you, Callahan? Aren't they bringing us home to meet the family?"

Snatches of music capered through Sean's mind, but he quickly shut them out. He tried to ignore the taunt, too, but failed. The accusation was simply too close to the truth — he was responsible for them being there.

Like a worm, the tunnel wound outward from the needle-port into the city. They emerged from its mouth and blinked into the alien light.

It was an enormous, thriving place they saw, motion and color everywhere; an expressionist painting come to life. Massive, convoluted shapes were lifted into the air or buffeted from side to side:

entire buildings disassembled themselves and regrouped in novel patterns in a matter of seconds. Humanoid forms, with their visible circulatory systems, nerves and internal organs, passed in groups, or singly. The only ornament or garment any of them wore was a small orange thing around the neck or on the shoulder. Sean thought they looked at Pomuz deferentially.

"Big man I see through you," Gruber sang to the tune of "Skip to My Lou," capering ludicrously around the group. Javak seemed a bit annoyed, but the others buzzed and squawked excitably. The phonemes, "Groo-bah," were distinguishable several times.

Gruber did a mock German folk-dance until he tired of it, then fell sullenly in line behind the others. They all boarded a skeletal vehicle that stopped conveniently for them; a more uniform and elegant conveyance than the jungle transport, but quite similar to it in general appearance. Swift and silent, it whisked them through the twisting streets. In the distance, an imposing building brooded over the city, massive and unchanging.

Gliding to a smooth stop, the vehicle confronted a giant jigsaw puzzle. Its parts interlocked in a preposterous manner, shifting and balancing precariously here and there as they watched. It was a building, but not like the Terrans were used to.

Pomuz indicated that Sean, Rachel and Gruber should enter it.

"How does he expect us to get inside such a thing?" Rachel asked, somewhat intimidated by the structure's unstable look.

"Fun-nee house on the o-ther side," Gruber sang as he passed under a balcony that was aligning itself above an entrance shaped like a two-meter tall keyhole. Sean and Rachel followed him reluctantly.

Their captors steered them toward a rounded doorway, through coruscation that imitated the natural light outside. They stopped while the aliens conversed. Pomuz said something to Javak, who retreated, never taking his eyes from Gruber. The five other aliens followed, disappearing around a corner.

They were alone.

"Let's go," Gruber said, looking sharply at Sean and Rachel. "This is our chance."

"Where do you suggest we go?" Sean asked him. "We're in a city full of aliens, and we haven't the faintest idea of how to fly one of those ring-ships, much less where to go."

"That's why they left us alone here, Frederic," Rachel said. "They knew we couldn't go anywhere."

"Look at it this way," Sean said. "At least here they've given us a little privacy."

Gruber's heavy features took on

a hurt expression. He began to sulk, and did not respond.

"Let's see what's in there," Rachel said, pointing to the circular hole in the wall.

"All right." Sean went ahead, peering gingerly into the adjoining chamber. As far as he could see in the dim light, it contained nothing but several large loops suspended from the upper part of the concave, polished stone. He stepped inside cautiously — and was struck by a jet of tiny particles.

Startled, he jumped back into the corridor.

"What is it?" Rachel demanded, frightened.

"Something hit me." He looked at her.

"Sean!" She broke into a grin, white teeth exposed through the caked grime on her skin. "Your face is clean! It's a bath!"

Gruber snorted and barrelled through the opening, grabbed at the hanging loops to steady himself, turned and grinned at Sean and Rachel.

They laughed, threw off what was left of their clothing, and joined him.

11

Sean and Rachel wandered, refreshed, through the jigsaw building. Aliens came and went, but paid no attention to them. When

one of the aliens wanted to go somewhere, he simply approached the wall; it would swing open to admit him, like a door or hatchway.

"It really is TK," Sean said, after watching one exit. "But they need a prop of some kind, like the rings — or the wirepoints."

"Not here," Rachel said. "Here they seem to be able to control everything with their minds alone."

"That could mean the power source is centered here in the city," Sean replied.

"Possibly." She caressed his arm.

Sean looked at her. She looked almost radiant after the bath, and he had not had sex with anyone for a very long time; he was becoming aroused.

And so was Rachel. They backed into an alcove created by the recently moved stone.

"Do you think they'll stop us from making love here?" Rachel asked, as if she could read his mind.

A bit surprised, Sean looked at her again. "Why don't we find out?" He put his arm around her and kissed her, open-mouthed. She responded eagerly, her tongue playing lightly with his. The thrill of imminent danger coupled with the sensuousness of the kiss gave them a tremendous lift. There was no jolt from the prod.

Hurriedly removing their cloth-

ing, they fell to the floor. Sean entered her hungrily. They made love with great passion, like two children who had just discovered sex.

Later, as they lay together in the flickering artificial light, enjoying a pleasant, warm fatigue, Rachel brushed her lips against Sean's neck, her small body curled around his.

"Sean," she whispered.

"Umm?"

"What do you think is going to become of Gruber?"

"Hard to say."

"He frightens me," she said. "The way he acts."

"I doubt he'll ever be quite right again," Sean replied. "He just keeps going deeper into his own head — and mine."

"Do you think the aliens know he's sick?"

Before Sean could answer, a silhouette loomed above them. It was Javak, staring at them, his bony facial plates vibrating.

"Well, look who's here," Rachel said. "I always suspected he was interested in having a little fun."

Javak gestured for them to get up and come with him.

Sean reached for the discarded clothing on the floor, tossing Rachel's kilt to her. Slipping into his own, he patted the inside pocket. There was nothing there.

The tetrahedron had been stolen.

Was Javak the thief? Sean stared at the clear, gelatinous back of the alien.

Part of the floor rose gently to become an inclined plane, while the ornate wall in front of them tumbled back out of sight. They walked up the incline and through the makeshift exit.

No one had even known he had the object, not even Rachel. He wanted to tell her now, about the nocturnal meeting with Gifon, the presentation of the tetrahedron, his subsequent concealment of it and its loss, but it was too late to confide in her. Besides, he couldn't afford to talk about anything until he knew precisely how much the aliens understood.

