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WORLD'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION: 1965

The pick of the most unusual and original science-fiction stories and novelettes of the year from the best 1964 writings of both hemispheres.

EDITED BY

DONALD A. WOLLHEIM & TERRY CARR

The impact of other worlds, scenes of future times, inexplicable events in today's scenes, and marvels that walk unseen amongst us—these are but a sprinkling of the many fascinating ingredients of modern science-fiction storytelling. And in this new anthology there have been painstakingly selected the very best of the year's tales of wonder as written by the leading imaginative talents of the world.

This, the first really up-to-date annual of the year's best, is a veritable treasury of science-fiction gems. In the seventeen fabulous tales that make up THE WORLD'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION: 1965 there are really outstanding stories from all the science-fiction magazines of the United States, Great Britain, and the rest of this planet.

Here are stories no devotee of imaginative fiction can afford to miss.

DONALD A. WOLLHEIM is well-known as a science fiction book and magazine editor, an outstanding anthologist, and the author of many s-f novels and short stories. A native New Yorker, he is the editor of Ace Books.

TERRY CARR is an active s-f fan and critic who proved his merit by writing and selling novels and a number of short stories and articles. A former Californian, he is now a member of the Ace Books staff.

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ACE BOOKS, INC.
1120 Avenue of the Americas
New York 36, N. Y.

WORLD'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION: 1965

Interior art work by Jack Gaughan.

Printed in U.S.A.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THIS IS THE FIRST of an annual series of anthologies of the best science fiction short stories and novelettes published during each year. As the title *World's Best Science Fiction* indicates, the stories have been chosen not just from the regular s-f magazines published in the United States, but from publications from all corners of the world.

Our determination to seek out the best s-f from foreign markets stems from an awareness that science fiction is not, after all, an entertainment form indigenous to the United States. The two men who did the most to explore and demonstrate the possibilities of science fiction as a popular and worthwhile field of writing were Jules Verne and H. G. Wells —a Frenchman and an Englishman, respectively. And they were by no means the originators of the form—such earlier s-f writers as Lucian of Samosata, Cyrano de Bergerac, Mary Shelley and Plato never even managed to obtain naturalization papers from this country.

To be sure, science fiction has enjoyed far more popularity in the United States than anywhere else. By far the greatest amount of s-f published has come from the U.S., and by and large the most advanced thinking in the field has been done by writers living in the fifty states. This is a result of the fact that science fiction caught on as a popular fiction form here

in the early part of this century, and since 1926, when Hugo Gernsback founded *Amazing Stories*, there has always been at least one magazine specializing in the field, and sometimes twenty or more of them at once. The average over the nearly four decades has been about eight or ten magazines—a sufficiently thriving market to allow writers to establish continuity and cross-fertilization of ideas and techniques, with the inevitable evolution in both over the years.

Other countries have had their own science fiction magazines, of course, but none of them have enjoyed the continuous development possible in the U.S., because there have been long dry spells when s-f magazines were not being published. Even in England, where short-lived s-f magazines like *Scoops* and *Tales of Wonder* were attempted as long ago as the 1930's, it wasn't until after World War II that the magazine *New Worlds* began a publication schedule which has continued without drastic interruption to the present, making possible the development of such excellent British writers as Arthur C. Clarke, John Wyndham, Brian Aldiss, John Brunner and many more.

Other countries have been even less fortunate in their science fiction outlets, and have had to rely for the most part on magazines composed wholly or in part of material reprinted from the U.S. magazines—a situation which has inhibited the development of s-f writers in these countries. An Italian writer, for instance, interested in science fiction but having no markets in his country for such stories (as was the case there until comparatively recently) was unable to devote a great deal of his professional time to the field, with the result that he lacked the practice at s-f writing which U.S. writers could afford. In addition there was the fact that, lacking a home-grown tradition of science fiction, the Italian (or Hungarian, or Japanese, or Spanish) writer had to start all over again where we began in 1926, with the result that stories from other countries have often seemed rather old-fashioned to U.S. readers.

In the Soviet Union, science fiction was encouraged from the 1920's, but only as a form of juvenile fiction intended to

be inspirational and educational in nature. As an influence in adult reading it is only recently that fantasy projections have been slowly and sparsely appearing in the Russian literary world. Because of this, what has appeared has lagged far behind us in sophistication and techniques. Interestingly enough, Poland, Czechoslovakia and (not surprisingly) East Germany have turned up s-f novelists of even more promising talent than those of their Soviet mentors.

Nonetheless, the Russians *are* now in the adult s-f field, as are a constantly increasing number of countries throughout the world, and each nation is contributing its own viewpoint to the genre. It's a healthy state of affairs, and likely to improve more and more as practiced science fiction writers develop in these countries—as they did so gratifyingly in England after World War II. And the more voices which can be heard in the field, the more fresh viewpoints we can get (whether we agree with them or not), then the more informed and enlightened we are likely to be about the human, and *non*human, condition . . . now, and tomorrow.

Already the foreign writers are making interesting contributions to the field, and of the seventeen stories we've chosen as the best of 1964, almost a third of them first appeared outside this country. Quite unsurprisingly, two of the stories are from the English magazine *New Worlds*, which (with its companion magazine *Science Fantasy*) is well known as a prime source of imaginative and accomplished science fiction. Messrs. Brunner and Mackin—the former a writer with a well-established reputation both in England and the United States, the latter having published only in England so far—both deal with a theme which has shown up frequently in English "mainstream" fiction of the past decade, from John Osborne to Colin Wilson to Keith Waterhouse: the alienation of the individual from society, from friends, and from himself. Brunner and Mackin consider the theme in science fiction terms, but their treatment is no less human and emotional for that.

Dr. Josef Nesvadba, a Czechoslovakian, is 38 years old and a psychiatrist by profession. He is one of the major names in

science fiction in Eastern Europe, and the story reprinted here was the title story of his first collection, published in Czechoslovakia by Artia Pocket Books. *Vampires Ltd.* is a disturbing story—not because it's about black horrors flapping across the moon, which it isn't, but because it's about a much more real evil and therefore a more terrible one.

Harry Mulisch, whose *What Happened to Sergeant Masuro?* is both intriguing and unsettling, is 35 years old and has already published eight books ranging from novels and short stories to plays and autobiographical essays. He has been described by the *Netherlands Book News* as "a Colin Wilson of Dutch literature, steeped in religion (conventional and occult), history (and 'anti-history'), and the philosophy of science (or reverse the nouns), with a vast Freudian computer-mind of memories and fantasies . . ." A significant portion of his fiction lies within the field of fantasy and science fiction, a form to which he brings a vigorous individuality.

Colin Free is among the best-known writers in Australia. Born in 1925, he has worked in the field of advertising but now writes full-time, primarily for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, which has presented over a hundred of his plays and documentaries. He lives near the Blue Mountains, inland from Sydney, with an art teacher who is his wife and a four-year-old girl who is his daughter. Most of his stories are concerned with the freedom of the individual in society —as is his story here, *The Weather in The Underworld.*

Of the writers reprinted here from U.S. magazines, most readers will already be familiar with Fritz Leiber, who brings his distinctive poetic magic to a science fiction theme in *When The Change-Winds Blow*; with Philip K. Dick, whose imagination and sense of humor are as unpredictable as ever in *Oh, To Be A Blobell*; with William F. Temple, who pulls a *tour de force* out of a time machine in *A Niche In Time*; and with the irrepressible humor of Christopher Anvil, as displayed in *Bill For Delivery.* Writers like Tom Purdom, C. C. MacApp and Ben Bova are comparatively new but have already gained followings through frequent appearances in the s-f

magazines (Bova with a long string of speculative science articles as well as his fiction writing).

But in addition to the work of established writers, it's always a pleasure to present good work by newcomers. The science fiction magazine field in 1964 was an expanding one, with new magazines in the field and older magazines moving to more frequent publishing schedules. If the expansion is to be a healthy one, we must have good new writers to help fill the space, so it was gratifying to see so many new bylines on excellent stories. Some of these writers, like Thomas M. Disch and Norman Kagan, have already made second, third and even tenth sales and are on their way to becoming top names in the field. We're sure the other new writers represented here also have more to tell us of the future, the real and the unreal, the comic and the cosmic, and the sheer adventure of being human today and tomorrow.

A final word: We've researched the world's s-f publications to the best of our ability, but we realize it's probable that many stories published in obscure places and obscure magazines will elude our attention. We will welcome suggestions from readers who may encounter such tales for consideration for inclusion in the next compilation of the *World's Best Science Fiction.*

—THE EDITORS

GREENPLACE

BY TOM PURDOM

On the outskirts of Greenplace, Nicholson seated himself in the wheelchair and took the drug injector out of his shirt pocket. Rolling up his sleeve, he uncovered the lower half of his biceps. For a moment the injector trembled above his flesh.

He put the injector down. Twisting around in the chair, he looked up at the sec standing behind him.

"Will you help me if I get into a fight?"

"I don't get paid to fight," the sec said.

"I thought you might do it for pleasure."

"I work for money."

Fear was a tingling nausea in his chest and stomach. A yes answer from a big, hulking man like the sec would have made him feel a lot better. From the look of him, he had thought the sec might enjoy a fight. The big man's face seemed to be set in a scowl of permanent disgust with a world which made such trivial use of muscles. Ever since the invention of the voicetyper, which had made the old trade of stenographer-typist obsolete, secs had been the lowest class of unskilled labor, status symbols hired on a temporary basis merely to carry their employer's files and dictating equipment. He turned around in the chair. Across the street the late afternoon sun fell on the lawns and houses of Greenplace. Children were yelling and he could smell the grass. What was pain like? He couldn't remember. He had been forced to en-

dure it only once in his life, twenty-four years ago when he had been twelve and the doctors had given his left eye a new set of muscles. Could he take it? Would he beg them for mercy?

"Don't think they don't know you made that last survey," Bob Dazella had told him. "Never underestimate the Boyd organization. Every time a lawn gets mowed in that district, it goes in their computer. You'd better go armed. Believe me, you go into Greenplace unarmed and you may come out a cripple."

Glued to the middle finger of his left hand was a scrambler, a finger length tube which fired a tight beam of light and sound in a pattern designed to disrupt the human nervous system. In his lower left shirt pocket he had a pair of bombs loaded with psycho-active gas and in the bottom of the wheel chair he had installed a scent generator and a sound generator. He didn't know what the two generators could do for him if he got into trouble, but they had been the only other portable weapons he could think of. He didn't think anything could help him very much. MST—melasynchrotrinad —had one bad side effect. It disrupted coordination. Once the drug hit his nervous system he would be a helpless lump of flesh for the next four hours.

Again the injector trembled above his biceps. He shook his head disgustedly. He pressed the release and two cc's of red liquid shot into his arm. Behind him the sec stiffened. He put the injector back in his pocket.

It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon in late summer. He was sitting in the shade of a tall apartment tower, the last one for several miles. In front of him Greenplace looked comfortable and pleasant. Lawn mowers hummed across the grass while their owners watched them with sleepy eyes. On every lawn there was at least one person sprawling in the sun. Greenplace had been built in the early 1970's and it was typical of its period. Every block had fewer than fifteen houses and every house had a lawn and a back yard.

He sat tensely in the chair. He could feel the chemistry of his fear mingling with the disturbing chemistry of the drug.

He felt like a pygmy with a wooden harpoon waiting to go out and do battle with one of the giant creatures that swam in the oceans of Jupiter. Congressman Martin Boyd was probably the most powerful man in the United States. He had been the undisputed boss of the Eighth Congressional District since 1952. Now that medical science had conquered death, or had at least given most people an indefinite life span, his organization might very well control the district forever. In addition to his forty-eight years seniority, Boyd had accumulated wealth, a first-rate psych staff, and control of the House Rules Committee and the Sub-Committee on Culture and Recreation. Modern psych techniques were so powerful, politicians and social scientists unanimously considered Boyd unbeatable.

His head rolled to one side. He scanned the clouds and the blue sky and he estimated the wind velocity and what kind of weather they were having in Nigeria, where his wife was on a weekend shopping trip. His hand suddenly appeared between his eyes and the clouds. He tried to return it to the arm of the chair and instead slapped the bare skin below his shorts hard enough to sting.

He tried to lower his head and look at Greenplace. He found himself looking at the apartment tower on his right. He noted the number of floors and the number of windows per floor and developed a highly original theory about the effects of high rise apartment living, combined with current toilet training procedures, on the Oedipus complex of classic Freudian psychology. Before he could take his eyes off the tower, his drug accelerated brain composed a witty paragraph about the theory for his popular column in *Current Psychology*.

"Let's . . . g . . g . . ooo . ." His tongue and lips felt normal but his ears told him his coordination was already degenerating.

The sec pushed him forward. His head was swaying from side to side. He tried holding it steady and failed. The landscape swung across his vision.

MST was the most powerful psychic energizer on the market. It multiplied the powers of observation and the rate and

quality of thought by a factor somewhere between three and seven. The user observed data he would never have observed in his normal condition, and his mind invented and discarded hypotheses at a dizzying rate. The drug was only eight years old but it had already been responsible for several breakthroughs in the sciences. Thanks to four brilliant insights by drugged experimenters, his own field of psycho-therapy had leapfrogged several decades. The black arts of social manipulation had also advanced.

He heard the wheels of the chair rumble on the street and he calculated how much heat they were generating and formulated two contradictory hypotheses about what the motion of all the wheeled vehicles on Earth was doing to the annual temperature and rainfall of the northeastern United States. Smoothly, without breaking his stride, the sec rolled him off the street onto the sidewalk.

On the first lawn two boys mounted on electric rhinos were engaging in a duel with stunner swords. A heavy man in dirty shorts and an unbuttoned shirt looked away from the combat and glanced at the wheelchair and its occupant. His eyes narrowed. His face hardened and he stuck a cigar butt in his mouth, and then Nicholson's head rolled again and he saw the people watching him from the other side of the street. Several people had actually gotten out of their lounging chairs and stood up. All the way down the block, every eye over twelve years old was looking at him.

He had seen the same kind of hostile looks last month when he had surveyed a neighborhood near here on a weekday morning. Fear of strangers and mind probers seemed to be part of the conditioning the Boyd organization imposed on the District. A big organization didn't have to psych the voters by riding around openly drugged. Boyd's psychers could use more subtle methods: surveyors disguised as salesmen and maintenance men; community carnivals at which the booths and amusements were concealed psych tests; even, when necessary, arresting people and releasing them with many apologies and no memory they had been psyched during their detention.

Nicholson's organization consisted of five men and at present he was the only trained psych man in the group. An MST survey was the only way a small organization could learn enough about the voters to fight a strong campaign.

Turbine engines whined in his ear. "Cop," the sec grunted.

An open police car swung past his bobbing eyes. In the front seat two policemen and a panting dog stared at him.

The policeman slid out of his vision. For a moment he and the fat man with the cigar eyed each other. The boys had stopped jousting and the man was standing, with his legs spread and his arms folded in his chest, in front of the exact center of his house. There was a comic resemblance between the human figure and the front of the house. Both were extremely broad for their height. The fat man had a fat house . . .

"Just a minute, mister. Hold on."

Fear erased everything but the policemen from his nervous system. Their exact appearance flashed into his consciousness and he formulated three hypothetical models of their personality structure. His right hand shot toward the sky and then dropped over the arm of the chair. He moved it again and this time it landed on the arm. Underneath his fingers he could feel the reassuring plastic of the buttons which controlled the generators.

"Sss . . . ttt . . . ooopp . . ."

The sec stopped. The cops got out of the car, one of them holding the dog on a u-shaped leash, and stepped in front of him. The one without the dog held out his hand.

"May I see your identification, please?"

"You making an arrest?" the sec asked.

"Just another routine check."

"We don't have to."

"Don't have to what?" the cop with the dog said.

"You have to arrest us for something. No arrest, no ID."

Nicholson wondered where the sec had learned that bit of law. The big man might not be bright enough to hold a regular job in a modern economy, but he seemed to have learned a few things about dealing with cops. He was certain the

Boyd organization already knew who he was and most of his life history, but when you were fighting modern psych techniques you never knew what piece of information might be crucial. The best rule was to tell them as little as you could.

"What are you doing here? Who are you working for?"

The sec didn't answer. The grinning dog bobbed across Nicholson's vision and he felt a new stab of fear. The thick muscle in his mouth quivered.

"Aaaag . . . verr . . . ggg . . ."

The cop scowled at the sec. "I asked you a question."

The sec remained silent. A bony hand jerked the leash. The dog growled.

"You want us to run you in for disturbing the peace?"

"We aren't making noise. You have to make a noise."

"You're a real lawyer, aren't you?"

The buttons controlling the generators were still under his fingers. In his condition it would be hard to punch out a particular code, but he could surprise them with a blast of almost anything, from the roar of a rocket to the smell of horse manure, and then get them with the scrambler and flee. But that would end the survey before it started.

"Get them out of here," a man yelled. "Don't take any back talk."

All over the block people started yelling at them.

"Send them back where they came from!"

"Sic the dog on 'em!"

The cop gestured at the excited people. "You aren't disturbing the peace?"

A little girl ran toward them across the nearest lawn. "Go away, bad man! Go away! Bad man! Bad man!" Her mother screamed at her but she kept on coming. At the edge of the lawn she stumbled over a drainage ditch and fell on the sidewalk.

"My baby!"

The girl lifted her face from the sidewalk and screamed at him through her tears. Her mother ran up and bent over her. "Poor baby. Poor little thing." Glaring at him, the mother lifted the sobbing child to her shoulder and carried her to-

ward the house. "There, there. We'll give you something to eat. Stop crying now. Stop crying. How about a nice piece of candy?"

The dog growled again. "Who are you working for?" the cop repeated.

The sec remained silent. The cops glanced at each other. The one holding the dog grinned. "Let him do what he wants." They trudged back to their car.

Nicholson waited. The car didn't leave. Ahead of him the people standing on the lawn looked like some kind of macabre gauntlet.

He was supposed to turn right at the corner and spend the next three or four hours cruising through the neighborhood. Everywhere he went people would be standing on the lawns yelling at him. How long would it be before they got violent?

"Gggg . . . goo . . . aaa . . . aann . . ."

The sec pushed him forward. The people might curse him, but whatever they did, even if they hid in their bedrooms, they would tell him something about themselves. Even the shape of their homes and the stuff scattered on their lawns were revealing.

"Snooper!"

"Go back to your garbage pit!"

The cops followed him down the block.

He was too scared to function. He observed everything but his brain refused to produce any theories. He took it all in, the people, the elaborate toys, the houses, the food and amusements scattered on blankets and lawn tables, and even as it flowed through his nervous system his brain obstinately planned escape routes and what to do if they attacked. He couldn't think about anything else.

He tried to get his cowardice under control. He wanted to tell the sec to turn around, but he valued his self respect too much. Nothing could justify running away. Too much depended on this. Always in the past men who had accumulated so much power and wealth they couldn't be removed from office by normal political means had eventually been removed by death; men with slightly more advanced ideas had

taken their place and society had lagged only a generation or so behind technology. Now death had been abolished and the rate of technical change was accelerating. He was here because he was convinced the only alternative to what he was doing was social collapse.

He tried to get his mind back to work by making it review everything he knew about Boyd's political career. His thoughtflow couldn't be controlled. Every time a new voice screamed at him, he began thinking about self defense.