Where was Javak taking them? They walked behind his swaying figure up one passageway, down another, while he moved obstacles with the power of his mind. The power of his mind, and . . . ?

A heavy block swung open, revealing the city, bathed in the glittering auroral light of the planet's night. They stepped outside. In front of them was a skeletal conveyance like the one they had come to the building in. Pomuz and Gruber were inside it.

Elongating his syllables, Pomuz hummed something in a tone Sean interpreted as affable. The words, except for "Kal-han," and "Ray-chel," were indistinguishable, but the intention was clear: they were at least as much guests as captives.

In the heart of the city the aliens could afford to be generous.

Javak, Rachel and Sean got inside the vehicle. It began to move, snaking quietly through the city. There was as much activity in the streets as there had been in the daytime: strange, ribbed vehicles slipped about ubiquitously; structures constantly adjusted and readjusted their details; scintillating, artificial imitations of the planet's natural light exploded, danced and rippled in a variety of colorful displays.

Pomuz carried a small, glittering box with him, about two hands high and three wide. He opened it as they traveled and removed something from it. Enclosed in his huge hands were three small, chirruping creatures. These animals had scaly heads and tails, like reptiles, but their bodies were covered with a light, orange fur. They had long tongues that darted half a meter from Pomuz' cupped palms, and inordinately large, intelligent black eyes.

Pomuz handed an animal to each of the three humans. The creatures fit easily into the palm of one hand. Sean accepted the gift, chuckling at the fat little beast's somber expression. Smiling Rachel took hers. Gruber allowed the last one to be placed in his hand, its tongue flicking about like a tiny whip, but said nothing.

"I noticed these before, when we first arrived," Sean said, "but I

didn't realize they were living things."

"Why do you suppose they gave them to us?" Rachel asked. An answer of sorts came almost immediately, as her animal's tongue lashed out and absorbed a drop of perspiration on its spongy tip.

Rachel and Sean were delighted. They laughed as Sean's animal repeated the action with its tongue on his forehead.

"Look, Frederic," Rachel said, eager to share their discovery with him.

Gruber's eyes widened and he lifted his massive hand, the animal in his grasp. Only its head and tail were free. Gruber squeezed. The thing's jaws opened in a silent scream and its tongue flicked wildly.

"No!" cried Rachel, staring wildly at the big man.

The animal stopped moving, blood trickling out of its mouth, over Gruber's fat fingers and down his wrists.

No longer laughing, Sean watched Gruber hurl the tiny corpse away, but it bounced back from the car's invisible field; it fell at Gruber's feet, eyes staring up at him.

They were moving toward the immense building they had seen in the distance earlier. It stood, static and monolithic, like a guardian over the city. As the vehicle reached this gigantic building, its configuration of rings bent like a

worm, fitting itself into a hollow groove in the stone face, two-thirds of the way up the side of the building. Streaming light suddenly issued from within — an opening. Pomuz stepped out between two of the car's rings and was swallowed up completely by the light.

"This is important," Sean said, not knowing why he was so sure of it. "Very important."

"Yes," Rachel said. "I think you're right."

They looked at the alien, standing in the brilliant light so calmly, like a distorted anatomical drawing. Sean put his hands to Rachel's waist and helped her through the rings, then stepped up beside her. Gruber followed.

Turning, Pomuz walked deeper into the illumination and disappeared. Gruber glanced at Javak, who was still sitting in the car, and then after Pomuz. Sean and Rachel followed. Inside, the light was pervasive. There was no sound.

Ahead, Sean could see Gruber as a vague presence in the enveloping light. He could not make out Pomuz at all. Rachel was at his side; she took his hand as Gruber widened the gap between them. Sean thought that he should call out to Gruber. The big man was sick; he shouldn't be wandering about this place alone. Not this place.

No sound came from Sean's mouth; his disorientation was

complete. It was so strange here, he thought, the alienness of this other universe so complete, so awesome. Part of him said to go back, while another part urged him to go on: *See this place — no other man ever will.*

Gruber was forgotten, and so was Rachel. Only the tiny animal remained, perched on his shoulder. He went forward.

12

Focus: near and distant simultaneously; intimate yet vast.

Emotion: giddy love, pleasure, happiness; seething hate, revulsion, xenophobia.

Sean spun formlessly in the light, crying for the love he could not deal with, screaming for the hatred he could never escape; alone.

Alone.

The light became darkness. The darkness of the grave, of non-existence. He had known such darkness before, in his dreams — and in reality. Something was touching him, opening wounds that had never healed. He begged it to stop.

He opened his eyes to see shining black marbles staring intelligently at him from a comic, frog-like countenance. It was the little orange creature he had been given before coming to this great, living structure.

But how did he know the building was alive? Knowledge had been given him, not only of the thing he was inside, but of a great many other things as well. But how? For what purpose?

Tearing, pulling at him from a thousand directions, the great, animate building spun him through darkness, and suddenly he was a child with no father and a drunken mother, then a C² ship Captain befriending a young crewmember, then a man watching his friends die....

"Why are you hurting me this way?" Sean cried. "What have I done to you?" The darkness still surrounded him, shrouding his mind with misery and despair. His cry was lost in the emptiness.

This thing that could take his most guarded secrets and hold them up for him to see, hear, smell, touch and feel again was too much for him. He spun, all sense of time lost, deeper and deeper into the darkness, at the mercy of some incomprehensible alien intelligence.

Or had he gone mad?

He screamed, but no sound came from his lips. The thing that scoured his mind did not communicate in any auditory fashion; it received his thoughts in direct electrical emissions from his neurons, from the intricate mechanism that made up his personality, that fired his hopes and dreams, that allowed him to reason. Pitilessly, it stored

lumps of information in his brain that he could not digest, and it extracted those things it found there it deemed useful or interesting.

"What do you want?" Sean screamed silently, knowing full well it wanted him. "What are you?"

This time there was an answer. Sean immediately knew the great entity by both its name and its function — *The Tender*.

13

"Why didn't you make Pomuz come sooner?" Sean asked the Tender. "Why did you allow so many to die before you intervened?" His body was resting on a solid surface; he was looking up at Pomuz through the brilliant light. Pomuz' head rocked from side to side, and his enigmatic jade eyes sparkled as the life-fluids surged silently beneath his transparent flesh. "There's just the three of us left now," Sean said. "All the others are gone. Does that mean anything to you?"

It did.

Pomuz had not spoken, but his thought was nevertheless conveyed. One of the functions of the Tender was an esper communication network, Sean knew.

One of its many functions.

Turning, Pomuz walked down a corridor, almost obscured by bril-

liant light erupting from its walls. At the end of the corridor was a dark rectangle.

Sean followed the alien. It was difficult for him to walk; his ankles felt weak and his knees trembled. Somehow he balanced himself and staggered down the corridor toward the patch of darkness.

He was being dismissed — the Tender had no further need of him just then.

But he would be called again.

Feeling a small weight on his shoulder, Sean reached up and felt the thin, fibrous hairs of the little creature. He was glad it was still with him.

At the end of the corridor the car waited. In it were Rachel, Gruber, Javak and, of course, Pomuz. Sean got in, and it began to descend from its position high on the Tender. He saw that Rachel was weeping.

He put his arm around her, and she laid her head against his chest, crying uncontrollably for a few moments. As she wept, the diminutive orange creatures raised their tails until the tips met, forming a little arch. Sean thought he heard a muffled sound come from them, barely discernible.

No, it was Rachel, he realized; her pain appeared in his mind like a delicate tapestry — a history of the deaths of loved ones, failure at love, and a genetic flaw that left her forever barren, since she

wanted nothing to do with clones and could not afford an ovary transplant — showing Sean in a bittersweet, emotional weave why she had become a Starwoman.

Their minds had been linked by the Tender.

"I think these animals are empathic," Sean said.

"Yes," Rachel replied, sniffing. "They shared the experience with us." He could feel her affection for them.

Gruber stared down at the tiny, mangled corpse at his feet. His hatred was a palpable thing.

Sean sensed Rachel's sympathy for Gruber. He didn't like it as she went near the big man.

"Gruber," she said, "did you — "

"Other side!" Gruber screamed, cackling monstrosly. "Back and forth!" He reached down and then grabbed the creature's remains by the tail, swinging it like a pendulum.

"Get away from him, Rachel!" Sean commanded.

Gruber leaned back and dangled the dead animal over his mouth.

"Oh no," Rachel said.

Dropping it into his mouth, Gruber swallowed the little beast in one gulp. He looked up and grinned.

14

"There's a whole world outside," Sean said, "and we've got to live in it."

"That's true," Rachel replied. "But so far we haven't even become familiar with this building."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Sometimes it's better to take things as they are. That's all."

"For you, maybe," Sean said. "I'm claustrophobic — and I want my privacy back."

"There's a cure for claustrophobia — go out. You'll be able to find your way back. You've got the information in your brain."

"Which brings us to the question of privacy," Sean said. "I don't want to share my every thought with everyone else on this planet."

"Why not? You can share the thoughts of anyone you want, too, you know — it works both ways."

"Except those who have special influence, I'll bet," Sean replied. "Remember how selective the prod was? Well, it was just one of the functions of the Tender — I'll bet it can be pretty shrewd. I don't like it."

"So you think it tends to invade your privacy, do you?"

"That's a terrible pun. Are you trying to get rid of me?" The wall moved aside for him. "I'm going to do a little exploring."

"Don't get lost," Rachel said.

"I'll try not to." He walked down the corridor, thinking about how close he and Rachel had been for a short time, after the experience in the Tender. Still, his dis-

satisfaction with the way they were living was beginning to manifest itself in his restlessness.

Outside, he felt the needs, and heard the random thoughts, of those he passed. He could understand very little of it as yet, but he was starting to pick up a few things. The language was a combination of oral and esper, an art form unto itself. Emotional, primal thoughts were tempered by the rationality of the spoken forms. Little by little, the secrets of the tongue of the Noktyod, as the aliens called themselves, were revealed to him. Increasingly, he tapped the reservoir of implanted knowledge. If he was not careful, the voices of the city would well up in his skull, an amorphous, insistent roar he found impossible to deal with. At these times he would shut his mind off to the Tender. More and more, whenever he did this he was groping in darkness. He felt manipulated, certain that the whole elaborate business had been arranged by the Tender to make him learn so much in a given length of time.

There was virtually no limit to the Tender's powers, Sean thought as he strolled through an area marked by dozens of deep wells, in which huge cylinders chugged like pistons. Beyond them, a helical structure ran in and out of the smooth pavement at regularly spaced intervals. The Tender was like a god, overseeing it all.

The ground sloped gradually to a height of several kilometers, forming an immense, symmetrical cliff, overlooking the city of Zuk. Sean walked close to its edge, enjoying the spectacle of the city laid out at his feet, the burning sky flickering angrily behind it.

A figure approached from the other direction, walking briskly with body fluids surging. Sean nodded to him.

"Hel-lo," the alien said, passing before Sean realized that the greeting was in Terran. Sean turned and ran after him.

"Did you speak to me?" he asked.

"Yes." The *s* was clipped off the syllable, but it was recognizable.

"Where did you learn loglan?"

"From you."

"The Tender, I suppose?" Sean said. "But how can you speak it? Your oral equipment is so different."

"Flex-i-ble," the alien said.

"This is incredible," Sean said. "I mean, it's very good to talk to you. You're the first one I've been able to communicate with — besides my own people — since we've been here." He thought of Javak, and the prod. Pain had been the only method with which Javak had tried to get through to them. Apparently, the average Noktyod was more civilized than that, he thought; then it occurred to him that the issue was more complex. However, in his eagerness to expli-

cate his feelings, he allowed a jumbled roar of thoughts to rush in on him. He turned off his mind, quickly building a wall to hold back the noise, but it rumbled menacingly near on the other side.

"In-tri-cate," the alien said.

"I see. You're complimenting me on the subtlety of my language." To the Noktyod, thought processes were merely part of the language. It made Sean feel naked, stripped of the cloak of anonymity that had always protected him from others, perhaps even from himself.