"Stop him! Don't let him go any further!"

A girl jumped in front of the wheel chair. "He's from that milk company. I saw it on television. They're trying to make us buy bad milk. He's trying to poison us!"

The sec tried to move around her. She threw out her arms and stepped back. She danced down the street in front of the chair.

"They're poisoning the milk! They're poisoning the milk!" She was black haired and mercurial. A black dress swirled around her body. Flickering lights from two jewels in her collar, a popular type of cosmetic, played on her face and bathed her features in swiftly changing patterns of light and shadow.

Her name was Betty Delange. Her hair color had been changed and her body seemed more voluptuous, but he had examined enough pictures of Boyd's people to be sure it was her. She was the best psych technician in the Boyd organization. They were fielding their biggest guns right at the start of the war.

"He'll fix us so we have to buy it! He'll make us drink his poison! Stop him!" Her voice rose to a panic-stricken scream. "Why don't you stop him?"

People moved toward them across the lawns. A few of them ran but most of them walked. Even with a scream like that it was hard to get people excited nowadays. Life was comfortable and pleasant.

Faces swung past his eyes. Twenty or thirty people surrounded the chair. The sec tried to push through and then stopped.

"Is that the truth?" a man asked. "Who are you working for, mister?"

Most of the faces were young. There were a lot of teenagers in these older developments. The eyes of the men told him they had been attracted by lust as much as by violence. Some of them were looking at the girl more than they were looking at him.

His tongue quivered. "Nnnnn. . . ." His hands appeared before his eyes and he pulled them down. He was matched against a first-rate craftsman and he was helpless as a cripple.

Somewhere in the crowd he heard music with a strong rhythm and a loud, thumping bass beat. A young man was holding a gadget which looked like a radio but had to be a psych device. The rhythm was exactly the same as the rhythm of the lights moving over the girl's face.

"How do you know he's from that milk company?" an older man asked.

"I *know.* I saw it on television. It was on the news this morning." Boom, boom, boom. "They'll make us drink their poison." Boom. *"They'll make us drink their polluted milk!"* Boom, boom, boom.

The music was getting louder. The melody was fading out and the beat was coming in. Strong rhythms were one of the most effective techniques ever devised for breaking people down and making them more suggestible. They had been used in voodoo and in classic brain washing and the current tribe of witch doctors still found them useful. The people crowding around him probably weren't even aware the beat was driving their emotions toward violence.

The faces looked at him. Violence wasn't natural to them. They hated him because he was a stranger and a spy, but if the girl hadn't appeared on the scene they would probably have stayed on their lawns and released their anger with their mouths.

His head was still swaying back and forth. His thoughts were still completely concentrated on saving his skin. They had him in a neat trap. If he used the scrambler or the psycho-active gases before they attacked, the cops would

arrest him for assault with a dangerous weapon. If he waited until they attacked, he would only be able to eliminate one or two before the rest of them ripped him to pieces.

His right hand groped toward the arm chair and the buttons which controlled the generators. By making very small movements, he could almost control his muscles. Sound or scent might break up the steadily growing crowd long enough for he and the sec to break through and run for it, but he hadn't psyched the neighborhood long enough to know what would work on these people. Upsetting enough of a crowd to make a difference wasn't the same as temporarily surprising two policemen. Sound and scent had to be used with precision. They could be effective only when you knew your target. He might generate a stimulus which would actually fortify the girl's incitements. Even if he broke them up temporarily, what would keep them from chasing him?

The girl drew herself up and pointed her finger at him. Towering over him, she arched her back so her breasts stood up.

"He's a snoop," she yelled. "Who cares who he's working for? Do we want a snoop in our neighborhood?"

They looked at each other. They were still hesitating. Probably not one of them had ever before hit a human being.

He felt sick. He had come here fearing violence, but now that he was confronted with the reality, the ruthlessness of Boyd's staff disgusted him. Speeding off on a tangent, his brain tried to imagine the kind of personality this girl had to have. He couldn't figure out Boyd or any of Boyd's people. They were total mysteries to him. Didn't they understand? Mankind was living in a new age. If human life could last forever, then it was even more sacred than it had been in the past.

A boy slithered between two sets of bare legs. Standing in front of the wheel chair he looked at Nicholson with the cruel face of a child mocking the village idiot. He was carrying a huge ice cream cone, several red streaked scoops of vanilla piled in a high, dripping tower.

"How do you eat, mister? Show me how you eat."

"Get him out of here," a girl said.

The boy thrust the ice cream across Nicholson's lap. Startled, Nicholson moved his left hand. The ice cream shot from the boy's fingers and splattered on the sidewalk. The boy stepped back and brought his hands up to his face as if he were warding off a blow.

"Teach him a lesson!" the girl screamed. "What are you waiting for? He's spying on our minds. He's poisoning our milk. Get him! Get him! Get him!"

Boom. Boom, boom, boom. Boom. Boom, boom, boom.

A hand grabbed his shirt collar. Faces moved toward him. Eyes stared at him over cigarettes and slowly chewing jaws.

More than half the people here were smoking.

A hard, masculine hand slapped his face hard enough to make his eyes water. He moaned and instantly felt ashamed. The hand drew back and balled into a fist and his right hand tightened its grip on the chair arm. Less than fifteen percent should have been smokers. His brain was psyching again. Most of the people here were young enough to have reached their teens after the big anti-smoking campaigns of the Seventies. Why would there be more smokers in Greenplace than in the almost identical neighborhood he had surveyed last month?

The fist dropped and the blow snapped his head back and then forward, past the blue sky, the working jaws, the lips sucking on cigarettes, the artificially voluptuous girl, the people edging toward the chair, the fat bodies—the boy had deliberately moved his hand so he would knock the ice cream out of it!—the lawns, the houses like big, soft, edible. . . .

Orals!

They were all orals! Everyone in Greenplace was an oral!

"Give it to him! Teach him! Teach him!

How could every person in a neighborhood this large belong to one psychological type? Could even Boyd's organization be that powerful? No wonder they had jumped him before he was a block in!

They were pulling him out of the chair. He could feel blood running down one side of his face. The hysterical beat

of the music came to him through a ringing ear. He couldn't waste time with theories. They were going to hurt him. Compared to what he was about to suffer, the pain he had just experienced was trivial.

He gave the man who was pulling him out of the chair a blast of the scrambler. Confusion and disorientation distorted the man's face. Screaming and flailing his arms he stumbled backward into the people pressing behind him.

Behind his back the sec made a strange sound. His mind was racing ahead at full speed. It had only been a few seconds since the second blow had hit his face.

His fingers wiggled on the buttons of the control panel. Formula Eighty-two. Only two digits. Each button had a different texture, a scheme he had worked out to help him use the generators while he was drugged. Two tiny points pricked his middle finger. Eight. He pushed.

He waved the scrambler in wide, sweeping arcs. It wouldn't hold them off forever but he only needed a few more seconds.

A rabbit punch sent pain shooting up his left arm. Hands grabbed his shoulders and shoved him forward and up. As he rose out of the chair, his forefinger slid across the smooth, hemispheric surface of the Two button.

He collided with the people standing in front of the chair and the crowd yelled with triumph. Their behavior was straight out of the textbooks.

A fist hit him in the stomach. He thrashed wildly and a hand grabbed his arm and spun him around. Pain made him close his eyes. Somebody kicked him in the ankle. He opened his eyes and through the brawling bodies he saw the sec fighting with a strange smile on his face.

The smell of human vomit filled the summer air.

All around him people gagged. The hands released him at once. He fell back and hit the ground waving his arms like a baby. He was gagging, too. The smell was enough to nauseate any normal human. On a crowd of orals the effect was terrifying proof of the fragility of the human personality. People pressed their hands against their faces and backed away from the chair with bent spines. A girl toppled over and

blacked out. A man old enough to be his father stumbled away from the smell and then tripped and lay on the grass gagging and yelling for help. The stench permeated the air and clung to the inside of the nostrils and the mouth. It penetrated to the center of the oral personality and evoked terrors which had hidden in the psyche since infancy. It was the pungent, smothering antithesis of everything the oral personality needed and desired. Retching, hysterical, pursued by an odor they would never forget, the crowd stampeded.

The sec reacted fast. Strong arms picked Nicholson up and dropped him into the chair. Wheels rumbled on the sidewalk. The girl jumped in front of them and then jumped back when the sec nearly ran her down. Even she looked sick.

Fleeing backs swung across his vision. To an experienced therapist the agony tearing through all those psyches was as avid as anything he had ever suffered with his own consciousness. No cautious modern psychologist would have explained personality types with Freud's theories of infant development, but it was still true there were patterns of behavior which fitted Freud's terminology. People who got most of their pleasure and their psychological security from eating usually released their aggression with their mouths and made love with their mouths more than with their hands; tended to read certain kinds of literature and watch certain kinds of television programs; and could be manipulated by symbols and appeals involving food and the mouth and the emotions associated with the full, distended belly. There were at least ten such personality types in current psychological theory—Freud had only described four, but the world had changed and Freud hadn't known four types never applied for psychoanalysis—and theoreticians believed, or at least hoped, every personality on Earth could be classed in one of them.

He should have seen it from the first, but it was too fantastic to occur to anyone until the evidence became overwhelming. Imagine the power of an organization which could arrange for every person in a neighborhood to be one

type! The Boyd organization had to be destroyed. This alone was enough to make him a fanatic.

The police vehicle tried to follow them but the sec took to the lawns and managed to evade it. In the process Nicholson did enough psyching to confirm his theory. That evening he called Bob Dazella in Washington and they both shook their heads over what he had learned.

"It must be great for them when they're campaigning," Dazella said. "Hundreds of voters, acres of territory, ten percent of Boyd's district, and they can manipulate every psyche in it with one tactic. I wonder how they set it up."

"Advertising's the best theory I've come up with. They could aim all their ads at orals. It still wouldn't be easy. Why don't you check around and see if Boyd ever had any kind of financial interest in Greenplace? Maybe he was in a position where he could control the ads for a few years."

"It's a good thing you worked it out. They could have killed you."

Dazella was a second term Congressman, an archaic political specimen these days. After he turned off the phone. Nicholson sat in his study and thought about the campaign three years ago which had first put Dazella in the House. That had been his first taste of modern politics. It hadn't been pleasant. That time Dazella had nearly gotten killed.

This campaign was going to be worse. He could imagine the efforts the Boyd organization would make to control the minds of himself and his friends. They would attack his psyche with every weapon in the modern arsenal. As plainly as if it were a drama projected on a screen, he could see the psych technicians maneuvering across the Eighth Congressional District as both sides struggled to control the voters's minds and neutralize the work of their opponents. He could see violence, and danger, and all the dirty playing with the human mind he resented and wanted to eliminate forever from human society.

He had won the first battle, but that only meant he had to stay in the war and fight a hundred more battles. He almost wished he had lost.

MEN OF GOOD WILL

BY BEN BOVA AND MYRON R. LEWIS

"I HAD NO idea," said the UN representative as they stepped through the airlock hatch, "that the United States lunar base was so big, and so thoroughly well equipped."

"It's a big operation, all right," Colonel Patton answered, grinning slightly. His professional satisfaction showed even behind the faceplate of his pressure suit.

The pressure in the airlock equalibrated, and they squirmed out of their aluminized protective suits. Patton was big, scraping the maximum limit for space-vehicle passengers, Torgeson, the UN man, was slight, thin-haired, bespectacled and somehow bland-looking.

They stepped out of the airlock, into the corridor that ran the length of the huge plastic dome that housed Headquarters, U. S. Moonbase.

"What's behind all the doors?" Torgeson asked. His English had a slight Scandinavian twang to it. Patton found it a little irritating.

"On the right," the colonel answered, businesslike, "are officers' quarters, galley, officers' mess, various laboratories and the headquarters staff offices. On the left are the computers."

Torgeson blinked. "You mean that half this building is taken up by computers? But why in the world . . . that is, why do you need so many? Isn't it frightfully expensive to boost them up here? I know it cost thousands of dollars for my own flight to the Moon. The computers must be—"

"Frightfully expensive," Patton agreed, with feeling. "But we need them. Believe me we need them."

They walked the rest of the way down the long corridor in silence. Patton's office was at the very end of it. The colonel opened the door and ushered in the UN representative.

"A sizeable office," Torgeson said. "And a window!"

"One of the privileges of rank," Patton answered, smiling tightly. "That white antenna mast off on the horizon belongs to the Russian base."

"Ah, yes. Of course. I shall be visiting them tomorrow."

Colonel Patton nodded and gestured Torgeson to a chair as he walked behind his metal desk and sat down.

"Now then," said the colonel. "You are the first man allowed to set foot in this Moonbase who is not a security-cleared, triple-checked, native-born, Government-employed American. God knows how you got the Pentagon to okay your trip. But—now that you're here, what do you want?"

Torgeson took off his rimless glasses and fiddled with them. "I suppose the simplest answer would be the best. The United Nations must—absolutely must—find out how and why you and the Russians have been able to live peacefully here on the Moon."

Patton's mouth opened, but no words came out. He closed it with a click.

"Americans and Russians," the UN man went on, "have fired at each other from orbiting satellite vehicles. They have exchanged shots at both the North and South Poles. Career diplomats have scuffled like prizefighters in the halls of the United Nations building . . ."

"I didn't know that."

"Oh, yes. We have kept it quiet, of course. But the tensions are becoming unbearable. Everywhere on Earth the two sides are armed to the teeth and on the verge of disaster. Even in space they fight. And yet, here on the Moon, you and the Russians live side by side in peace. We must know how you do it!"

Patton grinned. "You came on a very appropriate day, in that case. Well, let's see now . . . how to present the picture.

You know that the environment here is extremely hostile: airless, low gravity . . ."

"The environment here on the Moon," Torgeson objected, "is no more hostile than that of orbiting satellites. In fact, you have some gravity, solid ground, large buildings—many advantages that artificial satellites lack. Yet there has been fighting aboard the satellites—and not on the Moon. Please don't waste my time with platitudes. This trip is costing the UN too much money. Tell me the truth."

Patton nodded. "I was going to. I've checked the information sent up by Earthbase: you've been cleared by the White House, the AEC, NASA and even the Pentagon."

"So?"

"Okay. The plain truth of the matter is—" A soft chime from a small clock on Patton's desk interrupted him. "Oh. Excuse me."

Torgeson sat back and watched as Patton carefully began clearing off all the articles on his desk: the clock, calendar, phone, IN/OUT baskets, tobacco can and pipe rack, assorted papers and reports—all neatly and quickly placed in the desk drawers. Patton then stood up, walked to the filing cabinet, and closed the metal drawers firmly.

He stood in the middle of the room, scanned the scene with apparent satisfaction, and then glanced at his wristwatch.

"Okay," he said to Torgeson. "Get down on your stomach."

"What?"

"Like this," the colonel said, and prostrated himself on the rubberized floor.

Torgeson stared at him.

"Come on! There's only a few seconds."

Patton reached up and grasped the UN man by the wrist. Unbelievingly, Torgeson got out of the chair, dropped to his hands and knees and finally flattened himself on the floor, next to the colonel.

For a second or two they stared at each other, saying nothing.

"Colonel, this is embar—"

The room exploded into a shattering volley of sounds.

Something—many somethings—ripped through the walls. The air hissed and whined above the heads of the two prostrate men. The metal desk and file cabinet rang eerily.

Torgeson squeezed his eyes shut and tried to worm into the floor. It was just like being shot at!

Abruptly it was over.

The room was quiet once again, except for a faint hissing sound. Torgeson opened his eyes and saw the colonel getting up. The door was flung open. Three sergeants rushed in, armed with patching disks and tubes of cement. They dashed around the office sealing up the several hundred holes in the walls.

Only gradually, as the sergeants carried on their fevered, wordless task, did Torgeson realize that the walls were actually a quiltwork of patches. The room must have been riddled repeatedly!

He climbed slowly to his feet. "Meteors?" he asked, with a slight squeak in his voice.

Colonel Patton grunted negatively and resumed his seat behind the desk. It was pockmarked, Torgeson noticed now. So was the file cabinet.

"The window, in case you're wondering, is bulletproof."

Torgeson nodded and sat down.

"You see," the colonel said, "life is not as peaceful here as you think. Oh, we get along fine with the Russians—now. We've learned to live in peace. We had to."

"What were those . . . things?"

"Bullets."

"Bullets? But how—"

The sergeants finished their frenzied work, lined up at the door and saluted. Colonel Patton returned the salute and they turned as one man and left the office, closing the door quietly behind them.

"Colonel, I'm frankly bewildered."

"It's simple enough to understand. But don't feel too badly about being surprised. Only the top level of the Pentagon

knows about this. And the president, of course. They had to let him in on it."

"What happened?"

Colonel Patton took his pipe rack and tobacco can out of a desk drawer and began filling one of the pipes. "You see," he began, "the Russians and us, we weren't always so peaceful here on the Moon. We've had our incidents and scuffles, just as you have on Earth."

"Go on."

"Well—" he struck a match and puffed the pipe alight—"shortly after we set up this dome for Moonbase HQ, and the Reds set up theirs, we got into some real arguments." He waved the match out and tossed it into the open drawer.

"We're situated on the *Oceanus Procellarum*. you know. Exactly on the lunar equator. One of the biggest open spaces on this hunk of airless rock. Well, the Russians claimed they owned the whole damned *Oceanus*, since they were here first. We maintained the legal ownership was not established since according to the UN charter and the subsequent covenants—"

"Spare the legal details! Please, what happened?"

Patton looked slightly hurt. "Well . . . we started shooting at each other. One of their guards fired at one of our guards. They claim it was the other way round, of course. Anyway, within twenty minutes we were fighting a regular pitched battle, right out there between our base and theirs." He gestured toward the window.

"Can you fire guns in airless space?"

"Oh, sure. No problem at all. However, something unexpected came up."

"Oh?"

"Only a few men got hit in the battle, none of them seriously. As in all battles, most of the rounds fired were clean misses."

"So?"

Patton smiled grimly. "So one of our civilian mathematicians started doodling. We had several thousand very-high-velocity bullets fired off. In airless space. No friction, you see.

And under low-gravity conditions. They went right along past their targets—"

Recognition dawned on Torgeson's face. "Oh, no!"

"That's right. They whizzed right along, skimmed over the mountain tops, thanks to the curvature of this damned short lunar horizon, and established themselves in rather eccentric satellite orbits. Every hour or so they return to perigee . . . or, rather, periluna. And every twenty-seven days, periluna is right here, where the bullets originated. The Moon rotates on its axis every twenty-seven days, you see. At any rate, when they come back this way, they shoot the living hell out of our base—and the Russian base, too, of course."

"But can't you . . ."

"Do what? Can't move the base. Authorization is tied up in the Joint Chiefs of staff, and they can't agree on where to move it to. Can't bring up any special shielding material, because that's not authorized, either. The best thing we can do is to requisition all the computers we can and try to keep track of all the bullets. Their orbits keep changing, you know, every time they go through the bases. Air friction, puncturing walls, ricochets off the furniture . . . all that keeps changing their orbits enough to keep our computers busy full time."

"My God!"

"In the meantime, we don't dare fire off any more rounds. It would overburden the computers and we'd lose track of all of 'em. Then we'd have to spend every twenty-seventh day flat on our faces for hours."