"Do not be alarmed," the alien said. "The Tender is your friend, as it is my friend." Without another word, he hurried off in the direction he had been walking when Sean accosted him.

"Cant," Sean said to himself aloud. It disturbed him that the great machine entity had laid him bare for this entire world to see. Even though he knew better, he could not help feeling it had been done for the amusement of the Noktyod.

15

On the far side of the sloping, artificial cliff was a monumental shape, towering over the buildings near it — a tetrahedron.

"Rachel," Sean said, "I've got to tell you about this — I should have told you from the beginning,

but I was afraid someone else might find out." He came closer to the tetrahedron, impressed by its size and simple architectural grace.

Rachel whispered from far across the city, "The tetrahedron."

"Then you know." It was becoming increasingly clear that Rachel was far more adept at looking into his mind than he was at looking into hers.

Sean was now in the shadow of the immense tetrahedron. He saw that it was an empty shell, open at the base. Following a group of five Noktyod, he went inside. The group sat down in a circle on a large platform, and began to massage one another's shoulder, as he had seen before, on the ring-ship. As they groped and stroked, the platform rose and swung round, positioning itself against the wall. There it began to rise, one among level after level of similar platforms, all supporting several aliens. At the height of the building the platforms started a slow descent, rising once again after reaching the bottom. Again and again the platforms completed the cycle, only to begin once more.

"Cal-la-han," an alien voice hummed from behind him. As he turned, Sean's face nearly collided with the bony plates of a familiar figure.

"Gifon," Sean said.

"Yes." The plates vibrated.

"I'm pleased to see you. I had a

feeling I would."

"Not merely — a feeling." Gifon's jade eyes glinted.

"Then the Tender sent me here?" Sean asked.

"Yes."

"Why?" Sean demanded. "I don't have the tetrahedron anymore."

The facial plates twitched.

"Do you have it?" Sean asked.

"No."

"Who, then? Javak?"

"Gruber." The green eyes stared at him blankly. "He took it from you when you and Rachel were ... occupied."

"Making love." Rachel's mind joined softly in the conversation.

"He is sick," Gifon said.

"Yes," Sean replied. "Yes, he is sick. Can the tetrahedron make him well?"

"It is difficult to predict the outcome of such a union," the alien buzzed thoughtfully. "A tetrahedron has never been in the possession of a single individual for long."

"Then there is more than one tetrahedron?" Sean asked. "Yes, I see that there is — the Tender has let me know that much. But what are they?"

"I do not know. I only know that their power mobilizes our entire technology, and the forces that live inside them wait for release."

"Those forces seemed very old," Sean said.

"They are even more ancient than this world of Kra," Gifon replied.

16

"Gifon is a prestigious member of a group called the Unknowns," Sean said, pacing the chamber; he had changed its dimensions several times, widening or lengthening it, dropping or raising the ceiling, even bringing in from elsewhere some building blocks that were not in use, to toy with while he was thinking. "He's on the outs with them right now. He wouldn't say why, but I think it has to do with the tetrahedron — and it has to do with me."

"Why are they called the Unknowns?" Rachel asked.

"Because most Noktyod don't know who they are, even though their influence pervades the entire society."

"Then they're the rulers of Kra?"

"No," Sean replied. "In fact, they have often been castigated by the society in the past."

"What is their function?"

"They work with a group, called the Tender's Children, toward an end which the Tender alone is aware of — if it is indeed aware of that end itself."

"What's the purpose of all this?"

"That's the incredible part. The Noktyod believe that someone is

going to come along and take the tetrahedron the Unknowns have been sitting on for God-knows-how-long, and—" He clenched his fist and struck it against the palm of the opposing hand.

"And what?" Rachel looked at him sharply.

"They don't even know themselves."

"Then why do they insist on all this?"

"The Tender has made it imperative," Sean said. "The Noktyod have depended on the Tender for everything, ever since they've had any kind of society — they might never have come up out of the mud and the jungle if the Tender hadn't been left here by some alien intelligence — and it's extorted a promise from them to help it in this search for some sort of a savior. They've built institutions for that very purpose."

"What part do the Tender's Children have in all this?" Rachel was unable to read the details through Sean's anxiety.

"They look after the damn thing, it looks after them, and they commiserate with the Unknowns. These two groups alone are exempt from the prying minds of their fellows: the Unknowns partially — they have a public identity, like Gifon being Javak's assistant — and the Tender's Children completely. They answer to no one but the Tender, so they can carry on their secret plans for their prepara-

tion — the preparation for the coming of the One, as they call their Messiah.”

“I think I understand why you’re so upset,” Rachel said.

“You already see what I’m coming to, then?” Sean was relieved to get it off his chest. “You understand?”

“Your thoughts have become less ambiguous as you near the point.”

“Of course. I forgot how good you are at this mind-reading game.” He stopped pacing and looked at her thoughtfully. He knew that she could gaze into his heart and see the reasons why he didn’t love her; it must have been child’s play for her to see what was bothering him. But he said it anyway: “They’ve got it in their heads that their Messiah has come at last. I’m the One.”

17

Sean didn’t sleep well that night, even after sex. His restlessness was compounded of equal parts guilt and fear — past and future, respectively — combined with resentment toward the Tender. He awoke several times, always finding Rachel staring at him, concern in her eyes. “I can’t sleep,” he said at last. “It all comes rushing in on me like a tidal wave ... the hopes and dreams of an entire race.”

Rachel reached up from the

sleeping cushions and held him. “What are we going to do?” she asked.

“Nothing. I won’t do what they expect of me — I don’t care what it is.”

“Sean, there’s logic in what the Tender does, so this is probably logical, too.”

“I don’t care. I refuse to be appointed the official Messiah of Kra — it’s absurd.”

“How can you stop it?”

“I don’t know,” he admitted.

“Then you might as well go along with it.”

“Not necessarily,” he said. “I could go away from here. If I’m not around to be the One they’ll either have to get somebody else, or forget about the whole thing.”

“Where will you go?” Rachel whispered, knowing that he would leave her behind when he left the city of Zuk. “The Tender’s influence is everywhere.”

“Not beyond the mountains. The Tender itself says so.”

“But no one has ever crossed that mountain range and lived,” Rachel replied, disturbed by what Sean intended to do. “The Tender also says that.”

“That’s the chance I’ll have to take,” Sean said.

“And how do you expect to get even as far as the mountains without the Tender stopping you?”

“I don’t know,” Sean said. “But our minds are different. I’ve learned ways to shut out the

Tender — it doesn't have complete control. And even if I can't shut it out completely, I can outdistance it. There's a limit to its power, and I know what it is: those mountains."

18

Sean was already a long way from the city before he turned around to look back. In the distance Zuk sat, a collection of odd shapes laid out haphazardly beneath the angry sky. Out in the open the heat was nearly intolerable. Could the entire planet be bathed in the same infernal temperature at all latitudes? He had to laugh at himself, thinking in such conventional terms about a world located in a universe different from the one where he had learned about such things. Still, Rachel had been right; things seemed to be basically the same in both universes.

What really made Kra so difficult to deal with were the alien artifacts. Where were the tetrahedrons from? More to the point: what was their purpose, and why had they been brought to Kra in the first place?

Perhaps he had already been given the answers to these questions, he thought as he turned away from Zuk and gazed out over the ragged orange plain. Just now, though, his problems were more

immediate: it was going to be difficult enough to cross such a vast expanse before he even got to the mountains. His regulation boots were falling apart, and all he carried was a container filled with water, a knife, and the tiny animal that Pomuz had given him.

The orange plain was sparsely dotted with blisters of vegetation. In the distance were monstrous blobs, looking as though a huge eye-dropper had deposited molten rock on the amber sand — the impassable mountains. He hoped his water would last until he reached them, but he was discouraged by how far away they were.

"I'm still with you." Rachel's thought came like a cool, welcome breeze in the still desert air.

"Rachel," he said. "Please try to understand. If you can follow me with your mind, that means they can too. I've got to shut you out if I'm going to make this work."

"Sean." He could feel her pain. "When will I see you again?"

"I don't know," he said through already cracked lips. "When it's over, I guess. Stay away from Gruber while I'm away, Rachel. He's dangerous."

"He's gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes. He's done the same thing you have."

"But why? They don't want him."

"He believes they do," Rachel

said through the wind.

"Then it's become a contest between Gruber and I, to see who'll be the One?" This thing was becoming more insane by the moment.

"Yes. At least in Gruber's mind," Rachel told him. "But try not to think about it — he's nowhere near you."

He tried to do as she said, concentrating on shutting it all out. But, as he slowly made his way across the orange expanse, he occasionally relaxed his mental vigil, and the thoughts of billions poured into his mind in a torrent. He redoubled his efforts to keep them out.

Each time, mingled with the thoughts of Zuk, more and more, was a cacophonous orchestration, a mad symphony.

Gruber.

19

When he ran out of water, the mountains didn't seem much closer than when he started. When his thirst became unbearable he decided to try cutting into one of the blister-like plants. There had to be moisture inside it. He stood over the rounded vegetable, drawing his blade and plunging it into the pulpy outer layer. He was rewarded by the sight of a thin trickle dampening the mossy yellow growth beneath the plant.

Before he could stoop to catch the dripping water in his empty container, however, a popping sound startled him.

A small, circular portion of the plant emerged, borne like a crown on the head of a tiny creature. The animal resembled the one perched on Sean's shoulder. There was more popping, and several more of the creatures appeared, each ludicrously crowned like the first. The tiny beasts filed down the curve of the blister-plant. Wrapping their tails firmly around the plugs on one another's heads, they removed them, and with them proceeded to seal the gash Sean had made with his knife.

Somehow, they reminded Sean of the buggers. They were doing the same thing, saving their home when it was being attacked. The main difference was that the buggers' defense was an offense; these creatures were like little engineers.

The hair-like fibers on his own animal's back stiffened. It scurried down his arm and leaped half a meter to the plant. It landed in the midst of its solemn fellows.

"Deserting me, eh?" Sean said through swollen, cracked lips.

It looked up at him blankly. Then it abruptly lashed its long tongue about, touching each of the other creatures with it. They ceased their labors and gathered around.

"Are you making a deal in my

behalf?" Sean asked.

The animals went to work furiously. With their minute digits they soon fashioned a rough ball out of the plant's pulpy material. Sean was presented with the moist globe on a delicate living umbrella composed of two dozen tails.

He touched the ball tentatively. Obviously, it was intended as a gift to slake his thirst. He accepted it, bowing. He had hesitated, he realized, hoping to read the little creatures' intentions. Of course, they weren't plugged into the Tender's vast neural-analogue network; he couldn't be linked mentally to them. However, his brain did possess information on them: they were an autochthonous desert species, the kukugu; they were empathic, and served the symbiotic purpose of channeling moisture wherever it was needed. They carried water in sacs near the digestive system and in the fibers on their backs.

Holding the ball over his parched lips, Sean squeezed it. Greedily, he swallowed big drops of water. As he drank, the little animal Pomuz had given him darted back to his right shoulder and resumed its perch.

"I think I'll call you Moses," Sean said to it, after drinking his fill. "You and I are going to find out if the Promised Land lies beyond those mountains."

20

"It won't be long now, Moses," Sean said to his pet. The mountains loomed above them.

The little creature flicked droplets of perspiration from his brow with its tongue. When it had finished, it craned its neck and gazed at Sean with solemn eyes. He wondered why Pomuz had given him the creature in the first place. The Tender must have known he would try to cross the desert; why else would he need Moses? Of course, Moses was an empath as well. But of what significance was that to the Tender?

Unlike the ruddy, crystalline mountains Sean had seen on another part of the planet, these were lumpish and gray-green; great beads of hardened liquid deposited on the plain by some ancient volcanic upheaval. As he climbed higher, the air became dry and cool. Moses huddled closer to his face.