Torgeson sat in numbed silence.

"But don't worry," Patton concluded with an optimistic, professional grin. "I've got a small detail of men secretly at work on the far side of the base—where the Reds can't see—building a stone wall. That'll stop the bullets. Then we'll fix those warmongers once and for all!"

Torgeson's face went slack. The chime sounded, muffled, from inside Patton's desk.

"Better get set to flatten out again. Here comes the second volley."

BILL FOR DELIVERY

BY CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

8/14/97

Dear Sam:

I agree about keeping in touch. Old pals should stick together, especially when they're both in the space transports.

Your letter, with quotes from your diary during *Starlight's* trip with the troublemaker, reached me after apparently being forwarded over half the known universe. I promptly slipped the message spool into the viewer, but I can tell you that I slipped it in with trembling fingers, owing to what I've been living through myself. I have to admit that what you went through was pretty awful. But I'll tell you, Sam, what I'm going through is worse yet.

Just as you're first officer on *Starlight,* I'm first officer on *Whizzeroo.* You will see from that name that our company isn't quite as dignified as the one you're working for, but never mind that. It could be worse. One of our sister ships is TSM *Clunker.* The way these names come about is, the Old Man looks at the records of this or that ship, and all of a sudden he gets red in the face, bangs on the desk, and yells, "Look at this lousy record sheet! They call this the *Star of Space,* hah? Why, they haven't met a schedule in the last ten trips! *Star of Space,* my foot! From now on they're *Muddlehead!*"

And that's that. Next trip to the loading center, out comes a crew to paint out *Star of Space* and paint in *Muddlehead.*

The Old Man judges strictly by results. If you have a streak

of bad luck, or even if the whole crew comes down with the green sandpox, through no fault of their own, that's still no excuse. All it wins you from the Old Man is:

"Don't give me your alibis! *Did* you keep the schedule or *didn't* you keep the schedule?"

The answer better be, "Well, yes, chief, *sure* we kept the schedule!"

"O.K. That's all I'm interested in."

You see what I mean. It makes it kind of rough if, through no fault of your own, the gravitator gives out before its triple-clad warranty period is up, or a jump-point slides out of congruity and hangs the ship up in the middle of nowhere for a month. It doesn't matter if you don't have any more control over the trouble than you have over the speed of light. The only thing that counts is, *"Did you keep the schedule?"*

I think you get the picture, Sam. This just isn't an outfit where they study the crew's brain waves after every trip, or send along psychologists, nurses, and free candy bars to keep us happy.

Now as for this trouble I'm in. I think I ought to tell you that the way the Old Man operates is kind of old-fashioned, from some points of view. Now, don't think I'm saying that it's ridiculous. A forty-five automatic is pretty old-fashioned, but when the big lead slugs start coming out, I'll tell you, there's nothing ridiculous about it. That's what you've got to bear in mind when I tell you about this.

One way the Old Man is kind of old-fashioned is the way he operates when somebody doublecrosses him. There was a third officer a while back that false-boosted a cargo of first-grade Stiger hides, jumped ship at the next loading center, and collected a neat eighty-thousand profit for the hides and the cargo-section. This bird invested thirty thousand in laying such a long crooked trail that it would cost a mint to track him down and catch him.

Now, the modern, up-to-date spacefreight executive will not let emotion cloud his reasoning, but will feed this problem to his computer, and will come up with the best answer from a strictly profit-and-loss standpoint.

And what did the Old Man do?

Well, they tell me the first thing he did was to rise up behind his desk, spin his chair over his head, and slam it into the wall thirty feet across the room.

"I'll get that crook if it kills me."

Now, as to exactly what happened next, I don't know. I wasn't there. But the bird that stole the hides turned up ten months later orbiting a planet in a space yacht, stone dead with an iron bar wrapped around his neck.

Now, it's a very old-fashioned thing—it's "positively infantile behavior"—to go out and nail the bird that's robbed you, especially when he's laid such a crooked trail that it compounds the loss to locate him and give it to him right between the eyes.

It's old-fashioned. But I'll tell you, Sam, it really discourages the next crook that gets a bright idea.

Doublecrossing the boss is rough business in this outfit. Honest but stupid mistakes can be almost as bad. There was, for instance, a cargo-control man on one of our ships—it's named the *Moron's Delight* now—who made three blunders in a row, on the same trip.

First, he missed cold-mold spots on a cargo of hardshell beans. The mold ate into the beans, generated heat and moisture, the beans sprouted, and the cargo-section arrived at the pick-up station split wide open with green slop drifting out.

Next, he O.K.'d a pressure-plate-type elevator-section filled with a cargo of grain that had cutbug eggs in it. The eggs hatched into maggots, which, eating steadily, grew into armored slugs, and then looked around for some rock to drill into for the next step in their life-cycles. The nearest thing was the wall of the elevator-section, which, as a result, arrived at the pick-up station holed like a sieve, with the grain drifting in a giant cloud around it.

You might think this was enough disaster for anybody, but this cargo-control man was exceptional.

The next cargo was a complete self-contained automatic factory, built for an ore-rich planet with conditions too tough for human comfort. You know how these self-contained fac-

tories work. Roughly, one part has diggers, crushers, grinders, and conveyers; another section has separators and furnaces, and the chemical-treatment centers where objectionable impurities are got out, and alloying elements put in; further on there's Special Processing, followed by Manufacturing, where the finished product is made. Another section houses the hydreactor, dynamos, and energy-balance equipment, while yet another has the automatic control center. Outside, there are arrangements to move slowly from place to place, as the factory eats up the ore supply.

There's one more device, that receives the signal by which the factory is controlled from a distance. If you want it to make one thing, you send one signal. If you want it to make something else, you send another signal. The exact nature of these signals is a deep, dark secret, with the control apparatus put together in sections, one contractor knowing one part of the plan, one another, and so on.

But there's a funny thing about these self-contained factories. On recent orders for checking cargo, the cargo-control man is instructed as follows:

WARNING: THIS AUTFAC–62A IS PROTECTED AGAINST SCALE BY SPECIAL CHEMICAL COATING PROCESS. DO *NOT* USE ELECTRONIC PROBE TO TEST FOR SCALE.

The "NOT" in this warning is put in red and underlined three times.

Now, in the first place, no one can buy any chemical coating that will stop scale organisms, despite the terrific demand. Anyone with such a process could make a mint. Therefore, why keep it secret?

And in the second place, why be so desperate to keep the cargo-control man from using his electronic probes? How could they hurt a *chemical coating?*

You see what I mean. There's a screwy aspect to the warning. But there must be *some* reason for it.

Now, what do you suppose this cargo-control man did when he saw the warning.

Right.

He read it over three or four times, growled, "They're nuts," and went ahead and used probes *anyway*. I had this direct from the first officer of the *Moron's Delight* while we were in an entertainment palace on a frontier planet called Snakehell.

The *Moron's Delight*, by the way, makes the run from Snakehell *out*. Personally, this was the first time I ever knew there was anything out beyond that place. But apparently the Old Man found some excuse to open up an outbound run.

Now, as you know, these automatic factories come in different sizes. The biggest come in pieces, with teams of specialists to cluck over them all the way out.

But the particular factory entrusted to *Moron's Delight*—which was named *Recordbreaker* before this happened—was the small model. This is about a hundred feet long by eighty wide in the middle, and has roughly the look, from overhead, of an Earth-type horseshoe crab.

To protect it from damage, the factory has to be put in a cargo section, and the contract specifies a particular kind, specially shaped and padded, and made of thick high-quality alloy steel.

Any spaceman can see that this super-duper cargo-section uses a lot more steel, and everything else, than it needs. But, of course, it was the automatic-factory company's engineers who made up the specifications, and what they know about designing cargo sections could be written on the head of a pin. Still, there's no getting out of using the things, since they're specified in the contract.

Now, to get back to the cargo-control man on *Moron's Delight*. Having checked the way the factory was bedded into its gigantic flexwood rests, and having examined all the springs, pneumatic pads, layers of plastic webwork and everything else on his checklist, he duly came to the warning NOT to use his electronic probes, and used them anyway. He didn't find anything wrong, put his O.K. on the necessary papers, and the cargo section was boosted to the cut-loose point. Then the ship started back.

When the deluxe cargo section reached a certain position, it would make a subspace jump. The detectors showed that it did that, so of course it seemed that there was nothing to worry about.

The only trouble was, the cargo-section went on through subspace and *never came out on the other end.*

It's not hard to guess what went wrong.

When this cargo-control man ignored the warning and used his probes on that factory, he was begging for trouble.

Obviously, the wizards who made the factory wouldn't be so illogical without *some* reason. Since they didn't want the electronic probes used near the factory, it must be that the probes would somehow interfere with it. Since the reason they gave wouldn't hold water, there must have been some *other* reason.

Now, just what part of this self-contained factory could the signals from the probe affect? Certainly they wouldn't hurt the digging or initial-processing equipment. But what if, after going through all the elaborate precautions for secrecy, it just happened to turn out that the signals from the probes could activate the supersecret remote-control unit—*by pure accident.*

Sure, they'd make changes. But until then, how to safely ship the almost-finished factories for rush orders they had on hand?

That must have been the reason for the gibberish about the new chemical coating. A cargo-control man with any kind of nose for trouble would read that warning, and you couldn't pay him to put a probe in there.

But, as you remember, this particular cargo-control man did it anyway.

Naturally, life being as it is, he activated the remote-control unit. That started up the factory.

Now, the factory was designed to mine iron ore, and, using its own special process, turn it into iron and steel goods. Well, the whole hundred-foot length of the factory was packed in an alloy steel container. The diggers, crushers, grinders were designed to handle any ordinary ore, but you can see that an

ore of the hardness of this alloy-steel container would pose something of a problem for the factory.

Also, the factory was designed to move under its own power to the nearest ore. But in this case the ore—the alloy-steel cargo section—could be detected in all directions, completely surrounding the factory.

Apparently it took time for the factory's computers to work these problems out. So everything seemed peaceful and quiet when the factory and cargo section disappeared into subspace.

But not too long after that, the factory apparently worked out the difficulties, slid out some newly-fabricated, specially-tipped drills and magnets, and settled down to business.

When time came for the cargo section to go back into normal space, there wasn't enough left to do the job. It had been eaten up by the factory.

When the alarm on this missing automatic factory came in, naturally nobody had any idea *what* had happened. But it looked like someone had worked out a way to highjack a cargo part way through subspace.

Right away, the Space Force got worried about the possibilities, and put out an All-Sectors alert.

No doubt you heard about that alert, at the time. But you remember, they called it off, and they never did explain what happened.

Naturally. They were too embarrassed.

They did find the factory, surrounded by a vast number of little metal objects of two kinds. One was a short hollow cylinder closed at one end and slightly flared at the other, about the size of a large inkwell, and with a tiny bouquet-of-roses design on one side. The other objects were little, slightly-arched disks, with a small handle on top of each one. There were literally millions of these things, each one made out of very thin cast-iron.

The Space Force, operating under an All-Sectors alert, was keyed up to the limit to begin with, and at first didn't know what to expect from all these objects. After they got over that, there was the problem of getting the factory into another

cargo section, when all the factory was interested in was eating up the cargo section and turning out more millions and millions of these little disks and cylinders. One thing led to another, and since it all took place in subspace, everyone was pretty frazzled by the time they got the factory *out* again, along with some millions of its products.

Meanwhile, anyone with the leisure to stop and think was trying to figure out the function of these small cast-iron cylinders. The disks fitted neatly right on top of them, but what was their purpose?

You can imagine their frame of mind when it dawned on them that this miracle of modern-science had succeeded in converting an expensive alloy-steel cargo section into a host of worthless undersize cast-iron chamber pots. Worse yet, they couldn't turn the factory off, because the supersecret control-signal generator had been shipped out by a different route, using a competing carrier. And when the special factory representative did arrive, it developed that the factory, in solving the conflicting orders put into it by the accidental signals from the probes, and then in carrying out the mismatched orders by reducing high-quality steel to cast iron, had acquired a "hardnose psychosis," and become "perverse and unco-operative."

In short, the expert couldn't shut it off. Instead, the factory got hold of his control-signal generator and made fifteen or twenty little chamber pots out of it, and he was afraid to go back in there for fear it would try the same thing on him.

You can see, Sam, it was a wild life while it lasted.

Now, the upshot of this, so far as everybody working for the company was concerned, was the renaming of the ex-*Recordbreaker*, its dispatch out beyond Snakehell, the sudden disappearance of the cargo-control man, and a ten per cent cut of all pay clean across the board, including the Old Man's salary, so the company could pay off that cargo section the automatic factory ate up. There was also a big uproar about the psychotic condition the factory had got into, and threats of lawsuit, but the Old Man got it across to the manufacturer just what lousy publicity could come out of this. So

everything is now settled except paying for the cargo section.

What I'm trying to get across, Sam, is just how fast you can get flattened if anything goes wrong, and also I want you to get a good clear picture of the trouble-potential of this cargo-control man who disappeared after *Recordbreaker* was renamed *Moron's Delight.* If there was ever anyone who served as a regular magnet for bad luck, he seems to be the one. Of course, he came to us with a wonderful recommendation from Interstellar Rapid Transport, but they're a competitor, if you get what I'm driving at.

Now, Sam, as for my own little difficulties. As I told you, that mess you ran into with the troublemaker was pretty rough, but it looks like a vacation compared to what I've got on my hands.

I think I've told you enough so you'll understand when I say the Old Man has a special way of reacting when anything gets him in a corner. If you think he refers to a computer for the optimum way to maximize profits and minimize losses, I haven't got the picture across. What he does is to cut rates, and speed up schedules, and grab every piece of business he can lay his hands on, practically no-questions-asked.

Ordinarily, we're a little careful about what we contract to deliver. As you know, there's always some zoo eager for a prime specimen of two-hundred-foot live *kangbar,* or some research institute that's just dying to crack the secret of those radioactive cysts that turned up after the big explosion on Cyrene IV. The job the Old Man contracted for wasn't quite as open-and-shut as these two. On the surface, it looked like a borderline case. You'd never touch it if you didn't need the money. But to look at it you'd think you *might* get out of it in one piece. Unfortunately, when this contract came through, our ship—*Wizzeroo*—happened to be between jobs and in a good spot to take it on.

The first I knew of this, "Hook" Fuller, second officer of *Whizzeroo,* walked in and shoved a sheet of message paper under my nose. I looked at it and read:

AM TAKING ORDER FOR DELIVERY FIFTY LIVE BANJO-BIRDS TO HUMAN RESOURCES RESEARCH

CENTER ON ULTIMA STP DETAILS FOLLOW STP I AM COUNTING ON WHIZZEROO STP DON'T LET ME DOWN

The Old Man's name was right there at the end of it.

"Fifty live banjo-birds," I said. "What's a banjo-bird?"

Hook may not be grammatical, but he knows his job and he's tough enough to last in this business.

"Damn if I know," he said, scowling. "But it don't sound so good to me. I been trying to talk the captain into shorting out the gravitors and begging out of it, but the captain's afraid the Old Man might find out."

Pete Synder, the third officer, spoke up hopefully.

"Maybe we could break off the end of the locking hook. It's already worn down pretty bad. Then they'd have to send us back for a refit and *Spitoon* would get the job."

"That's no good," said Hook, "because this Human Resources outfit is sending their own special cargo section, and it don't hook on. You tow it with cables and spacer bars."

For the next half hour, Hook, Pete, and I sweat over the problem of getting out of this assignment. But we just couldn't find any way out, and in due time we ended up off a pioneer planet that the atlas called "Rastor III" and that the pioneers called "Poverty." The special cargo section was alredy there, and we seemed to be stuck with the job.

As a last resort, Hook, the captain, and I put it to Barton, our cargo-control man.

"Listen," said the captain, "I'm not eager for this job. There's half-a-dozen subspace jumps between here and cutloose, and one of these jumps winds us up on some new route out beyond Snakehell. We're taking these jumps with a spar-and-cable outfit, we've got to play nursemaid to fifty good-sized birds for the whole trip, and it isn't enough that we certify them now at the start, but they've got to be certified all over again before every jump. We can't just walk down the corridor to take care of them, either, because the cargo section doesn't hook in close. It's just cabled up. Worse yet, the spars are so long the corridor extension won't reach. There's

no way to get from the ship to the cargo section without suiting up. Frankly, Barton, this job stinks. Can't you find *something* wrong with the cargo section?"

"Sir," said Barton, "I've turned myself inside out hunting for something wrong with that cargo section. That's the best set-up cargo section I've seen in some years."

"How about scale?"

"No scale in it, and this trip wouldn't be critical anyway."

"Why not?"

"It's the birds we want to get back. Scale won't hurt the birds. Besides, there's no scale there."

"What about all that freak equipment to keep the birds unconscious? Any flaws in that?"

"Not that I can find. All that stuff is warranted anyway."

"That won't keep it from failing."

"No, but it means we can collect if it does fail. Besides, I can't find anything wrong with it. There's only one thing I can think of."

"What's that?"

"If the cargo section's jump equipment is out of phase with ours, we could refuse to use it."

"No soap. We already checked that."

"Then we're stuck with the job."

Hook and I argued with him, the captain threw his weight behind us, but Barton wouldn't budge.

The next thing we knew, we were ferrying up banjo-birds and loading them into the cargo section, where each bird was supposed to get strapped into his own individual couch, and have an anesthetic tube clapped over his nostrils. This is easy to say, but when you consider that each of these birds stands about three-feet eight-inches high, weighs around sixty pounds, has a set of short powerful wings armed with hooks, has spurs ten inches long on the back of each leg—not to mention the claws—you will see that we had quite a lot of fun getting these things to lie down and breathe the anesthetic. And I haven't even mentioned the best part of this bird yet. That is the bill. You would expect birds built on these lines to have short curved heavy beaks. But not these things.

They have a straight slender bill around two feet long, and as sharp on the end as a needle. Since the male birds use the bill like a rapier, it's quite an experience to handle one of them. I almost forgot to mention the male birds' yellow down —if that's what to call it—which is made of innumerable tiny barbs which dig in, break off, work into your skin, and fester.

Thanks to the colonists, who had each bird tied up in a leather bag with its feet strapped together, head sticking out, and a strap on its beak, we were able to load the things into the tender and get them up and into the cargo section. Unfortunately, there was no way to get them strapped onto their individual couches without taking them out of the leather bags. Once we did that, their wings were free. Then the fun started.

I know, you can say, "Why didn't we anesthetize them first?" Well, the anesthetic was intended to keep them under, in a kind of light doze, for the better part of the trip. It was mild, slow-acting stuff, and didn't work unless you could keep the birds' nostrils up tight against the hose for about five minutes. But you had to strap them in to keep their heads still, and to do that, you first had to get them out of the bags. That freed their wings.

Now, the first thing a bird did when his wings were free was to use them to rip the strap off his beak. Now he could stab in a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree arc with that beak.

When he stabs something with it, he puts all his force directly behind the point. The bill will then go through a regulation spacesuit, through a man's thigh inside the spacesuit, and stick out the other side, as we discovered from experience.

The only restraint on the bird was the knotted thong holding his legs together. He wasn't strong enough to break the thong, and his bill wasn't made for ripping and tearing. All the same, he was able to hop around after a fashion, and under the light artificial gravity this was bad enough.