Painfully aware of how ill-prepared he was for such an ascent, Sean advanced slowly. It was not the most difficult going possible, since the rocks were never so steep that a path could not be found. But it was hard enough.

He had not heard a whisper from Zuk for some time; only the barest trace of the mass Noktyod consciousness buzzed in the back

of his mind. And, puzzlingly, the Tender had done nothing to stop him.

Weak from hunger, he searched the terrain for something edible. There was nothing growing but some scruffy moss, and he didn't like the looks of it. He was very tired, but he couldn't sleep while he was so hungry.

At last he simply could go no farther. He lay down between two large boulders, his head against the cold, hard stone as day turned into auroral night.

He cradled Moses in his arms as he lost consciousness, feeling the trembling of the tiny creature's body in the cold.

21

The light flickered brilliantly about him when he awoke. Rubbing first at his eyes, Sean's hand then trailed down his face, and through his tangle of beard. His neck was sore from sleeping on the ground, and his joints ached from the cold. Slowly, he got up and retrieved his blade, which he had had the presence of mind to stash in one of the niches in the rock as a precaution; he might have rolled over in his sleep and cut himself.

As he climbed, the terrain became increasingly more rugged. At times it was virtually impassable. Only with great difficulty was Sean able to scale the promontories that

extended from the mountains like the splatters of giant raindrops. He was coughing and sneezing from the cold, and his joints were swollen and numb from the frost which made them slippery. Still, he went on.

Late in the day he reached a sheer face several meters high, and covered with ice. There were enough ridges in the solid rock for hand and foot holds, but some of them would be accessible only through the greatest expenditure of energy. Slowly, agonizingly, he raised himself a few centimeters at a time, his labored breaths wheezing out in a vapor. Once, his foot slipped on the ice; he quickly scrambled up to the next handhold, scraping some skin off his already raw knees. Soon he had drawn himself halfway up the outcropping.

Two-thirds of the way up, a sound disturbed the intense stillness — a resonant, vibrating sound. Sean turned to see its source.

It came across the file toward him, floating nearer and nearer to the sheer face where he hung so precariously. It was green and bright and quivering — and indisputably alive. Less than two meters from him it *whooshed* to a halt in mid-air. It remained there, vibrating, a vaguely ovoid entity. It appeared to be examining him.

Except for the quivering, the thing remained immobile. Sean

slowly started to inch his way upward again. As soon as he moved, however, the ovoid being started to quake violently, actually causing the solid rock to vibrate until Sean's fingers were torn and bleeding. He was sure to fall if it continued, a drop of at least twelve meters straight down to the nearest ledge. His only chance was to reach the level surface at the top of the outcropping. But the stone was shaking so much he couldn't climb.

Sean hung on the rock like a dying spider. Still quaking at a furious frequency, the green thing pushed part of itself outward and edged closer to him. Carefully, Sean withdrew the bloody fingers of his right hand from the crack in the stone, reached down to the sheathed blade at his side and drew it. By this time the thing's appendage was only centimeters away.

He would die if he didn't act; the thing would kill him, whether it intended to or not.

Just before the pseudopod touched him, Sean flung himself awkwardly off the rock and onto the thing. He hacked at it with an overhand stabbing motion. The knife met no resistance; it slid easily into something with the consistency of wet putty. Sean's entire hand and wrist sunk in with the knife, as did his knees.

The thing began to vibrate even more violently than before, but Sean hung on, sinking deeper and

deeper into its soft bulk until both arms and legs were buried. Only his head, back and right foot were exposed, the rest of his body immersed in the cold glop.

His teeth rattling from the thing's vibrations, Sean held onto it as it shot up half a kilometer. It stopped and revolved, trying to throw him. Horrified, he saw Moses go flying to his death. He jammed his limbs deeper into the creature. The thing began to quake rapidly; Sean's teeth rattled and his guts felt like jelly, but he still hung on.

It began to whirl faster and faster. Nauseated, Sean dug his hands and feet still deeper, until his fingertips touched something solid: tubular organs radiating from a pulsing central core. The mouths of the tubes seemed to be steadily producing the sticky stuff of which most of the creature was composed. His knife was now lost in the living muck, so, instead of trying to cut it, he squeezed the round thing at its center with his bare hands. The creature took off at a tremendous speed, but slowed as Sean choked its heart with every bit of strength he could muster. The flight hesitated — then resumed so swiftly that Sean felt certain he would have vomited if he had had any solid food in his stomach. There was tremendous pressure as the blood pounded in his temples, in his hands and feet.

With a great effort of will, he

squeezed harder.

The thing began to slow down and sink toward the ground.

With a final surge of strength, he gripped its heart as hard as he could. The organ burst, liquid spurting warmly over Sean's hands.

It was dead; the two fell the last few meters to the ground. Hitting the ground that hard had never felt so good, thought Sean.

Nauseated, bruised, bleeding, freezing, and starving, he stood, pulling himself free of the strange creature.

The mountains, he saw, were behind him; the ovoid creature had carried him over them.

"So, Callahan," came a familiar voice from atop some nearby rocks.

Sean turned quickly and looked up.

"You made it." There was a hideous grin on the man's face.

"Gruber!"

"The one and only One, Callahan. I'm the Messiah, and I'm going to make sure that you don't interfere."

Gruber leaped. Sean tensed to receive the blow, but it never came. Gruber was suspended in mid-air, motionless, a look of terror on his face. Behind him in the sky there appeared thousands of tetrahedrons, flashing and glimmering with reflected light.

"Prepare, Callahan," came a voice inside Sean's head. "We can

protect you, but the experience will be painful. The Tender is about to act."

At once Sean was thrust into a nightmare of pain; waves of agony began deep within him and thundered outward until they lifted and shook his body like a rag doll. When at last it was over, Sean found himself lying next to the limp form of Gruber.

"What . . ." Sean said weakly.

"We are the Elwheyn," came the voice inside his head. "We are from your universe, and were ancient before your planet was born."

"If you're from my universe," began Sean, "then there must. . ."

"We will explain everything."

"Long ago, a war began between two factions of our race. Through control of energy that seems to you to be mental in nature, because that is how you come into contact with it, we fled to this universe in order to hide. We wish no war, but our enemies remain belligerent, and have at last found us on this planet we now call our home."

"Forced to fight, we have proven more powerful. Our enemies, however, in a last desperate maneuver, have devised the Tender. Its power is awesome. It was placed here at the conclusion of a fierce battle and since then has begun a procedure that can defeat us unless you help us."

"This is incredible," said Sean,

staring into a sky filled with tetrahedrons.

"Allow us to continue," said the voice.

"Do I have a choice?" said Sean.

"Yes," said the voice.

Sean was silent for a moment, then realized the voice was telling the truth.

"We have found the Tender too powerful to be defeated by ordinary means, and so it goes on with its plan. It began by lifting the Noktyod, natives of this planet, from non-intelligence to intelligence as great as your own. It then set them about clearing areas of the jungle. In these clearings, it means to build what you may think of as relay stations. Eventually, these stations will enable it to produce a network of energy that would inevitably subjugate us."

"So how do I fit in?" Sean asked.

"Your mental patterns, as you already suspect, are importantly different from ours. The Tender saw that you could be used as an energy focus in a way that could make it invincible even before all the relay stations were built."

"What about the Unknowns?"

"The Tender's control is not absolute, and we have attempted to capitalize on one of its weaknesses by creating a religion in the midst of the Noktyod. This was achieved through the efforts of the tetrahedron that Gifon gave you. This

religion, the religion of the Unknowns, worships us, though it knows not what we are.

"Through this religion, we had hoped to eventually undermine the Tender's power. We had not, however, progressed very far when you appeared. When the Tender became aware of you, it tried to use the religion to its own advantage, by convincing the Unknowns that you were the Messiah, and that your delivery to the Tender would mean our salvation. The Tender could not succeed in controlling you, however, because of the same tetrahedron that instigated the religion. It was that very tetrahedron who directed Gifon to give itself to you one night. It then arranged a link between your mind and ours. Since then, we have built around you more and more protection against the Tender.

"Not knowing that we were protecting you, the Tender made a mistake. It gave you the creature you called Moses to help ensure that you reached us, then allowed you to come here, thinking to test you as a focus. You came, however, because of a suggestion we, not the Tender, planted. The pain that you felt just after you saw us was the result of the Tender's agonized, desperate effort to exert control once it discovered our protection.

"As part of our effort to protect you from this attack, it was necessary to use Gruber as a pawn. We

regret his death, but he was insane and intended to kill you. He came here out of jealousy, and was not stopped by the Tender because the Tender never tried to control your companions. You may wish to know that the Tender chose you above Gruber and Alyosha-Lermontov merely at random. It needed only one of you."

Sean gazed emotionlessly at the still form of Gruber beside him.

"Okay," he said, "what do you want?"

"It would be simple for you. Allow us to use you as a focus, in much the same way the Tender would have used you, but painlessly. You will give us what we need to defeat the Tender within a time so short you would not be able to measure it. Then we will control the Noktyod, and will direct the construction of a vessel

that can automatically take you and Alyosha-Lermontov back to your home."

"I can't believe it," said Sean.

"Why not?" said the voice. It sounded genuinely puzzled.

Sean laughed. "That's just an expression. But tell me something else:

"Alyosha-Lermontov? Is that how I think of her?"

"That is how you think of her."

"Well, let's win this war of yours, and give me a nice long space voyage to change my thinking."

He turned to face back toward the city.

"Rachel!" he yelled, as loud as he could; opened the mental link, and felt her eagerly come to him.

"We're going," he thought, knowing she was listening. "We're going home." ●

Update:

UNEARTH isn't the only one in the world of new writers who's celebrating these days. Timothy R. Sullivan, author of "Downward to Darkness" and "Doin' That Tachyon Rag" (in UNEARTH #2) recently made a sale to one of sf's most respected editors, Robert Silverberg. The story, "Rauncher Goes to Tinkertown," will appear in *New Dimensions* #9.

We expected that the fourth issue, our first with perfect binding and a full-color cover, would meet with generally favorable reactions. We weren't disappointed; the following are samples of the kind of comments you sent in.

— J O-L

Dear Jonathan O-L and John L.,

WOW!!!

I must comment, not on your magazine's contents (which have always been superlative), but on your new format.

Do you know the warm feeling that wells up from your chest when you see a movie on opening night and know, right then and there, that you've just witnessed a future "classic"? When you read an "interesting-looking" book during its first days of release, then watch it shoot to "#1 Bestseller" status?

Well, that's the feeling I got when I picked up UNEARTH Number One a year ago; and that feeling returned when I received Number Four in the mail.

WOW!!!

I feel as though I've observed a child progeny blossom into adulthood. UNEARTH's "folder/staple" days are long gone, and I couldn't be happier.

Congratulations on your breakthrough into the big-time. You now deservedly stand head-to-head with F&SF, GALAXY, ANALOG, and the others.

It is gratifying to know that I have, in my small way, contributed to your success by "believing in the future of Science Fiction."

Sincerely,
Paul J. Phillips

LETTERS

Dear Jonathan and John,

I've just finished reading your fall issue, UNEARTH #4, and I must congratulate you on your finest issue to date. Having a charter subscription to UNEARTH, I've watched it grow from stapled, black-and-white, to bound and full color professional-quality artwork in a mere four issues. The exterior appearance of a magazine may be a relatively minor point, but these improvements have paralleled a similar growth in the contents of UNEARTH.

Over the past four issues, the stories have been consistently improving in both quality and professionalism. The artwork, too, has undergone similar improvements.

To get more specific, I particularly enjoyed the first segment of Timothy R. Sullivan's serial, "Downward to Darkness." The first part was excellent and I'm looking forward to the conclusion (but in three months?!). Perhaps you should consider a bi-monthly, rather than quarterly publication, if it could be done without sacrificing the quality of the magazine.

I also found "Mrs. Millman Speaks" by Mike Baron to be unusually professional in quality, especially for a first publication. The characterization, particularly, showed a maturity in Mr. Baron's writing style.