Well, you can guess what happened. One thing led to another, and several of the men, jumping back to get out of the

way, lost their grip on the leather bags and let more birds loose.

Pretty fast we found out that the birds fight with the bills, not with just us, but each other. The males start up a kind of fencing match, strutting and thrusting, and the females give a *chirr* noise, and sneak kicks at any other females in reach.

Of course, we had this contract, so we had to keep the birds from killing each other. But we had a little handicap we'd never dreamed of.

What seems to set the males off is the yellow down or feathers of the other males. The females, we discovered, have a duller, sand-colored down. Unfortunately, our spacesuits, for visibility, are bright yellow. We had put on our spacesuits to make it safer handling these birds. It didn't work.

As I can think of no words to do justice to the scene in that cargo section, Sam, I'll just have to say that the birds had everything their own way for the first half hour or so.

Then one of us stopped running, jumping, and parrying beak-thrusts long enough to realize that that habit of stabbing at anything yellow could come in handy.

The end of the next hour found us looking down on a good dozen of these birds with their bills stuck fast in a yellow-painted two-by-four that we found amongst the dunnage. They were pretty subdued birds, I'll tell you. But now it occurred to us that the birds *still* weren't where we had to put them. And first we had to somehow get their beaks *out* of the two-by-four.

This turned out to be a long, delicate process of tapping the two-by-four with hammers, and once we had it done, we couldn't get anywhere till we painted the spacesuits the exact sand color of the females' down. This put the male birds in a pleasant enough humor so we could strap them down. But handling the female birds, we had to either paint the suits yellow again, or else get kicked senseless at the first opportunity. The female birds don't seem to use their beaks to fight with but they have big clublike spurs, and they don't hesitate to use them.

By the time we got everything done, we were a sorry-looking crew, covered with stab-wounds, bruises, sweat, brown and yellow paint, and raised red splotches where the downy hooks had sunk in.

Our medic was afraid the stab wounds might get infected, and since his method of insuring against that was to thrust an iodine swab in to the full depth of the stab, you can see that our misery wasn't over when the birds got through.

I have felt almost that bad at the end of some trips, Sam, but never before at the *beginning*.

"Well," said the captain, flat on his back in a pool of sweat, with the medic just putting his equipment back in his carrying case, "that takes care of 'A.' I'll tell you boys, if 'B,C,D,' and 'E' in this job are like 'A' was, I'll turn in my commission and retire."

We took that, of course, for just so much blowing off steam, but he had a point all right.

Hook gingerly felt a purplish bruise at the calf of his leg. "I think we're over the hump. After all, we've got 'em tied down now."

"I *hate* live cargo," growled the captain, as if he didn't hear. "I particularly hate working for a zoo, a museum, or a research center."

"Why so?" I asked, and he pointed to a copy of the contract lying atop his locker.

"Hand that thing down and I'll show you. I didn't want to show you till we got past this point."

He opened up the contract, searched through it, and read aloud:

"The aforesaid authorized carrier does hereby warrant and agree, in addition, to release from confinement and individually feed and exercise, once each standard Terran forty-eight-hour period, each and every one of the aforesaid units of live cargo, as defined above. The feed and exercise period will be not *less* than forty standard Terran minutes, and not *more* than eighty standard Terran minutes."

Hook clapped his hand to his head, and I sagged against the bulkhead.

"There's fifty of them," said the captain. "If we exercise each of them every forty-eight hours, and do it for forty minutes apiece, that means we're going to be working at it all the time, since it's going to take time to wake them up, and it's going to take time to strap them in afterwards."

"Why," said Hook, looking dizzy, "can't we just forget that part of the contract?"

"Because," growled the captain, "then the birds will die, the contract will fall through, and the Old Man will flatten us."

Well, there was nothing to do but go ahead with it, but before this trip was half up, I, for one, found myself wondering which was worse, the Old Man, or the birds.

For one thing, there were just too many of them. It took about an hour minimum from start to finish to unstrap, wake-up, feed, exercise, and reanesthetize, each one of these birds. If there had been fifteen or twenty of them, maybe one or two men could have handled the job, but there were fifty. Then, this one-hour period assumes that nothing went wrong. That was the exception. Nine times out of ten the bird took a crack at a sleeping bird, or it rammed its beak into the man taking care of it, or it bounded up and slugged either him or some bird lying on its back, with both feet.

It wasn't long before we were all either laid up, or else just getting over it. If the birds had gotten weaker or more tractable as time went on, maybe we could have stood it. Instead, contrary to what anyone would think, they just got more cranky and hard to manage. They were wearing us out a lot faster than we were wearing them out.

And, because of the stringent penalities in the contract, we mustn't let any one of the precious beasts be seriously injured.

The reason for the whole trip, according to the captain's information, was that the colonists on the planet, who naturally tried every kind of food they could lay their hands on, had found that the liver of this bird, eaten cooked or raw, created a tremendous sense of well-being, backed up by every outward evidence of health. After about a week, this faded out, leaving whoever had eaten it very sleepy. Aside

from the need for twelve to fourteen hours sleep for the next two or three nights, no harmful side-effects resulted, and the treatment could be repeated, again with no visible harm from it. The Human Resources Research Center naturally wanted to find out about this. The obvious way to go about it would have been to cut out and freeze the livers of the birds, and ship *them* for analysis. But the scientists at the Research Center on Ultima had apparently discovered it was easier to get a great big grant for a great big project than to get a little modest grant for a little modest project, so they were going at it in a big way.

That was great for them, but it was ruining us.

Along in the fifth leg, when we were ready to make our next-to-last subspace jump, and Barton, the cargo-control man, had just finished his check, a male bird that was being exercised went past Barton, and spotted the yellow underside of the flap of the open pocket that Barton kept his notebook in. The bird whipped his needle-sharp bill around and rammed it through the flap.

The bill passed through the upper part of Barton's abdomen on the left side, angled slightly upward and came out the back on the right side. Barton collapsed.

The crewman exercising the bird wanted to wring its neck, but no, of course, he couldn't do that, or he'd bring a huge penalty down on our heads.

The medic said there was nothing he could do except ease Barton's pain. The only way to save him was to get him to a hospital. We called a nearby colony planet, and learned that it was an idyllic place to live, but it had no hospital. A Space Force dreadnaught answered our emergency call, and said they had facilities to handle the case. An intent Medical Corps colonel made an examination, and said Barton would recover, but would need plenty of rest and special treatment. The last we saw of Barton was his smiling face above the sheet on a stretcher as he was carried out through the air lock.

Naturally, we were thankful for Barton's sake. But this left us with no cargo-control man.

And under the terms of the contract, a duly-accredited cargo-control man had to check the cargo and certify it before each and every subspace jump, or a massive penalty would be levied, wiping out the profit of the trip.

This seemed bad enough, but this was just the start. Next, the captain announced that he had completed his thirty years' service three days ago, and, taking advantage of the retiring captain's privilege, he directed me to set him down, with a list of stores, on that idyllic colony planet we'd turned to for help. We tried every argument we could think of to get him to change his mind, but he said, "No, boys, I'm retiring as captain of the *Whizzeroo*. Damned if I intend to stay on, and then retire as captain of the *Flying Junkheap, Pack of Boobs,* or *Cretinous Jackass.*"

Well, we could see his point all right, and after arguing till we were blue in the face, we finally had no choice but to let him go.

This, of course, made me acting captain. Hook acting first-officer, and so on. But this was the kind of ship—like one on a collision course with a sun—where a raise in rank didn't bring quite the zestful feeling that it ought to.

Since Barton had checked the cargo and certified it, we could now make exactly one more jump. We had to make two to fulfill the contract.

Hook said earnestly, "I wish *I* had thirty years' service behind me."

I nodded glumly. "I know what you mean."

"What do we do now?"

"The only thing I can think of is to send a priority emergency message asking the Old Man for help."

Hook snorted. "What can *he* do? Besides blame us for the whole mess?"

"Cargo-control men retire just like anyone else. But their certificates are still good. If the Old Man can pull enough strings, he may be able to get the Colonization Council, or maybe the Colonists' Protective Association, to run through

their recorded files on nearby planets, for a retired cargo-control man."

With no real hope, we settled down to wait for a reply, and kept busy feeding and exercising the birds. The birds kept getting shorter-tempered and nastier and since we had gotten fairly skillful at warding off kicks and stabs from them, they now developed the habit of hitting us with the undersides of their wings. This doesn't sound bad, but the wings are about the only part of these birds that have actual feathers. And along the outer edge of the underside of the wings are several rows of quills that didn't develop into feathers, but end in barbed points. These aren't the hooks I mentioned earlier; these are in addition to the hooks.

By this time, we were all wearing some kind of armor under our spacesuits, and were worrying for fear the birds might break their bills on the armor and thus become "imperfect specimens" which would incur another of the contract's penalties. Added to all our other worries, this business with the wings almost brought us to the breaking point.

Now, however, to our astonishment, we got the following message from the Old Man:

CARGO CONTROL MAN RECENTLY RETIRED LOCATED ON HELL STP THAT IS COLONISTS NAME FOR THE PLANET STP YOU WILL FIND IT IN THE ATLAS UNDER CASADILLA II STP NO DETOUR NECESSARY AS THIS IS JUST BEYOND YOUR NEXT-TO-LAST JUMP STP GET THERE FAST AND OFFER BONUS KIDNAP HIM OR DO WHATEVER YOU HAVE TO STP ANY COLONIST SHOULD BE HAPPY TO GET OFF A PLANET WITH THE CLIMATE THAT ONE HAS STP COLONIST REPORTED TO HAVE SETTLED IN PLANETS ONLY CITY WHICH HAS FIVE HUNDRED INHABITANTS PLUS A SPACE COMMAND COMBAT-TRAINING HQ STP NAME OF CITY IS SALT SWEAT STP CARGO MANS NAME IS JONES STP GO GET HIM AND DONT WASTE ANY MORE TIME

We read this over several times, then headed for the planet.

The subspace jump was smooth, and we had no trouble of any kind. The Space Force center on the planet co-operated with us, located Jones, Jones was eager to get off the planet, and agreed to end his retirement at once and ship with us at standard wages.

We were dizzy with our good luck, but somewhere a warning bell was going off. It couldn't be *this* easy.

When this cargo-control man came on board, with hang-dog expression and unwilling to look us in the eyes, we had our first nasty suspicion. The fellow had a kind of sloppy quickness, as if he drifted into trouble through lack of method, then tried to get out by snap decisions. He'd answer without thinking, and several times shot out lightning replies without waiting for the whole question. I guess this was supposed to show brilliance, but since he didn't guess the right questions, the effect sort of fell flat.

When we'd got him out of the control room, Hook looked through his record folder and swore.

"This is the same bird that did it to *Moron's Delight.* After that, the Old Man gave him the highest recommendation, and he transferred to Comet Spacelanes."

Pete Snyder straightened up.

"I wondered what hit them! Remember that double wreck and explosion?"

"Yeah," said Hook.

"Then what?" I said nervously.

"Well, they juggled him around from ship to ship, and then they gave him highest recommendations and he hired out to Outbeyond Nonscheduled Freight. He lasted one trip with them and it says here that he voluntarily chose to retire when the ship reached Casadilla II."

"Voluntarily chose to retire?"

"That's what it says here."

I'd never heard that one before. I said. "Funny the Old Man didn't do that to him."

"The Old Man had it in for Comet. This fellow damned near wrecked Comet."

"And now," I said, "we've got him."

"Yeah. *We've got him.*"

Like I said at the beginning of this letter, Sam, that mess you had with the troublemaker was rough, but this mess is worse yet.

As I see it, I've got exactly four choices:

1) Watch this cargo-control man day and night, and go the rest of the trip on schedule. But when you've got somebody like this aboard, things go wrong that you never dreamed of.

2) Dump him back on Casadilla II before he has time to wreck anything, and go ahead with no cargo-control man. This will cost us a huge penalty, and the Old Man will tear us to shreds.

3) Break my own contract, forfeit pay for this trip, and settle on Casadilla II. What this involves is pretty clear from the name the colonists have given the planet.

4) Turn pirate.

I don't know what you would do, Sam, but after careful thought I've decided to put this fellow under heavy guard, lock him up till we're ready to make the next jump, bring him out just long enough to let him make his inspection and put his signature on the certificate, and then lock him up again. It doesn't seem like he ought to be able to do too much damage, that way.

After this last jump, we cut the cargo section loose and another line will pick it up and take it the rest of the way to Ultima. We'll be coming back this way, so when we get back here, we'll let our friend "voluntarily choose to retire" all over again, and then we'll head back for a refit. We need a refit.

Now, Sam, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to leave this letter here, with instructions to hold it unless something happens to *Whizzeroo,* or unless we just disappear and don't show up for a long time. If that happens, they're to forward it to you.

But if we get back all right, I'll go right on from here and let you know just what happened. So you'll know from whether there's any more to this letter whether we got through

in one piece, or another one of those fantastic accidents hit us.

I don't think this cargo-control man ought to be able to hurt us too much, if we watch him day and night.

But you never know.

Like I say Sam, this here is a real mess.

As ever,
Al

FOUR BRANDS OF IMPOSSIBLE

BY NORMAN KAGAN

"THAT CONCLUDES the Travis-Waldinger Theorem," said Professor Greenfield. "As you can see, it's really quite trivial."

"Then why did it take people to prove it!" piped up one teenage hotshot.

The bell cut off Greenfield's reply, and most of the class bolted. All the mathematics people at my school are bad—Greenfield the geometrer was a mild case. His motto was: "If you can visualize it, it isn't geometry!" Which is not so bad compared to my other course, where rule one was: "If it seems to make sense, then it's not mathematical logic!"

Which reminded me I still had to find out about my grade in that subject, along with about aleph-sub-aleph other things—most important of which was securing a nice fat student-trainee job for the summer that was fast approaching. I elbowed my way past a couple of teenage hotshots, and then I was in the open air.

I decided I'd check out my marks later—the IBMed grades would be posted on the "wailing wall" all summer. Right now I'd leg it over to the Multiversity Placement Service. I could study for Greenfield's final this afternoon.

I walked across the campus slowly, checking myself out. "Do not judge according to appearance." Try telling that to some of these megabuck research corporations! I mussed my hair and put three more pencils in my breast pocket, and de-

cided not to wear my glasses at the interview. It's amazing how much easier it is to lie to someone you can't really see.

"Hey, Zirkle—Perry—wait half a me'!"

Harry Mandel hailed me from the psychology library. I grinned and waited for him to join me.

Harry is a swell guy, and besides he's a psychology major, not a math competitor. He joined me, puffing, a moment later. "Summer job hunting?"

"Yeah. I've got a couple of interviews arranged, Serendipity, Inc., and the Virgin Research Corporation."

"Me, too," said Harry. He gestured at my tousled hair. "Getting ready? Physical appearance is very important, you know." The short, pudgy psychology major pumped his legs to keep up with me.

It was a warm, comfortable day on the Multiversity campus. The long rows of wooden chairs were already set up for graduation, and here and there was a girl in long hair and levis, or a bearded boy with a guitar. Early summer session people. Lazy jerks.

"What's the word on the companies?"

Mandel wrinkled up his forehead. "Personnel men—not technicial people. So if you've got the grades, go all out—anything to avoid the paper barrier."

"Any specific suggestions?"

"Mmmm—well, Fester pulled a full-scale epileptic fit—but then he's nearly a five point. If you're just bright, a few eccentricities ought to do it. I'm trying my bug-on-the-walls gambit."

"You mean the one where you pretend there's a bug that crawls all over the walls behind the interviewer, and you follow it with your eyes."

"No—that was last year. In this one I sort of scrunch up in the chair, cowering—give 'em the impression I can't stand confined spaces, need lots of room—like, say, New Mexico or Arizona. I'm sick of this east coast weather, and the Virgin Research Corporation has labs in New Mexico."

"That's for me, too. I'll see what I can think up."

In the 1980's, it's practically impossible to get a summer

job in the sciences—not that the big science and engineering corporations don't want you, they do. But to apply, you've got to submit about a ton of paperwork—eight commendations, four transcripts, character references, handwriting samples, personality profiles, certificates and forms and diplomas. Who has the energy?

Science and engineering majors, however, have worked out a swell dodge—we just pretend we're a little nuts. The big company personnel departments are endlessly amused by the antics of their nutty research wizards. With the squeeze on for technical people, it's easy to fake looniness well enough for the personnel men to see that cause follows from effect, in that wonderful way of their's, and conclude we're the brilliant boys they're looking for.

Or maybe they just get a kick out of watching us degrade ourselves in front of them.

I had a couple of swell dodges I'd worked out from one of my professors—through the length of the interview I'd keep pulling a piece of chalk from my pocket, sticking it into my mouth, then spitting it out and muttering; "Simply must give up smoking!" For dubious types, I'd offer my *piece de resistance;* all through the talk I would gesture and wave my arms, seeming to shape the very job concept out of the air. Then, when the interview had reached a critical juncture, I'd pause, drop to the floor, and lie on my back staring at the empty spaces I'd been manipulating. As the interviewer came round the desk, I'd cry out in annoyance; "Simply must look at this from a new point of view!" It worked like a charm.

Except for this time. Not that it didn't; I just never got the chance to use it. On this job, all the craziness came at the end.

The interviewer for the Virgin Research Corporation was a big blond crewcut man with terribly stained teeth and a sadist's smile. He reminded me of one of my philosophy professors. He was talking philo at me too, about half a second after I sat down in the little interview cubicle.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Zirkle—you're a mathematics major, by your application. Is that right?"

I nodded.

"Sit down, sit down," he said, gesturing. "Now, before I begin to ask about you, I'd like to tell you a little about the activities of the Virgin Research Corporation, Mama, as we call her around the shop. Our organization is concerned with the three aspects of pure research, what we like to call 'The Three Brands of Impossible.' "

I nodded at this. Harry Mandel's eyes had been shining when he'd passed me outside the room, but he hadn't time to whisper more than a fiery; "Grab it, fellow!" to me before I was ushered in. I hunched forward and began to listen.

"If we ignore subjective problems—what the Kansas farmer said when he saw his first kangeroo—we might analyze the concept of the impossible as follows—"

He pulled out a diagram, and his finger danced down it as he continued to speak.

"First, there is the 'technically impossible'—things that are not possible in practice, though there's no real reason why they can't be done. Things like putting the toothpaste back in the toothpaste tube, or sending an astronaut to Saturn—such things aren't practical at the moment, I think," he said, smiling briefly.

"Then there is the notion of the 'scientifically impossible'—traveling faster than light, or building a perpetual motion machine. These are not possible at all—within the limitations of what we know about the universe. But you'll recall, a heavier-than air-flying machine was a 'scientific impossibility' a century ago.

"These two categories have merged somewhat in the twentieth century, though the distinction is clear enough. In the first case, the 'technically impossible,' theory allows you to do the impossible—you just haven't the techniques. In the second instance, the 'scientifically impossible,' you've got no *theoretical* justification for what you want to do. But in both cases, men have 'done the impossible'—either developed new techniques or found the flaws and limitations in the theories.

"But there is a third category of the impossible, one ignored by even the most farsighted researchers—the 'logically

impossible'!" The interviewer's voice rose in triumph, and his other hand, which had remained in his pocket, furiously jangled his change.