In short, I found nearly all of the fiction well-written and entertaining. All of the departments were fascinating, as usual. Especially helpful and readable was Harlan Ellison's WRITING column. Please thank Harlan for his greatly appreciated articles in UNEARTH #4 and past issues.

As UNEARTH matures and grows in contents (as well as circulation) I

sincerely hope that you never get too big to fulfill the three original promises which were made at the outset of the magazine; 1) to publish only previously unpublished writers 2) to read and actually comment on each submission — as opposed to the form rejections of most magazines, and 3) to return submissions within a reasonable amount of time.

People such as myself, who have aspirations in the field of writing (especially Science Fiction) are most grateful for what UNEARTH is doing, and the opportunities which it presents. I'm looking forward to your upcoming first anniversary issue and wish you continued success.

Sincerely yours,
Edward Glassberg

It's not easy to continue to respond personally to each submission, but we're hanging on. Despite the vast increase in the number of stories sent to us (submissions have tripled in the last few months), we're still commenting on each one. It now takes up to four weeks to do so in some cases, however, so we ask that contributors be patient.

Dear Sirs Ostrowsky-Lantz and Landsberg,

I saw an ad for your magazine in the July issue of *Galaxy*, pondered for a few days, and then sent my check for a subscription and a copy of volume 1, number 1. Both issues arrived in due course.

As my cat Alice says, "Oh, wow! Oh, wow!" I haven't been this excited about a magazine since I was ten years old and first laid my hands on the *National Geographic*. I've been read-

ing science fiction magazines for several years now, but yours is the first one in which I have actually made notes in the margins, underlined tasty sentences, and circled well-formed paragraphs. The book reviews are thoughtful and insightful. The writing column is quite the learning experience. The science articles read like well-conducted seminars. And the stories are well-written, energetic, and imaginative. Yours is a fine, fine publication and I heartily congratulate you on it. Furthermore, in a field with far too few outlets for budding (as it were) writers, it is much needed and very much welcome.

Best wishes for success in the future!

Sincerely
Marie L. Bartlett

Are there any more at home like you?

Dear Mr. Ostrowsky-Lantz,

I've just finished an initial session with UNEARTH number 4 (the first volume of your magazine that I've seen), and the best I can describe it is "Wow!" The stories I've read are certainly above the nomen "unprofessional" — professional being a matter of style rather than place of sale. John Kelly's "... Circus" is imaginative and well executed; and Bruce Kent's tale is the best I've read in any sf magazine in a long while. (And I'm sure Kent would feel no shame if he knew which story — now several months old — was the last I so raved over.) I am a

high school English teacher who is fortunate enough to teach a unit on science-fiction, and I have already planned a dramatic reading, using two students, of Kent's story. I hope he won't mind.

Too, I liked your Departments, especially Ellison's piece (which was a lot more lucid and in sympathy with my own feelings than are most of his recent essays that I've read). Gardner's examination of "Star Wars," however, could not even hold an unshaped hunk of bees wax to Samuel R. Delaney's brilliant critique in the November COSMOS. But I appreciated his comparison / discussion of Samurai films.

If I was at all disappointed it was over the fact that the magazine wasn't longer. But I understand you're taking care of that with issue five. I can't wait! Too, I'm looking forward with eagerness to reading "Downward to Darkness," but I won't start that story till number five comes because if the story is as good as I suspect it will be I won't want to wait months for the sequel. So with apology to Mr. Sullivan I prefer to wait. Meanwhile I'll scour the back issues.

My single negative criticism is that when the book is shelved I have to look for EARTH rather than UNEARTH because of the near invisibility of that outlined UN. But we can all live with that, and it certainly won't hinder you from receiving the accolades that surely await. Go at it!

In the mean time I'll be looking forward to enjoying my subscription. May I renew for many years to come.

All the best,
Artemus Tann

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Unearthed: Contributors

CLYDE CALDWELL illustrated "McPeter's Intergalactic Circus" in UNEARTH #4. He works as a freelance illustrator in the Charlotte, N. C. area. He presently does mostly advertising illustration, but is working toward becoming a full-time SF/fantasy artist. During the past six years he has done covers, interior and spot illos, and logos for dozens of underground comix and fanzines.

DAVID DEWITT is the first former chimney sweep to sell fiction to UNEARTH. He lives in Bellingham, Washington, where he divides his time among sailing, hiking, tennis, and writing.

JIM GLENN lives in New York City's West Village. He is a 6'6" Piscean actor-illustrator-media freak.

GREG HARPER is a Kentucky illustrator who thinks fantasy makes the world go 'round. He illustrated "Thanatos Coming" in UNEARTH #1, and currently works as an illustrator at Fort Knox.

ROSEMARY HERBERT is currently teaching SF for the fourth year at the Cambridge, Mass. Center for Adult Education. She also reviews SF for *Library Journal*, and works at Harvard College Library.

JOHN KELLY contributed "McPeter's Intergalactic Circus" to UNEARTH #4. He attends Harvard, where he is majoring in Social Studies, and serves as a teaching assistant in a science course.

TYLER MATTHEWS may never recover from the shock of the Yankees winning the World Series. His once tranquil brow is now creased with sorrow, and he is often heard to mutter dark comments about "the final collapse of Western civilization."

DAVID C. POYER is a lifelong SF reader. He is an Annapolis graduate, and served for six years in the Navy. He recently resigned to do full-time freelance writing, including magazine nonfiction, technical writing, ad copy, and two as-yet-unpublished novels.

AL SIROIS has published art extensively in fanzines, and has done professional freelance work for three years. He is also a professional musician, and is currently working on a novel. He is married to another writer/artist/musician; they live in New Haven, CT, with two cats, two children, and a dying VW.

TIMOTHY ROBERT SULLIVAN is one of a small, but select, group of young SF writers maintaining a low profile in southern Florida. His first sale to UNEARTH was "Doin' That Tachyon Rag," in UNEARTH #2.

STEVE VANCE lives in Georgia. After using his liberal arts degree as clerk in a hardware store for several years, he quit late last year to write full-time. He has recently placed stories in PULP and DARK FANTASY.

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