I blinked at him. "But the logically impossible is—"

"I know, I know, I've listened to that stuff from our professional consultants," said the big blond man, suddenly impatient. "The logically impossible is part of an arbitrary system which would be destroyed by any attempt to—" he shrugged his shoulders in annoyance.

"Let me tell you," he cried, "that the Virgin Research Corporation has investigated the problem and decided otherwise. Our experts have—and they are some of the best men in the field, much better than any jerky Ivy League Multiversity can afford—our experts are convinced that such notions as the 'round-square' are meaningful, and what's more, are of potentially great military value!"

His eyes were crazed. " 'When the battle's lost and won,' indeed," he murmured in a low, sinister voice. He smiled at me coldly, and the rotten stains on his teeth stood out like the craters of the moon.

"We're using a two-pronged approach—psychology and mathematical logic. We've had no trouble recruiting psychology majors," he continued in a normal, tone, "but most of the students in the mathematics department weren't interested—or they've got to spend the summer with their families at home or away."

It was my turn to grin. That's what they got for trying to interest any of the teenage hotshots. But I wasn't afraid to broaden my mental horizons, I was willing to wrestle with the impossible, I was brave enough to face the unknown. My smile widened, and then my face grew serious as I took up the challenge.

"How much?"

"Two fifty a week, recommendations, room and board, and a motor scooter, and free transportation in a G.E.M. cruiser to and from the New Mexico labs," said the blond man.

"Well—"

"With your record, you should jump at the chance," he

said. "I've seen your transcripts, son." He began jangling his change again.

That "son" decided me. "Hmmmm—"

"All right, all right, we'll talk it over," he said, a little sharply. In science and mathematics, all the old guys are scared of all the young guys. You do your best work when you are young, and everyone's scared of being "burned out at thirty." Just like I'd love to line my teenage competitors up against a wall and plug 'em, I could see he was scared of me.

He pulled out my preliminary transcripts and applications, and began thumbing them. I slipped off my glasses, and licked my lips.

Later I found out I got A-minus on the mathematical logic final. I should've asked for fifty more than the three-twenty-five I got out of that terrified jerk.

The G.E.M. *Ruby* thundered west, the ground effect keeping it a dozen feet above the earth. The machine soared along, impossibly graceful, as night mastered day on the American Great Plains.

I peered out the big picture window, fully relaxed for the first time in many weeks. The orientation and information kit lay ignored across my knees. I'd look at it later. No more lab reports, no more little phrases like; "I'll leave that as an exercise," that meant a dozen hours of skull sweat, no more; "I'm sorry, but some pre-med sliced those pages out of the book you wanted with a razor blade last term." At the moment, I didn't care if the directors of the Virgin Research Corporation had cerebrum, cerebellum and medulla in their brain pans, or scrambled eggs. By Napier's bones, I'd escaped!

Someone was struggling up the aisle against the pressure of the *Ruby's* acceleration (we'd just pulled out of Ann Arbor). With a gasp he collapsed into the acceleration chair beside me. "Greetings!" I murmured. "You one of mama's boys?" About half the people on the *Ruby* were working for V.R.C. It's only these tremendous mysterious corporations that can afford intercontinental jet flights and G.E.M.s and—and pure mathematicians, thank goodness!

"Hello, yes," said my companion. He was a skinny, baffled-looking fellow about my own age. His very pale face said, "Yourself?"

"Perry Zirkle—I'm in the numbers racket—uh, I'm a pure mathematician."

"Uh, Richard Colby—microminaturization and electronics—I'm a grad student at Michigan Multi. If you can see it, then it's too big. My motto." Colby's face brightened and he grinned. *His* teeth were okay. "Say, I've got those books—you must be on the logical impossibility research the same as I am—Project Round-Square!"

I nodded and smirked at the books. "I suppose so—though from what I've been taught, I doubt if the project will last very long."

Colby settled himself and relaxed. "How so?" he asked. He didn't look like a monomaniacal studier—just an electron pusher in his twenties. He wasn't one of these kid geniuses, either, and I was rested and relaxed. So naturally, my mouth got the better of me.

"Just on the face of it," I argued calmly, "paradoxes and self-contradictions are interesting, and they attract attention to ideas, but by their very nature—" I found myself unable to continue.

"Maybe," Colby said. "But maybe you're just looking at the problem the wrong way—the fellow that interviewed me kept talking about 'thinking in other categories'."

I paused. "Oh, I know what he meant," I said, and laughed. "He was trying to tell you not to argue, not at two-fifty a week."

"Two-twenty-five," he murmured.

The electronics expert hesitated, and then looked at me oddly. "I don't know about you," he muttered, "but I consider it an honor and a pleasure to be able to do some 'pure' research. There's little enough of it in electronics these days—the whole subject has about one real scientist to a hundred engineers." His eyes were hooded. In the dimly lit passenger compartment of the G.E.M., his face was dark and brooding.

He licked his lips and went on, talking to himself as much as he was to me.

"It's enough to make you go into industry. Take my own school, the Michigan Multiversity. Did you know we have a top secret Congressional Project to automate the presidency? Fact. The chairman of the Department of Cybernetics told me the system philosophy behind it: Roosevelt showed that someone could be president as long as he liked. Truman proved that anyone could be president. Eisenhower demonstrated that you don't really need a president. And Kennedy was further proof that it's dangerous to *be* a human president. So we're working out a way to automate the office." He grinned, and I laughed in response.

I reached down into my fagbag and pulled out a bottle. His eyes went wide for a moment, but I passed it to him. He took a slug, and the evening was on its way.

Colby turned out to be all right. I told him Smith's remark about how engineers are sloppy when they call "characteristic values," "eigenvalues," because "eigenvalue" isn't good English. He came back with the one about the sequence that you had to prove converged, but that all the students demonstrated diverged. The Professor's masterful reply was: "It converges *slowly*."

The ground effect machine rushed on through the midwestern night, a foot or two above the earth, supported by a flairing cushion of air. Presently it's path curved south. The pilot-driver was steering by radar beacon and navigation satellite, towns and buildings signifying no more than treacherous shoals and reefs to a sailor. The craft was flying over ground that had never, and might now be never, touched by wheels or feet. Over these wastes we plunged southwest.

Dick Colby couldn't hold it very well, or maybe he was tired. In any event the fellow was soon sleeping peacefully beside me. I let him be and stared at the scenery.

These fellows that believe the "pures vs. applieds" battle really amuse me. Actually, science and scientists are just like anything else in this rotten world, just as corrupt. I've heard stories of research men during the great "Space Flight Bub-

ble" that would trade jobs a dozen times in a year, doubling their salary each time. And these stories about advertising men that run off with the best accounts and start their own agencies? Nothing to the technical men that impress the Pentagon and get the generals to finance them in their own electronics company. Though I don't feel much sympathy for the big firms. Anyone that builds H-bombs and missiles and lets someone else decide what to do with them—people like that deserve everything they get!

What was wrong with me lately? I still loved to work and study, to cram till one, then feel the high tension as the papers were handed out the next day. The gong that announced the start of the test always reminded me of the one on the old TV show, "To Beat the Clock." And there was nothing like the feeling in front of the posted grades, when I saw the shocked faces of the youngsters I'd beaten out. Tough luck, kid! Better switch to art history!

I lit a cigarette and leaned back. Well, right or wrong, this stuff would be fun. Science always is. I love to be totally absorbed in something new and strange. It's so much better than just sitting around doing nothing, or dull routine stuff. Frankly, I don't see how the hundred million unemployed can take it. My mood when I'm idle is usually a murderous rage at the kids who're going to parties and dances and junk like that. Not that that stuff is really *interesting*, like a problem in Greenfield space. But at least it's something, compared to sitting all alone with nothing to think about but myself. Frankly, I love really tough problems, the kind you have to think about *all the time.*

Dawn was peeping up over the horizon. I settled myself in my own acceleration chair, and tried to snatch a little sleep. My own watch said that in a few hours we'd arrive at the immense desert reservation which held the Virgin Research Corporation, summer student trainees for the enigmatic Project Round-Square.

"These are your quarters, Mr. Colby and Mr. Zirkle," said the blonde girl. She was worth a second glance, being the

possessor of a fine body, though a little bow-legged ("Pleasure bent," Colby murmured.) Still, a very nice body.

Colby dumped his junk on the bed, and began opening drawers in the dresser and putting it away. I stood still and read the information sheet we'd been given on arrival. It said I had to report at the Computer Center as soon as convenient. I put my own bags in the closet and went.

Outside, the desert sunlight was quite bearable, since it was only a few hours after sunup. I walked across the compound, guided by a map on the fact sheet.

The living quarters were good: simple ranch-style stuff with desks, and bookshelves duplicated in each room. This was no resort, but the place was clean and kept up, without the bleakness of a straight government installation. The labs and auxiliary buildings were spread out over the desert, the whole business enclosed by a security frontier. This made internal security checks unnecessary, and there were none.

People dressed informally: chinos, dungarees, western boots and flannel shirts. A pleasant change after school, where most everyone was formal most of the time—except for the technical students.

Of course they made us pay for it. All the co-eds are hot for someone they can discuss the Great Books with, not some barbarian science or engineering major with a sliderule swinging from his belt. I've seen these Zenish girls, with their long hair and thongs and SANE buttons, wild for motor cyclers and African exchange students. Rotten snobs! Though I've got to admit that some of my friends in the engineering school depend more on force that persuasion for their pleasure. Ha-ha!

The Computer Center was mostly underground, to make temperature regulation easier. These big machines really heat up. I know that back at the Arthur Regleihofp Computing Center, at my own multiversity, they have an enormous air conditioning plant through all the machine rooms, with dozens of recording thermometers. If the temperature in the labs goes above a certain point, the electrical power to the computers is shut off. Otherwise you have something called a

computer explosion, which no one at the labs wants to talk about. All I know is that during the summer, the machine rooms are the best place to relax, because they're so cool. And I can always scare the teenage-geniuses who run them into letting me rubberneck.

So I reported to the Computer Center, and found my wonderful creative position from which I could challenge the unknown—the programing saddle of an obsolete I.B.M. aleph-sub-zero—a jazzed up Turning Engine. The same noble trade I'd learned six years before, as a youngster in the Science Honors Program at the multiversity.

An International Business Machine aleph-sub-zero tests a mathematical model against reality. The device begins grinding out deductions from the model, and checking them about facts about the phenomenon. If they check out, fine. If not, it begins to blink and tremble in agitation.

This one had a few peculiarities. The "mode" was about ten times as complex as normal, there were fifty more storage units—and the runs averaged less than ten seconds.

By the end of the day, I was bored, frustrated, and very disgusted. I could barely keep from grabbing my teenage assistant by his ankles, swinging him around in a heavy arc, and smashing out his smiling, freckled face against the machine's one-to-ones. Rotten teenage competitor! Fortunately I ran into Harry Mandel directly afterwards, without having to look him up. At least that was something. One thing led to another, and two hours later, together with Richard Colby, the three of us were exchanging impressions.

"Oh, I suppose it's all I could expect," I told them disgustedly. "They're setting up odd sorts of logical-mathematical models—ones without the law of self contradiction, either A or not-A. Things like that. Then they run them through the aleph-sub-zero as a check. Only—" and I took a deep slug from my glass, "none of them works."

Harry Mandel bobbled his head up and down enthusiastically, so that it seemed to flicker in the cool dim corner of the White Sands Bar. Harry has this habit of shaking his head in violent agreement, while his eyes grow larger and larger

with each sentence you speak. It gives you the funny feeling that every word you say is confirming some incredible theory of his: that you're a Chinese Communist, or a paranoid schizophrenic, or an Arcturian spy. It's really quite frightening until you get used to it.

Also, his lips were trembling and his hands quivering. I knew the signs. Once he started talking, he'd never stop. So I gave the nod to Richie Colby instead.

The electronics expert looked up from his drink. "I don't know," he muttered. "I'm on the psychological-biological end, and so far I can't understand what's going on. They've got me working on topological neuronic maps—mapping the circuits of the brain. But for what, I don't know." He went back to the drink he was nursing.

I took a sip from my Coke. I don't drink more than I have to, and neither do most of my friends. In spite of all this talk about college students boozing it up, I'll be damned if I'll rot my brains, the brains that have to beat out all those teenage hotshots!

The White Sands Bar was a pretty good one, quiet with a kitchen. A while before we'd had a pizza, heavy with cheese and olive oil. It's funny how much time I spend in bars. Our civilization has wonderful extensive facilities for some things, fragmentary ones or none at all for others. It's perfectly clear how to fill out the forms and go to class and take exams and apply and student all the way to a Ph.D—but how the hell do you have a good time? I heard they had to double the psychiatric service up at M.I.T. Sometimes I have crazy insane dreams of getting out of this whole mess, quitting. But where could I go, what would I do, who would be my friends? *Who would be my friends?* Anyway, bars are all right, and this bar, the White Sands Bar, was a pretty good one.

I took up another drink. Richard Colby was staring dumbly into his. "Okay, Harry," I said.

"To understand my end, you'll need to know what the universe is," said Mandel quickly and incoherently. "People

ask, 'Why is the universe the way it is? And Kant answered them back: 'Because the universe is a tango!' "

"Huh?"

"Don't you know what a tango is?" said Harry quizzically. "Why, even all my buddy-buddy psychology major friends know *that*.You know—like this—" and he moved his hips suggestively. He grabbed up his Sloe Gin and Coke, and finished it off in a single gulp. "Daiquiri!" he cried to the waitress. "Like this, boys," he moaned, beginning to sway again.

It took a little while to make our questions clear, but presently Harry was sketching on a napkin with his Mr. Peanut Pen.

"Remember that proof in high school geometry—Tenth Year Mathematics to you, Perry—where you show that a line segment has only one perpendicular bisector. You strike arcs from the endpoints, and draw the line from one intersection to the other. But why should the arcs have any intersection? And why couldn't there be *two* lines that were straight and went through both intersection points? I bet you never thought of that!"

He looked up from his diagram defiantly.

Dick Colby blinked at him, his long face weary.

"I'll *tell* you why!" cried Harry Mandel, downing half his Daiquiri. He put the glass down and spoke decisively. "Because the universe is a tango—we see it this way because *we have to*—we're built this way. Anything else would be a logical impossibility—a contradiction. We can't experience the world any other way. We see it this way because we're built a certain way, and the universe is built a certain way. Reality is the interaction of the two parts—and the universe is a tango!"

He tossed down the rest of the woman's drink and nodded powerfully. "Any one of my buddy-buddy psychology major friends will tell you that!"

Colby and I nodded agreement. Mandel always was something of a nut. I never trust short guys—their mothers always tell them about Napoleon when they're little, and they always take it the wrong way.

Mandel was still gabbling. "But this doesn't mean we'll always have to look at things this way. We won't have to always think of a round-square as impossible. That's what my part of Project Round-Square is all about, the part with my buddy-buddy psychology major friends. We're going to change the music. We're going to give one partner dancing lessons!"

It was five weeks more before I learned that Mandel had in fact not been kidding around, nor really drunk at all. That was the essence of the psychology half of Project Round-Square. But a lot happened between that first night at the White Sands Bar and then.

For one thing, they closed down the mathematics-logic side of the installation. I had about a week more of that "Start Program!" Zip-pip-pip-pip-pip! "Clang! Clang! Clang! Discrepancy! Discrepancy!" nonsense, then two days of absolutely flawless correlations—as good as any of the test runs between economics and high school math, or advanced calculus and statics and dynamics. Whatever was being sent into the aleph-sub-zero, it was a perfect fit with the real world. The first day I was wildly enthusiastic, the second I was bewildered—maybe they were checking themselves? And the third day, I wasn't given any programs. The head of my section, a young man named Besser, showed up about an hour later and told me we were shutting down. I was to be reassigned.

"But why? The last two runs were perfect!"

"The last runs—" he began, then sighed. He looked more like a truckdriver than a worker, with the subtle squiggles of mathematical logic. "The last two runs were exercises in futility. You've had some undergraduate symbolic logic—you must have some idea of what we're trying to do."

I nodded.

"Well, rigorously speaking, the way to eliminate the notion of "impossible" is to get rid of contradiction—get a sort of logic where you can have a "round-square," as a legitimate

notion. Then you build a language with that logic. Understand me?"

"Uh-huh."

"Now, this seems—ahem, unlikely. If you've ever taken an introductory course in philosophy, there's always a kid who talks about there being 'some crazy kind of logic' where things could be red *and* blue, round *and* square." He shrugged in annoyance. "The professor can usually shut him up, and if he's persistent, embarrass him to death. Those kids are the sort that embarrass pretty easily."

I nodded. This guy knew something of college life.

"So that's what the meta-mathematicians and symbolic logicians upstairs have been working on. You see, while such things are silly to talk about here in the real world, you *can* have a logic without the 'not' operator. Such logics have been set up in the past—but they weren't very interesting, they weren't *rich*, fruitful in new ideas. But anyway, you can make such a thing, you can even build up to a mathematics from it, the way Russell and Whitehead built up numbers from logic in *Principia*. And you use your math to build a logic and a language—to describe the world. No 'not' means no opposites—which seems to mean no contradictions." He wiped his face and tried to look annoyed, but it was difficult. Good old air conditioning.

"Do you see?"

"I think so. Real world again—didn't match up."

"Kee-rect. Your math is no good for the real world. It's just wrong—like trying to navigate an ocean liner with plane geometry. Since the earth is round, it doesn't work out."

I nodded.

"I mean, it's *right*—it's *valid*—it just doesn't describe anything real," he corrected hastily. "Seems as if you *must* have contradiction."

"That's why the runs on the aleph-sub-zero were so short? The computer would spot a contradiction, and start yapping. But how about the last two runs—perfect straight out. What was the matter with them?"

"Oh, those," he groaned. "Those were that jerk Kadison's idea. The exclusion approach."

"Go on."

"Well, you know there's another way to eliminate the notion of a contradiction. By exclusion."

"Elucidate."

"Think of it this way," said Besser. "You understand the notions of tall and short, and you know such things are relative. But if you decide that everyone under twenty feet tall was short—then you couldn't have a contradiction, a notion of 'short-tall.' Everyone would be short, and you'd eliminate one sort of contradiction. 'Tall-short' would mean the same as 'mimsey-short'—'nonsense word-short,' or just 'short.' And you keep on going that way. This was Kadison's idea."

"It worked perfectly in the machine."

"Sure it did. And it's also perfectly useless. *All* gradations and comparisons drop out—and brother, you don't know how many there are. You know, most every quality has its opposite in *something* else. Even the notions of matter and empty space. You get nothing left—I mean *nothing*—the problem becomes trivial."

"The universe is an uncle," I said.

"Yeah, except for uncle say any other word. The universe becomes one solid, undescribable lump, with no qualities at all."

Also, Harry Mandel began to crack up. I didn't notice it while I was working—that aleph-sub-zero had some good problems—but when I was unassigned, the only real activity I had was going to the White Sands Bar. It was during the drinking sessions that his maddness began to blossom.

Now of course I know all about the science of modern psychology—it's one reason I've remained so balanced and stable. Myself, I'm what is known as a shame personality. It's a matter of personal honor with me that I fight to the limit for the highest grades and the most scholarship. I'll beat 'em all out. That's me.

Dick Colby was clearly a guilt personality. He really be-

lieved all that guff about the scientist's worldview, about the search for truth, about following an abstract pattern of behavior. Poor old Dick, he had an abstract moral code too, as I might have expected. Well, he had to follow the rules, and he might get kicked in the belly, but at least he was stable in his sad, picky way.

Now Harry Mandel was a fear personality. He tried to belong to some sort of whole, to link its destiny with his own. A gestalt. You find a lot like that: fraternity boys, soldiers, club members, athletes on a team. And of course the intellectuals —the literary group and Zenish girls and the interdependent independents.

Ain't social psychology great!

Anyway, Mandel's kind of twitch, the fear personality, is okay as long as he really has his buddies and believes it. If he doesn't have them, he wanders around until he can link up with a new bunch. If he doesn't *believe* he has them—look out! A fear personality with doubts about its gestalts, can slide right over into paranoid schizophrenia.

It came out in funny ways, distorted, because Mandel was very intelligent, and the more intelligent, the more little links can begin to snap and break. One night in late August he came up with this:

"I mean, I have nothing against that particular minority group," he said loudly. "It's just that—well, look at it this way. The original members were selected on the basis of crude physical strength—the smart clever ones escaped the slavers. Then they were brought over here, and were slaves for several hundred years. Now it seems to me that if you have slaves, you're going to encourage breeding among the stupid and the strong. You don't want smart quick ones. As a matter of fact, the smart quick ones would try to escape, and would be shot. Or else, if they're clever, slip over the color line and intermarry.

"So you see, you've had forces at work for three hundred years that bred—I mean in terms of human genetics—for less intelligence. You do that for three centuries and it shows—as

a matter of fact, it *does* show. In terms of modern science, they might even *be* inferior."

He was crazy, insane. For one thing, three hundred years isn't long enough to matter genetically for humans. For another, "the smart clever ones" *didn't* escape the slavers' roundups any more than the others did. Maybe if Mandel had been a slave owner he'd have tried to encourage only the stupid to breed, but such eugenically-oriented thinking didn't exist in times past. As for shooting would-be escapees, you don't destroy valuable merchandise like that, you bring it back alive! [Anyway, you don't talk about races, you talk about human beings.] Mandel was rationalizing, justifying immoral attitudes on the basis of a "science" which really doesn't exist. As for "scientific morality," Hell, science and morality are different, and by trying to base one on the other you are setting up for something like Hitler's "final solution."

Yet poor disturbed Mandel had *thought the theory up.* And for an instant, thinking of the exchange students and the Zenish girls back at the multiversity, my own brain had become enflamed. Science, reason, intellect—there are some things you mustn't think about. God help me.

A flash of disgust went through me. I never wanted to do any more calculations. I wanted to lie down with some pretty girl and make love to her and have her soothe me. I was too long alone. Help me! Then I squeezed those thoughts away.

I pushed away the thick silvery tin with the remains of the pizza. Delicious, too. Their cook was improving. Or maybe he could get real Mexican spices, not the stuff I used to settle for in Woolworths.

I looked at Mandel across the table. His face was beginning to cave in a little, and his eyes looked tired. Anyway, we had to talk about something else. I decided to find out some things about my new assignment. And that was thing number three. That afternoon I'd be transferred to the psychology attack team-programing again, the Urbont matrices of neurological maps.

"How's the job, Harry?" I asked him. "How's the dancing lessons coming?"

Mandel looked up. He hadn't mentioned his work in a couple of weeks, not since we'd taken his little lecture on Kant and the tango as a rib.

"What about it?" he asked crisply. "I don't know very much, I just do whatever they tell me."

They—his buddy-buddy psychologist buddies? Mmmmm.

"Well, whatever they've been telling you, they'll soon be telling me," I said, nudging him in the shoulder. "I'll be figuring out your brain maps for you."

"Oh, yeah. They ought to start programing in two weeks, and then installation—"

"Hey, installation? Whooa? What are you talking about?"

Mandel's slumped body seemed to collapse some more. He was so far forward I could hardly see his face. Just a dark form against the well-lit rest of the bar. Cigarette smoke hung in the air, and a dozen technicians were seated on the high stools. Over in another corner, two disgruntled physicians were playing NIM. A couple of the girls from the clerical pool were having heroes and Cokes at another table, blonde and brownette in brief desert costumes.

"Sensory enervation," said Mandel in a dead voice. "What else did you think?"

He blinked mildly and slugged down the rest of his Horse's Neck. "Rum and Coke!" he shouted to the barman. "I really hate to drink," he confided sullenly. "But at least I can do it alone, without my psychology major buddy-buddies." Richard Colby gave me a funny look and we both leaned forward and really began to listen.

In the 1950's, the psychologists of McGill University had commenced an interesting sequence of experiments in connection with the U.S. manned space flight program—an early phase of the "Space Flight Bubble." A space traveler confined to his space capsule would be in a state of extreme "sensory deprivation"—with so little to see, hear and feel, the psychologists theorized, the astronaut might go insane. The McGill University experiments were designed to investi-

gate this thesis, and even more extreme cases of sensory deprivation.

The perfection of brain circuit mapping had suggested the obverse experiment to the scientists of Project Round-Square. If sensory deprivation could debase a man, weaken him and drive him out of his mind—why not attempt "sensory enhancement." Enriching a man's senses by requiring his recticular formations to accept data detected by machines—the total memory storage of a computer, the complete electromagnetic spectrum, the sorting out of patterns and wave forms which was possible to oscilloscopes.

Volunteers weren't too hard to find—the McGill men had found volunteers, promising not much more than money and a chance at madness.

A man's concepts of the world vary according to the data he receives. For thousands of years, men had been building up systems and structures of describing the universe, without trying to improve the methods used to accept the data. Scientific instruments were not enough—could light and color have meaning, be *real* to a blind man? The scientists of Project Round-Square hoped that the contradictions and impossibilities of Reality might disappear for a man with enhanced senses. The system philosophy was illustrated in the poem, "The Blind Man and the Elephant."

"Could a dolphin discover Relativity?" said Mandel, almost angrily. "Of course not—plenty of brains, just never was even able to sense much beyond the other dolphins. Likewise, there may be enormous fields of knowledge we've never noticed, because of our sensory lacks."

"More than that, it's a *positive* approach!" cried Mandel, "the first in seventy years. Before this, all of psychology was concerned with debasing man, turning him into a super rat, a little black box which was fed a stimulus and kicked back a response. Automations!"

"What about psychoanalysis and the Freudians?"

"Bleugh!" cried Mandel, enervated himself for once. "They're the worst of all. The Id, Ego, and Super-Ego, are

just mental mechanisms, things beyond our control, which interact to produce behavior."

It was nice to see Mandel cheerful. There's nothing better for these neurotic types than to let them talk and talk and talk, it helps reassure them. Maybe they think no one will threaten them or kick them in the belly as long as they are blabbing. A false notion produced by too much well-written t.v. drama.

"But still," I said slowly, waggling a finger at him (or was I waggling and the finger standing still. I must drink less.)

"But, Harry," I continued. "All the colors of the rainbow won't alter this picture," and I flipped one of the White Sands Bar's napkins at him. It had a nice colored picture of a Valkyrie missile on it, from the days when White Sands was a proving grounds, before the "Space Flight Bubble" burst.

"Maybe not," he mumbled. "But that's only the neurological part of the idea. We're building compulsions to succeed into it, too. The kids will *have* to work out a world without impossibilities."

"Kids?" asked Colby dimly. "Keep talking, Harry."

Mandel blinked and then continued. A lot of the rest was whined and mumbled, but I thought I got most of it.

The subjects of the brain wiring were youngsters between twelve and sixteen. The psychologists had settled on those as the optimum age limits; young enough to be typified by directness, immediciacy, wholeness, spontaneity and integral fantasy. Teenage hotshots, in other words. Old enough to want to make sense of all the data, and young enough so their world view wasn't rigid.

You can look up all the psychology words except the last. "Integral fantasy" was the most important. Studies had shown this quality is most typical of real genius, and the kids had been specially selected for it. What it means is this. Most people have fantasies, but the fantasy is "disassociated"—it is unreal to them, like sex magazines and comic books. Children, especially geniuses, have "integral fantasies"—they get wild complex ideas about the real world. Ordinary people call these "strokes of genius," if they happen to work.

"And what's more," muttered Mandel, head down on the table, "they'll have to make *sense* out of it. They've had hypnosis and drug compulsions to succeed, so their new sensory picture will have to be free of logical contradictions. It'll have to be!"

I was about to ask him how they'd be able to communicate with them after the kids had "made contact"—but before I could, Harry dropped out of the game. He lay unconscious across the table. "Kids!" he murmured, hatefully.

So I was doing mathematics again, setting up Urbont matrices, the curious descendents of time-variable, multi-port switching and communications math. Far more subtle than any of these, however—the Urbont equations didn't analyze radars or satellite radio links, they symbolized the neuron patterns of the human brain.

It was tedious, subtle, absolutely-right-the-first-time work. The basic units are discrete—on-off switching conditions apply, rather than continuity. In other words, there was no margin for error.

I was getting more of those flashings of hatred and self-hatred. In my little air-conditioned cubicle in the Computer Center, I would get daymares where I would be a bug in a compartment of an ice cube tray—so cool and comfortable and . . . dead. Every so often my friends would stop by—Dick Colby, bemused and apologetic; Harry Mandel, confused and sullen.

More than once, I thought of informing the medical staff of Mandel's problems but I was afraid to. In the world of science, each man has a "paper shadow" that follows him around—dossiers, transcripts, evaluations by supervisors. Get something bad in among those papers—instability, erratic work habits, even extravagant praise, and you're in trouble. The big corporations like their scientists *a little* peculiar—just for identification. Anything serious can really ruin a man's career. I thought it might be best for Harry to take his chances—when I thought about him at all. I tried to stay away from emotional subjects.

Fortunately, about this time, the Virgin Research Corporation brought in some new entertainment, so I could relax without raising the alcohol content of my blood.

These were the moebius movies, the new cyclic films. I'd seen the first one, *The Endless War*, previewed in New York City, a few years before. Since then, their sophistication had increased many-fold.

The basic notion was simple. The films were written in such a way that there was no beginning and no end. But this was more than a simple splicing of the two ends. Literally, it was nearly impossible to know where the story commenced. In "The Endless War," there were at least a dozen places where you could enter, stay the two hours, and leave, coming away with the impression of a complete drama. In fact, depending on where you came in, the film might have been a comedy, a tragedy, a documentary or most anything else.

"To the Nth Generation" (or "Incest on It!") was a typical improvement. It dealt with the romantic affairs of several families over (I think) three generations. After forty years, with the amatory relations of the members incredibly tangled, the snarl was twisted back on itself as the original characters were brought fourth in and out of wedlock. It was pretty ghastly in a way, but also quite amusing. I hear the French are preparing a film which will do the same thing in two generations, and there's going to be a science fiction picture that does it in one.

I had also heard rumors of the most recent development. Cyclic films had closed the old notion of time, the first "true" moebius would eliminate time as an orienter. With pure dissonant sound, with only the most limited and ingenious movements, a complete showing would have the film run both backward and forward, right-to-right and right-to-left. Enthusiasts predicted it would make "Last Year at Marienbad" look like "Looney-tunes."

I got precious little pleasure out of "To the Nth Generation," however. Mandel was moaning and groaning about his buddy-buddies and how much he hated kids through the whole thing. I didn't stay past the second time around—and

these things are cumulative—ten revolutions of "The Endless War" had made me practically a pacifist.

The trouble was that half an hour into "Incest on It!" I fell off the edge of a cliff. On the screen the Most Beautiful Girl at Queens College was giving birth on the steps of the New York Public Library to the Nobel physicist who would father the owner of the biggest brothel in the Bronx, who in turn might (there were subtle hints) be the parent of the beautiful blond in labor on the dirty white steps.

I would always have teenage competitors! I would get older, and older, and older ("Never produced anything after twenty seven!" "Burned out at twenty-five, I'd say!" "We keep him around for laughs, and to teach the remedial courses. Never did anything worthwhile after his thesis!") but they would always be coming; young, bright, arrogant, brilliant. I could barely keep from screaming and screaming and screaming. Instead, I made as tight a fist as I could, squeezing, the way I would press the foot rest in the dentist's chair, because it hurts and hurts, and you've got to do *something* when it hurts so much.

I had been wrong about Mandel, or partly. He, like I, would not be shamed. And he saw Project Round-Square as a betrayal by his friends, of the creation by his "buddy-buddies" of new competitors to torment him. I could understand this, though his woe was not mine. His complaints had stimulated me to see my own doom in the endless procreation of the film.

And now I recalled the "Kubie Report" in the *American Scientist*: "Some Unsolved Problems of the Scientific Career." The high incidence of nervous breakdown in the middle years, as the creative energy wore thin. Directness, immediacy, diversity, wholeness, spontaneity, integral fantasy! For these I had denied myself everything, sweating out my advanced degrees before age could touch me. And now I was old, I could feel myself rotting as I sat there. I could feel my brains inside my body: ropy, red, pulsing, tinged with age, hot and glowing inside a pile of gray, fatty, fibrous tissue—my unexercised body. Somehow I managed to get up and stumble out

of the theatre. Behind me, on the screen, someone was talking on his deathbed to his grandchildren and grandparents, who would turn out to be exactly the same people.

Part of the time I worked intensely at my tapes and card-decks, not daring to pause, afraid to close my machine-language manuals. Other days, sometimes for hours, I could not work closely. I cut free of the job, drifted beyond the "grid" of the scientific attitude. What difference did it make, my mind gibed, if men landed on Mars, or discovered element 1304? Particle, wave, wavicle, round-square—who cares? Science was just another "institution," like anything else. Would a man a thousand years from now laugh at me, the way my seminal engineer friends would chuckle at a scribe in 1000 A.D., who spent his little life endlessly recopying scrolls in a monastery?

It took all my tricks to get through the final weeks. The best was French sleep therapy, which I once read about in a book called "Force Yourself to Relax!" If your troubles are unbearable, knock yourself out until your subconscious has time to patch you up. I tried reading for a while, but I couldn't seem to understand C. P. Snow's two cultures. All I could recall was a passage about someone dying. Snow said that on the point of death, most people care not a whit about their intellectual failures or social lacks. But they cry out endlessly about their missed sensual interludes.

Richard Colby still visited me, but Mandel had stopped coming. In a moment of weakness I'd told him about his "paper shadow." He'd slammed out in a huff. The next day he came back, calm and chipper.

"You look better than I do."

"Of course. All my problems are solved."

"What about your psychology buddies?"

"Oh, I knew none of them were *really* my friends. But I'm set to take care of them, all right, all right"

"Yeah? How?"

"Well, you remember what you told me about my personal file. About how if they decide I'm unstable and borderline,

it'll be very hard for me to get any sort of job, and I couldn't be a psychologist any more."

"The situation is something like that, at least with any large organization."

"But as long as I seem all right, all those rats will leave me alone, and even seem to be friendly."

"Well, you don't put it very well—"

"So it's all very simple. I've fixed them all right all right. I went over to chemical stores and got the components for a large bomb. Then I assembled it in the bottom drawer of my desk, in the middle of the Psychology Section of the project. And rigged it with a button detonator."

"Go on, go on!"

"Well, don't you see."

"No! Go on!"

"It's perfectly plain what I—"

"Mandel, explain!"

"Well, as long as I'm feeling all right. I go on in a perfectly normal way. When I feel a little sick, I go into my office. But, if some day, I think I'm going really nuts, I think I'm really going to go crazy so it all will go down on my personal file and ruin me with the big organization—"

"Yes?"

"Why, then it's as if all my friends are suddenly about to become my enemies, to turn on me, to think I'm crazy and fire me and laugh at me and pity me behind my back." His eyes were mad, though his voice was perfectly level. "They won't be able to do that to Harry Mandel. They won't do it. I'll blow them all to bits first!"

It was enough for me, friend or no. I got word to Personnel, anonymously, and that night they called for Mandel. The poor guy hadn't thought to install one of his "White Collar Kamikazees" in his quarters, so they took him out on the G.E.M. *Topaz* that very night, under heavy sedation.

Was I in much better shape than Harry Mandel had been? A cheerful, hopelessly-neurotic robot. I had come up through the sequence without much real thought about stuff like that.

It was enough to do my work. Once, when I was drunk, I had the idea that if you had a perfect baby, you could set up the perfect program for his life, sports and studies and sex and social life, split-second timed, an ideal existence. But it was already twenty years too late for that for me.

Or was that the easy way out, to flunk yourself and roll with the tide. Was I simply 'hiding out' in science because it was socially sanctioned and I had a talent for Math?

But on the other side it gave me a pattern for my days, the stability I needed and craved. For this I might do work that I even despised. There must be some way to decide, to choose the optimum path, the really best way, before all your time's run through?

But how do you do it, how could I, of all people, do it?

It was my own brand of impossible.

Project Round-Square finished out fast.

Dick Colby and I sat in one of the electronics labs and watched as the countdown dropped to zero. Closed circuit television brought us a view of the MT-Section, a big room holding more than a dozen aleph-sub-sixes. Dr. Wilbur, the head of the machine translation group, sat at the console of an aleph-sub-nine, the most advanced computer International Business Machines has ever turned out. (*Nobody* really understands it. It was designed by an aleph-sub-eight and the main purpose of the sixes was that collectively they kept the sub-nine from going crazy.)

Mathematical linguists is the new "in" branch of math, like differential topology used to be, and category theory after that. Wilbur was playing it to the hilt, with ski boots, no tie, and a crappy old sports jacket. But he had a feel for the communications process that amounted to empathy. It was this rare talent that was needed, to help the nine through the clutches.

Above him on the lintel of the machine, was the proud motto of the National Programer's Union, originally a remark by Queen Juliana of the Netherlands:

"I can't understand it. I can't even understand the people who can understand it."

"Project Round-Square," said a disgusted technician. "Still seems crazy to me."

"Perhaps it was a bad choice of name," said Colby next to me. The Michigan electronics expert was tanned and calm, and cheerful as ever. "Did you ever read that poem, 'The Blind Men and the Elephant'? It's the same principle. With new senses or a new orientation, apparent contradictions in reality might disappear. It's what some people call 'thinking in other categories.'"

"Like the wavicle," said someone else.

"Yes," said Richard Colby, his face taunting as he smiled. "When physicists were studying certain particles, they found that in some situations they could be thought of as waves, and the equations worked out. In other sorts of reactions, you could think of them as particles, and the numbers and theories checked out under *that* hypothesis. So the physics men just shrugged and called 'em wavicles."

"But what does a wavicle look like—"

"I don't know. Nobody knows—but nobody knows what a round-square looks like either."

The lab grew quiet, as if Colby had said something profound. On the television screen the computers clicked and roared, the tape drives jerking abruptly in their vacuum columns.

"What about military applications—" I croaked at Colby. He seemed to be up to date. I hadn't paid much attention to all the interoffice junk we got on the project—including the "Virgin Tease" newsletter that told the lab assistant in Subsection Nine of Track Four of Approach Nineteen what progress had been made towards the noble goal of Project Sixty Nine, of which he sometimes recalled he was a member.

"The guy that hired me told me this thing had military applications—I didn't know if he was kidding or I was in a nightmare."

Colby looked at me wide-eyed for a moment. "Well—I

don't know. Of course, there doesn't seem to be any *direct* application. But neither did Einstein's equations, or 'game theory' when it was developed. *Any* sort of insight into the world is likely to be militarily useful these days. It doesn't even have to be technical—remember the old German staff armies that were so successful. A simple thing like the chain of command could lick the best general who had to boss his own whole show."

"Just thinking is dangerous these days—often deadly."

"Maybe they ought to classify it," joked Colby.

"But then, I guess it always has been."

On the screen the computers continued to run. Coverage would be confined to the machine-translation lab; the psychologists on the staff had decided to have no reports from the real center of activity.

Outside, in a surface lab were a dozen adolescents. They had been trained to their peak as scientists, well beyond Ph. D.-level. Now they were being sensitized, exposed to the flood of phenomena that ordinary people never know about because our wonderful minds are deaf and dumb to nearly everything in the universe. And hidden deep down below their sensitivities, there was a biting, burning, clawing, raving drive to master this new universe they would meet, and to see in it the death of the old human notion of opposites, contradictions, limitations. Nothing, their minds raved as they scanned new skies, nothing must be impossible.

The computers ran for ten hours on the screens, while Wilbur studied and fumed and paced and drank coffee. The subjects would now all have come out of anesthesia, and would now be studying and observing the multitude of apparatus in the lab. Within it, I had been told, there was operating a demonstration of almost every major scientific phenomenon. The sensitized ones had been briefed to the limit, short of data which it was thought might stultify their world view. We could only wait now.

A red light glowed on the aleph-sub-nine, and data began pouring in. Wilbur threw himself into the operator's chair, and began chiding the immense computer, intuitively help-

ing it arrange the data into some sort of language which might mean something to man. His face burned with concentration.

Near the end of the four hour shift he looked at the machine oddly and tried another system of organization. Then he triggered his secretary. The machine, which had responded to his winking-blinking notes, fed back the information in binary code in his earphones.

He sat back and closed his eyes for a few moments. Then he opened them and took up the microphone. "Communications established. They're intelligible," he said. And then, in a lower voice, "I've seen that structure somewhere before. . . ."

The cheers in the room blotted out anything further. Contact established, and the response was not gibberish! Well, never mind what it meant! We'd get that soon enough.

Premature congratulations? Well, perhaps. Remember the satellite shots, with a rocket roaring up on it's own fire, swimming right into the calculated orbit, ejecting its satellite, and the little moon's radios bursting into life. *That* was when everyone cheered! Not six months later, when the miles of telemeter tape had been studied and re-studied and been given meaning by sweat and genius. Nor did most people feel very bad when the scientists figured out that someone had forgotten to pull the safety tabs from the quick-releases, so all the instruments were shielded and their data meaningless. . . .

The actual results of Project Round-Square took eleven months to evaluate and declassify. They came out, nicely distorted, in a copy of the "Virgin Tease" the V.R.C. mailed to me. . . .

Biologically, it was an unqualified success. The sensitized subjects had broken through to a whole new world of feeling. In physical terms, they were quasi-Gods, for they could sense things we would never know. It was more than a widening; new colors and smells. They could sense forces and radiations and bodies all forms of which are ignored by men.

But as to actual purpose of the project. . . .

The sensitives had been given what seemed to be an insoluable problem—eliminating contradiction in a world that required it in any rational description. The ingenuity of the

human mind, the directors of Virgin Research, had thought, might solve the problem, where the pure logic of machines had failed.

Well, they had solved it, in a way.

Wilbur had been right. The Hopi Indians, independently, had evolved a crude version of the sensitives' solution. The Hopi language did not allow for the complex tenses of the Indo-European tongues. All time and space to them was a single frozen matrix of vents, in which the word "perhaps" had no equivalent, and the notion of "possible" and "impossible" was meaningless.

To ask, in Hopi, if it might rain tomorrow, was as meaningless as to ask if it was possible it had rained yesterday.

To the sensitives, that thing had "roundness" and this one had "squareness." Could there be such a thing as a round-square?

Perhaps, in the forever-fixed future. When it made its appearance, they would tell you. Meanwhile, it's meaningless to think about such things.

The semanticists were the only satisfied ones.

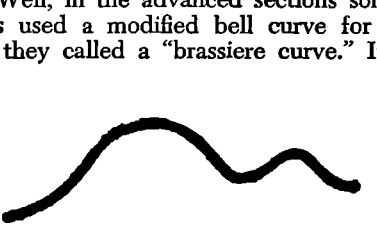
But this was only announced a year later. Not soon enough to save Harry Mandel, who was relieved of a multi-linear annihilator, fifty yards from the sensitives lab. He'd slugged a guard and escaped from the *Topaz*. I understand he's in a security ward somewhere, still talking about his buddies, while they watch him very carefully.

Dick Colby shrugged and grinned and had a drink or four with me at the celebration, then caught the evening ramjet back to Michigan Multi.

I collected my pay, scooter, and recommendations. Then, on the evening of the last day, I took a long look out across the desert. The sun was smouldering down into a pile of rust, the earth a great flat plum. By coincidence the girl that had assigned us our quarters was out on the desert too, but quite a ways away. I could see she was pregnant, and that was interesting to think about, and so I thought about it. I get a nice feeling when I see a woman with a child, if I have time for it—warmth, continuity for the race, the safe days of my

very young childhood, though I can hardly remember any of them. There certainly were enough signs of it; she was well along.

I got a funny cold feeling. It was a tangential association, a silly one: what the boys used to call a "brassiere curve" in the rapids. You know what an ordinary bell curve looks like? Well, a lot of teachers use it for marking—most of the grades falling at C. Well, in the advanced sections some guys said the professors used a modified bell curve for figuring out grades—what they called a "brassiere curve." It looked like this;



—and jammed up inside the little hump, good and tight near the B plus, A minus grades, was the little gang of teen-age hotshots—and me.

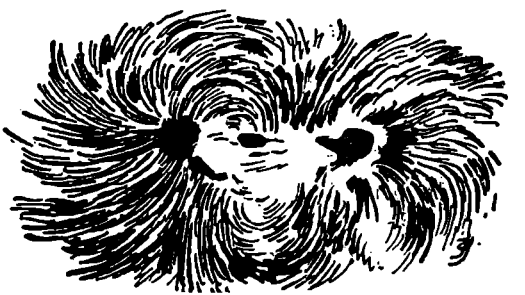
The cold expanded into my chest, numbing. I could look at the sunset, and the blonde and her baby, and the labs and drafting boys and offices and all of it, and not feel anything at all. Everything was impersonal, like a diagram in a text.

An hour later I caught the G.E.M. *Emerald* back to my own multiversity. Classes wouldn't be starting for a while, but I'd figured out from the summer session catalogue that I could fit in a three week intensive reading course in Chinese in the meantime. Chinese is the new "in" language for Ph.D's, like the way Russian used to be twenty years ago. It was pretty certain we'd be fighting them soon.

I figured I could fit in at least two "military application" courses into my fall program. Under the Rickover Plan I could get them tuition-exempt. What else could I do? I could use the money to pay for more programing. Computer operators are in short supply, and I would be sure of a fat income. I could be safe, nothing to worry about. Maybe I could get Virgin Research, or even the D.O.D. itself, to pay for more

math and science courses. I could plan it all out, interesting problems to work on the rest of my life, and get the government to pay for them. Wouldn't that be clever?

Shut up, shut up, shut up.



A NICHE IN TIME

BY WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

IT HAD to be a painter this time. My kind of painter.

I've catholic taste, but a natural bias. Music, literature, poetry, the theater, sculpture, architecture: all stairways for my spirit. All tracks up the slopes of Parnassus.

Yet to me the crest meant just one thing: a certain masterly arrangement of colors and of light and shade, bringing blazing exaltation.

It had to be Van Gogh.

Concerning others there was usually doubt about the right Moment to choose. Vincent's Moment for me, personally, was the painting of his masterpiece, "The Yellow House." For my employer, the University, Department of History, sub-department A.E. (Active Encouragement), the Moment was in the Borinage, during Van Gogh's period of greatest early discouragement. The Church Council had declared he was a most unsatisfactory preacher, and flung him out.

He didn't know which way to turn. So I visited him.

Shortly afterwards, he wrote to his brother, Theo: "I decided to take up my pencil and start drawing again, and from that moment everything looked different."

He was twenty-seven then.

I had been the man of that "moment," which it's my job to be: I am a Visitor.

It's a responsible job, and the strain of saying the right thing at the right time can be wearing on the nerves. So the

University, which is sometimes understanding—but often not—allows me the odd trip now and then purely for relaxation. A little holiday.

This holiday I wanted to see a painter. My kind of painter. I chose to revisit Vincent eight years after the Borinage—eight years of *his* time, of course. On a day when the paint on the canvas of "The Yellow House" was still wet. . . .

In my excitement I miscalculated, and instead of the tree-sheltered park set the chronocab plumb in the center of the lawn in Place Lamartine. But no one was around to witness me stepping out of nothingness. I was in costume, as always. This time masquerading as a French agricultural laborer, with walnut juice brown-staining my face and arms.

One must never excite the attention of the populace.

There it stood, on the corner. The yellow house itself, with its green door. The sun drenched it, but the yellow was hard, lacking the honeyed warmth from Vincent's brush. The sky above it was pure cobalt, lacking the magic ingredient of black Vincent had worked into *his* sky. It takes a master painter to gild Nature.

Beyond, on the right, the glamorous *Café de Nuit*—dusty, crumbling, prosaic in plain daylight. Also, the two railroad bridges, and just crossing the nearer—a timely gift from Time!—a slow, slug-black, smoky train.

Wide open to every precious nuance of awareness, I lounged across the brown grass.

This time it wasn't necessary to explain that I was a Visitor. It's never easy to do, and it was nice to be able to relax. Vincent Van Gogh still had two more years—the terrible years—to live, and there was nothing I could do about that. His disease was already deep-rooted in his brain.

My French was far better than his, and he accepted me as a Frenchman. An odd type, admittedly: a laborer who knew something about the technique of painting. But Vincent was already dwelling in a fantasy world, and I became merely part of it to him.

On my first visit it had been more difficult. He had been

let down badly. He was suspicious: thought I was an agent of the Evangelist Committee. I was a pretty good linguist, even then, but Dutch wasn't my strong suit. He'd been teaching—and preaching—in England, so we got by in English that time.

And that time I took him back to England—in the chronocab.

London in midwinter, 1948. A dark gray day by the dark gray Thames. There was an endless drizzle from a sky of mud. We arrived behind a telephone booth—its red was the only visible splash of color—on a side street.

I led him around the corner, and there on the sidewalk, patient in the rain, was a line of more than a thousand people. Slowly, they were shuffling into the Tate Gallery. And as the big building swallowed the head of the line, so others joined the tail, keeping the line at a constant length.

"That," I told him, "has been going on all day. It went on all yesterday. So it will go on, day after day. A thousand people an hour, every hour. All records for attendance at an art exhibition have already been smashed. These people, weary after a long war, are starved of sunshine and color. They flock here to feast their souls on the work of one great artist."

"Rembrandt?" he guessed, innocently, watching the traffic on the street with a wondering but wary eye. It was thin today, but I had warned him of it.

"No. You—Vincent Van Gogh."

He was stunned, and had no words. Those wild pale-blue eyes rolled more wildly. I feared he would have one of his fits, but his shaking was only excitement at this evidence of his unbelievable success.

We stood in line, so that presently he could see for himself the blazing sunflowers and orchards of the future in his style of the future. . . .

And now, in that future of his, in Arles, on my second visit, I stood with him again, looking at some of those very same paintings: unhung, unwanted, unbought.

The thick paint of "The Yellow House" was damp as toothpaste on the canvas: he'd just brought it in from the square. I could have left my thumb print on it for posterity—theoretically.

I savored this historical Moment.

I pictured this little house when the mistral howled around it, setting the windows rattling, the doors banging, and Vincent's super-sensitive nerves on edge.

I looked at the mess of dropped paint on the floor and the splashes on the walls. Soon Vincent would clean that up and whitewash the walls. For his hero, Gauguin, was coming to stay.

And one day, during Gauguin's stay, the red-tiled floor would become redder yet, with Vincent's blood, and all the splashes on the walls would be crimson.

I glanced at his right ear, and felt again the old awe of Nemesis. Effectively, the chronocab was like a fly buzzing across the path of a runaway truck.

Maybe the universe is mad. If so the most you can do is try to give people courage to face it.

If ever a man needed encouragement, Vincent did. Pick a moment at random in his life and you could reasonably call it the Moment. Here and now in Arles, for instance. He still hadn't sold a single painting. He was to sell only one in his life, and that for under four hundred francs.

Would it help if I told him that in Paris, in 1957, just one of his paintings would be sold for the equivalent of two hundred fifty thousand of those same francs? And at that period his total output was to be valued at thirty million francs? He needed money and food *now*. More likely it would embitter him to learn that art dealers, of the same ignorant breed that had spurned him all his life, would make fortunes from him when he was dead.

So I didn't tell him.

In any case, this time I had no authority to back such a statement. The first time, I revealed my identity and proved it by demonstration. Then, my mission completed, electronically erased the traces of it, which was standard procedure.

This time I was just Francois, an appreciative peasant, who wanted to learn about technique from an obvious master.

As I hoped, lonely Vincent, deprived of communication on the subject, except in letters to Theo, was eager to expound.

Finally, he settled on the bed, smoking and talking nonstop. While I sat on the rush-seated chair he was to make so famous, drinking his words in. My hero, the genius who it had been my privilege to help, explaining himself and his work to me personally, on a warm evening in Arles, far away in time and space. . . .

It was unforgettable. Nevertheless, I dutifully transcribed it from the tape directly I returned. It was practically a two-hour monologue.

Would you like to know what Vincent Van Gogh said? You can. Just read on.

My mind is purely that of an artist. It feels its way through a kind of colored fog. It reasons poorly, sees nothing sharp and clear in black and white. Mathematics has always baffled it. It can't grasp scientific technicalities. It merely apprehends form, tone, shades. . . .

How was such a vague person as myself appointed a Visitor? Well, of course, I'm restricted to the Arts, just as my colleague, Blum, is confined to the Sciences. Sometimes I envy him his keen, precise mind. His task is to encourage the scientific geniuses at times when superstition, incredulity, or prejudice are stiffling their creativity.

At least, he can offer a logical explanation of how past, present, and future are not merely interdependent but an immutable whole. And how an as yet unborn man can put his oar into some current human situation and add his pennyweight of influence to the scale-pan when a despairing creator is wavering between renewing the struggle or giving it up altogether.

When my particular nurslings of immortality ask me to explain the apparent time paradox, I begin to stammer. I fall back on insisting: "Well, it *is* so. For here I am. For further

proof, I'll take you through time to my world, which is your world also: for you have conquered it."

Once, of course, they've tasted future—and often posthumous—fame, they never revive the argument. It might spoil the dream. When they've seen their paintings or sculptures in the Louvre, heard audiences cheering their operas or plays, handled many editions of their books in libraries, they're reborn.

The surly Beethoven, for instance, bitter through neglect, anxious about his growing deafness. Following the visit to Carnegie Hall he was as benign and joyous as his own Pastoral Symphony. It was the joy of faith vindicated.

Another paradox. Man is never without faith. He always believes. If a man says he has lost his faith, he yet has faith —in his belief that he has lost his faith. All the same, this loss of faith can cause spiritual stasis. It's a whirlpool trap for a man's soul, which could circle pointlessly until he dies.

I explained to Ludwig von Beethoven that it was a Visitor's job to throw a line to such trapped souls.

He said, typically: "I am not the only one. I know of friends—"

"I cannot help your friends," I said. "Even if I tried to, I couldn't give them what fate has denied them. They have talent, not genius. Experience has shown that genius responds, talent does not. I can do nothing for them."

This led to a discussion on the nature of genius.

Beethoven's view was. . . .

You can learn Beethoven's view on genius. And it will cost you nothing. Read on.

Analyze the most magical lines in poetry and you'll find they're evocative of the inexorable passage of Time.

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near.

Or:

Brightness falls from the air,
Queens have died young and fair,
Dust hath closed Helen's eye.

Or:

Nymphs and shepherds, dance no more. (A line which always moved Housman to tears.)

Shakespeare, of course, was the most Time-conscious of them all. He refers variously to Time as: "The clocksetter, that bald sexton . . . That old common arbitrator . . . A whirligig . . . A fashionable host . . . The king of men . . . Eater of youth . . . A great-sized monster of ingratitudes . . . Envious and calumniating Time."

And bids us: *See the minutes, how they run.*

And asks:

What strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?

And:

But wherefore do not you a mightier way
Make war upon this bloody tyrant, Time?

And declares:

Time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.

His Sonnets are one long defiance of "Devouring Time." Constantly he repeats that, although Time will devour him, his lines will defeat Time.

Not marble nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme.

Which leads to a mystery. After his retirement to Stratford he made no attempt to publish any of his plays. After his death, they would have been lost forever had not a couple of his friends collated some old prompt copies.

Was Shakespeare finally resigned to the inevitable victory of Time? Or was he just thumbing his nose at it?

I wanted to visit him in his retirement and solve this mystery. Some day I shall.

I must hear that beautiful, gentle voice again, speaking his lines with that fascinating Warwickshire accent he never lost. Men have wondered that, reputedly, in his manuscripts, "he never blotted a line." Of course not. He was an actor. It was his practice to speak his lines aloud many times until they *sounded* right. Then it was merely a clerical job to write them

down. So naturally, as Heminge and Condell remarked: "His mind and hand went together."

I would have thought that his Moment for A.E. treatment was fairly late in life. Say, when in bitter despair at human ingratitude, he wrote the searing "Timon of Athens." But the departmental heads held that it lay somewhere in the Sonnet period, when he was in distress over his capricious rejection by the Dark Lady.

Maybe they were right. Anyhow, I visited him officially then.

The mysterious Dark Lady was certainly a *femme fatale.* There was poor Fortesque who, because of her, jumped from Old London Bridge. . . .

She was . . .

Perhaps you know who she was. Again, perhaps, like those who strove for four centuries to uncover her identity, you are still in the dark. You need be no longer. On the last page of this brochure you will find the key enabling you to unlock not only her mystery, but also many other mysteries of history.

It was the night of March 3, 1875, the premiere of "Carmen" at the Opéra Comique in Paris.

The audience was ice-cold. It didn't understand the opera, so it was bored. The curtain came down to a snakepit chorus of hissing.

There was a well-known report, repeated by Bruneau, that Bizet walked the streets of Paris till dawn next day, hysterical with shame and despair. Later, Halévy testified that such was not the case. That after the show Bizet returned with him to their lodgings. That was so. I know. I walked behind them.

In some ways, this was the strangest of all my missions. Doomed to failure, yet it was written that I had to try.

The whole point of life is that we all have to try.

What I shall never quite understand is how encouragement given *after* a work is created can assist its creation. Blum tells me I must cease to think of time one-dimensionally,

as a continuous line. I should picture it three-dimensionally. Say, as a cube.

A man's conscious mind moves from point to point over the surfaces of the cube. But his subconscious mind moves below those surfaces, darting around like a firefly within the cube. It can touch points of time anywhere on the cube long before conscious attention does.

Not that this is any new discovery. In the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries experimenters confirmed the phenomenon of pre-cognition clearly enough.

Anyhow, the fact remains that the subconscious is aware of the Moment of Active Encouragement, and it's immaterial whether that Moment lies in the conscious future or past. For it is from the subconscious that all creation proceeds.

Bizet was alone in his room when I called in the small hours. He was still fully dressed, sitting at a table with a bottle of champagne, and a half-full glass before him. He'd drunk only a little and was quite sober.

His face was impassive—and haunts me still. He had just received a mortal blow, but his self-control was almost superhuman. I respect him as a man perhaps more than any other man I've met, past or present. I've painted his portrait from memory. It depicts merely a fair-haired, fair-bearded man who looks thoughtful and—nice. (That unsatisfactory, and yet the only satisfactory, word.)

I've failed to capture, in paint, the essence of Georges Bizet. I shall try again.

I introduced myself and explained my presence. He seemed to believe me without proof, almost as though he were expecting me.

I told him: "In 1880 Tchaikovsky will publicly predict that within a decade 'Carmen' will become the most popular opera in the world. I'm glad to assure you that he will be perfectly right."

He smiled and poured me a glass of champagne.

"Let's drink to Tchaikovsky, then."

"No," I said, raising my glass, "to Bizet."

"Thank you. You are the only man to toast me tonight. At

this moment, all the critics are busily ripping 'Carmen' to shreds with their pen-nibs."

"Critics! On the rare occasions when their verdicts are unanimous, their reasons for giving them are totally different. Ignore them. You didn't write 'Carmen' for them. You wrote it for the people."

He sipped at his glass.

"That is true. And the people have rejected it."

"Come," I said, rising, "we'll go to the opera. I'll take you into 1905, and the night of the thousandth performance of 'Carmen.' "

He remained seated. "No, Monsieur Everard. The next generation is not my concern. I shall not live to know those people. I wrote for *this* generation, my fellow human beings. I have failed them."

"Nonsense! *They* have failed you."

"We've both failed—to communicate. And now something has broken in here."

He tapped his chest.

In three months—at only thirty-seven—he was dead. Of heart disease, the doctor said—though Bizet had shown no symptom of it before. Bizet's friends said yes, it was heart trouble: a broken heart.

It is true that when a man's spiritual mainspring breaks, it's beyond repair. The best that one can do is face the situation with calmness and courage. Bizet did just that. I shall always envy him his maturity.

There were other composers, too, of course, who died even younger, neglected "failures." The poverty-stricken Mozart, for one: he was buried in a pauper's grave. And the equally poor Schubert, for another, deeply frustrated in his love life also. Jon Everard met them both. His descriptions of those meetings will move you profoundly.

Vincent Van Gogh and I are totally dissimilar in style, although I owe so much to him. If there is a distinct Everard style, then I have achieved it in my "Calvary." The version on

my studio wall is actually my third attempt: I destroyed the others.

Strange how people who have admired it all assumed it to have come solely from my imagination. In fact, all three were painted in the neighborhood of Golgotha, and depicted the actual scene at the actual time.

Three crosses on a distant hill against a stormy sky . . .

Why didn't I approach nearer? I tried to, but something barred me each time. Possibly my own awe. Possibly some influence I don't understand.

Earlier, with the innocent daring of youth, I sometimes wondered whether I could possibly be intended to serve as a humble instrument in the Second Coming . . .

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When he had finished reading the shiny brochure, Jon Everard pursed his lips and laid it on his desk.

He looked at the Visitor, who eagerly and a little nervously awaited his comment.

"An ill-judged selection, I'm afraid, Mr. Bernstein. Certainly not the best of my passages, and the balance is poor. And that cheapjack get-the-customer-hooked gimmick is deplorable."

Bernstein looked crestfallen.

"Of course, some of the advertising copywriters do tend to lack taste, Mr. Everard. But their job is to sell the book to the widest possible public. They have to set their sights low . . . But that wasn't very tactful, was it? I'm making a mess of

this. I thought bringing that brochure was a good idea. It would show you at a glance that you would become the most famous and popular diarist since Pepys. Maybe I should have brought one of the tooled leather editions—"

"No, it's all right," cut in Everard. "You did well. Forgive my carping. My nerves have been in poor shape lately."

"Yes, I know. I must be your greatest fan, Mr. Everard. I know your Journal almost by heart. I can tell from the tone that around this period you had a bout of nervous depression, although you didn't record it in so many words."

"It showed, huh?"

"It seemed to me you'd gotten in the way of measuring yourself against these great men you were meeting, to your own detriment. You were losing the sense of your own worth. That's why I picked on this period to come back and show you that, probably quite unconsciously, you were writing a masterpiece. None of your successors has accomplished anything like it. I know I'll never be able to touch it, though I do keep a Journal. I'm still green at the job. Frankly, I hoped to pick up a few personal tips from you, as you did from Van Gogh."

"This visit is one of your holiday choices?"

"Yes. The very first. The University doubted you needed encouragement, and refused to sanction an official journey. You know what these things cost. There's always trouble over expense."

Jon Everard nodded. "Then I shan't make the account any heavier for you by insisting on going for a peek-a-boo at your world. Sounds like the same old world, anyhow. Thanks for calling, Mr. Bernstein."

Bernstein unhappily felt he was being dismissed. He hesitated.

Everard read his thoughts, and smiled kindly at him.

"I'd like to be able to help you, but nothing I could say would be of any practical use to you. It's such a personal kind of job that everyone's approach is bound to be different, according to their nature. Experience is the only teacher. So concentrate on developing into the first Bernstein rather than

a second Everard. If it'll increase your confidence, I'll tell you this: in all my travels I never had a cold welcome . . . What's the reading on your chronometer?"

Bernstein started, then inspected a dial on his tape recorder.

"Twenty-one minutes, thirty-five seconds."

"Play safe and set a round twenty-five on your Eraser," Everard advised.

Bernstein fumbled in his jacket pocket. Then he flushed.

"I really am a fool. I've forgotten to bring it. I was so eager to meet you, came away in a rush . . . Now I'll have to go back and get it."

"And add another fifteen thousand to the account?"

"Closer to forty thousand these days—that is, in *my* days," said Bernstein, gloomily. "The Governors will be mad at me for making a costly boob like this, especially on a privilege trip. Nevertheless, even if they fire me, I shall never regret making this trip."

"They need never know about it," smiled Everard. "You can use my Eraser."

He went across to his chronocabinet. It looked like a telephone booth in the corner. It was meant to look as ordinary as that, to avoid arousing curiosity. For Jon Everard was the first official Visitor, and at this time his reports were on the Restricted List.

He pulled the door open and patted a leather holster fixed to its inner side.

"Here's one tip, anyhow. Keep your Eraser stowed in the chronocab itself. Then you can't very well leave it behind."

"Thanks, I'll do that, Mr. Everard."

Everard pulled the pistol-shaped Eraser from the holster. The dial in its butt gleamed as it caught the light. He turned a knurled knob to set the pointer.

"Twenty-five minutes." He handed the instrument to Bernstein.

Bernstein checked. "Right."

Everard returned to his desk, settled back comfortably in his chair.

"It must be a relief for you to skip the explanation this one time," he said. "I always find that a tough chore. Sometimes they're a little afraid in case I'm going to kill them. Make sure you replace that Eraser in my chronocab—don't stick it in your pocket and take it with you. O.K., I'm relaxed now. Fire when ready."

He closed his eyes with a kind of deliberate finality.

Bernstein thought: he doesn't want to see me any more. Maybe *he* never had a cold welcome, but I've had warmer ones than this. Not even a good-by handshake. I tell him he's my idol—and it doesn't mean a thing. He's decent enough, sure—but I thought we'd have such a lot to talk about. Thought I'd be here all day. Twenty-five minutes!"

He walked behind Everard's chair, pressed the point of the Eraser against the nape of Everard's neck, thumbed the button.

The force-field of an Eraser sets up a block in the prefrontal area of the brain, eliminating the neuron paths consciously recorded within any set period. The subconscious retains the relevant memories but they can never re-emerge into consciousness: the bridges are down.

There was no visible reaction from Everard, but that was normal. Mental numbness usually persisted for three or four minutes after the shock. An artist, say, would awaken on his studio couch and imagine he'd merely fallen asleep. Whether he had been robbed of a few hours of his working life by sleep or by an Eraser made no odds. His dream life, at any rate, had been enriched, and his work is an embodied dream.

Bernstein pocketed the brochure, then glanced out of the window at the sea in sunlight. He had visualized himself strolling along its margin with his old hero, discussing life and what makes a man great, until those western waters were blood-tinged by the sunset. But sundown was way off, and he must leave Everard and his world, to meet him again only on familiar printed pages.

He sighed, taking a farewell look at the calm, still face.

Then he went into the corner by the tall bookcase—and disappeared. It was as though he had stepped through an invisible door into another dimension. And, indeed, this was what happened. For an invisible projection of his own chronocabinet was located there.

Five seconds later, he re-appeared, flushed and chagrined. He blundered across to Everard's solidly visible chronocabinet, and thrust the Eraser back in its holster. Sentimental mooning, destroying my concentration, will lose me this job yet, he chided himself.

A faint, unobserved smile touched Everard's lips, and was gone.

And then Bernstein, back in his own chronocabinet, was gone also. Everard, waiting for it, had heard the faint rising hum end abruptly with a snap, like a breaking violin string.

He opened his eyes, but no amusement lingered in them. They were sad. He ran his fingers through his hair, then rested his elbows on his desk and brooded.

He had boobed over the Eraser, too. Its battery was flat, and he had intended to replace it before his next trip. But, until Bernstein had attempted to use it on him, he'd forgotten that.

Why, then, had he shammed unconsciousness?

Why hadn't he simply apologized, and replaced the battery?

Pride, covering up that the great Jon Everard, famed as a perfectionist, could make elementary mistakes like a tyro—like Bernstein?

Consideration—to spare the young man further embarrassment?

Opportunism—to make use of foreknowledge?

Egotism—to be able to gloat over his coming election to the Hall of Fame?

No, none of those reasons. They were absurd. For he would be happier minus the memories of the past twenty-five minutes. Fame he desired, and fame would be his—but for the

wrong reason. His life-long ambition had been to become a great painter. He had poured his soul into his painting.

But Bernstein had made no mention of Everard, the painter. Neither had the brochure. Therefore, his work could have left no great impression. He had failed and was doomed to fail.

And he hadn't the guts of Georges Bizet.

As he brooded, he gradually began to understand why he had chosen to stay conscious. Bernstein's visit had succeeded only in imbuing him with a sense of failure and inadequacy. If the Eraser had functioned, it would have left his subconscious mind filled with discouragement, the reverse of what Bernstein had intended. And he would never know why he felt that way.

The instinct for self-preservation had induced him to play possum.

Self-awareness meant that he wasn't chained in bondage to his subconscious. He still had the power of choice. He must try for Bizet's kind of courage, and accept the situation as philosophically as the Frenchman did.

And that same self-awareness told him that there was one great difference: *nothing had broken inside him.*

He must simply learn to adjust. He must learn to exchange the brush for the pen, and become another kind of artist.

He picked up his pen and opened his Journal. He had not yet finished the account of his meeting with Georges Bizet.

He wrote: *The whole point of life is that we all have to try.*

He paused, remembering the words. That brochure was helping him, after all. Yet . . . it was fated, too. The future supported the past just as much as the past supported the future. Cause and effect were like two balancing sides of a Gothic arch. It was nonsense to pretend one came "first."

Yet he still had the power of choice. It made it no less a choice because his future self made that choice.

Time was an edifice, all of a piece, like some vast cathedral, architecturally perfect. Arch beyond arch, myriads of interlocking arches . . .

Soon, he told himself, I must visit an architect. Say, Christopher Wren, when the Commissioners for rebuilding London after the Great Fire were doing all they could to thwart his plans for completing St. Paul's Cathedral . . .

SEA WRACK

BY EDWARD JESBY

GRETA HIJUKAWA-ROSEN sat on the beach watching her escort maneuver a compression hover board above the waters of the Mediterranean. He stood on the small round platform, balancing it a few inches above the spilling tops of the wind-driven waves with small movements of his legs. The board operated on the power sent to it from the antennae above the chateau, but he operated on his own.

"Viterrible," Greta thought, stretching to lift the underside of her small breasts to the full heat of the sun. She giggled, wondering what her sisters would think of her use of a commercial word, and then shrugged and looked at her own golden tan comparing it to her escort's dark color. Abuwolowo was humus brown. "Deep as leaf mold," she said speaking aloud, and stood up to watch him lift the thin platform to its maximum altitude of six or seven meters. His figure rapidly diminished in size as he sent it wobbling in gull-like swoops out over the Mediterranean. Ultimately it was boring, she decided, there was no real danger. He had a caller fitted into his swim belt, and if he fell into the water the board he rode on would save him, diving into the water and lifting him to safety. Now he was very far out, and all that was visible above the wave tops was the black bobbing ball of his head.

"I suppose I should have a feeling of loss." There was contempt in her voice, and it came from her knowledge that all she knew of loss was what she had read about in a recent

television seminar on great books, but she gasped, losing reality, when she saw the head in close to the beach.

Looking desperately for her binocular lorgnette she asked, "Abuwolowo?" in a shout, but the head was white, and not merely the color of untanned skin, but a flat artificial white, like the marble statues in the garden of the summer home. Now, to her further horror, the rest of the apparition appeared out of the shallows. Above the blue sea, silhouetted against the paler sky, was a black figure with a dead white head. It staggered through the chopping waves with efforts to lift its legs free. When the creature succeeded in lifting its feet clear she was reassured. It was wearing swim fins, and she ran forward to help.

After she had gotten her hand onto the large soft arm she asked, "Are you all right?" The man nodded and kindly leaned a bit of his weight onto her. She was thankful, the figure stood a foot above her six foot three inch height, and its shoulders were broader than Abuwolowo's Nigerian span.

Firmly enscounced on the sand the man made a magician's pass at his neck and lifted the covering away from his face. He shot a quick look at the sky with black eyes that filled huge sockets and said, "Bright." He looked down at the sand, and after a few stertorous breaths spoke. "Thank you," he paused reaching into his armpit, and continued, "Basker hit me out there."

Breathing more easily he was easy to understand. The liquid mumbling of his first words had disappeared, and he looked directly at her. "Pretty," he said, "Pretty deserves an explanation. A basker drove me into the bottom. Something scared it from in the air and it dove."

"Basker?" she asked, wanting to hear the strange soft cadences of the voice that issued from the round head with its huge eyes.

"Basking shark," he said, "lying on the surface and it dove. I had no time to signal or to warn." He fell forward, breathing easily, but she saw blood welling from a cut on his back as he slumped onto his knees. "Excuse," he mouthed, when she gave a small touched cry. There was a long gash traver-

sing his back from the left shoulder blade to his waist at his right side, and the rubbery material of his suit had rolled back and pulled the wound open. She tried to lift him, but his weight was too great, and all she succeeded in doing was to push him over into the sand. She straddled him and pulled at his long thick arm, trying to turn him over, but that too was impossible. Flat as he looked spread out on the sand, with long thin legs and a midsection that had no depth, he was still enormously heavy. She jumped away from him and looked out into the sea. Abuwolowo was coming in toward the shore and she frantically waved and shouted, throwing her long pigtail and the points of her body in spastic jerks until he rode his board up onto the beach. "There's a man hurt here," she said, turning her back to him until the sand blasting up from the vehicle's air jets had subsided.

"Man?" Abuwolowo questioned, but he heaved at the collapsed figure. "He's as heavy as a whale. It's no use, I'll go up to the house and get help." He ran off in long loping strides that brought him to the elevator in the cliff with an instantaneous violation of distance that was dreamlike. She stayed to watch her charge, fascinated by the long breaths he took. Easy inhalations that moved down his length in a wave from his chest to midriff in a series that seemed to never stop. One breath starting before the other had finished.

She waited silently, forgoing her usual monkey chatter to herself, eschewing fashion in the presence of the impassive white straw colored hair, whose only life showed in the delicate flutter of petal nostrils. Finally, after no time had passed for her, Abuwolowo returned with four of the servants, strong squat men from neighboring Aegean islands. Puffing, their legs bowed under the weight, they half carried, half dragged the wounded man to the elevator and folded him into it under Abuwolowo's direction. Abuwolowo climbed over him, and braced between the walls, walked up the sides of the car until he was perched above the body. He held the up button down with a strong toe, the doors closed, and the elevator whirred invisibly away.

Greta had prepared for dinner, dressing and making her

face up with unusual care, and was coming down the great ramp that swept into the entrance hall when she heard her brother-in-law talking to some of the guests. She stopped, amused, he was not really talking, but lecturing in a voice that his Kirghiz accent made even more didactic than he intended.

"Amazing," he was saying, "the recuperative powers they have. After we had gotten him off the kitchen truck, and onto the largest reclining ottoman in the casual room, he sat right up. He smiled at me. He stretched." Her brother-in-law paused, either overcome with amazement or staring down someone who appeared to be about to interrupt. "As I was saying," he went on in measured periods, "he stretched."

Greta could not resist her chance, she slipped down the ramp, and crossed to the speaker. "He stretched, and then what?"

Hauptman-Everetsky gave her the limited courtesy of his chill smile. "He stretched, and his water suit opened up and came off like a banana skin. He checked under his arm, the gill slit, you know, and climbed off the ottoman. He ignored me and turned around, and the cut was healed. There was only a thin line to show where it had been."

Greta moved away, not waiting to hear the inevitable repetition and embellishments her brother-in-law would give to his reactions. She passed through the archway that led to the casual room, undisturbed by the slight malfunction of the pressure curtain that allowed a current of air to lift the hem of her long skirt.

The man from the sea was standing in front of the panoramic glass watching the slow turning of the sights from the islands perimeter. A passing flow of scenery that was magnified and diminished by the tastes programed into the machine. Just at this moment it was dwelling on the lights of the skyscrapers of Salonika. He was engrossed, but her cousin Rolf was questioning him with his usual inquisitiveness. Dwarfed by the figure next to him he blurted questions in his fluting high American tones.

The question she heard as she approached was, "And you

came all that way?" Rolf's voice did not hold disbelief, it held pleasure, a childish love for a reaccounting of adventure.

"Surely," the huge man said, "I have said it. I came from outside Stavangafjiord. I was following an earth current. I hoped it might teach me something about the halibut's breeding. But I felt that was foolish, and so I hunted down the coast until I came to here." He turned back to the glass to catch the artistic dwindling of the city as the machine withdrew his view to a great height. "And," he said, coming politely back to his interrogator, "and the dolphins told me, when they were racing off Normandy, that the waters here were warm, and," he paused, noticing Greta, "and the women beautiful, with yellow hair, and brown limbs."

Greta nodded. "You're very kind. But I do not have your name."

"Gunnar Bjornstrom-Cousteau, of the dome Walshavn." He bowed, and she noticed how curious he looked covered by evening clothes. The short open jacket that barely reached the stretch tights exposed the rectangular expanse of his chest, a smooth fall of flesh without muscle definition that made her remember the tallowy layer of fat his wound had exposed. She shuddered, and he asked, "Does my face disturb you?" and for the first time she noticed that his skin was peeling, and there were angry red welts under his chin. "I was careless to take such a long trip without going under the lamps at home first. But then I did not intend to come into the air then. I am not used to the sunlight."

"Into the air?" Rolf was off again, but Greta stopped him.

"Dinner must be ready." She took the stranger's arm. "Will you take me in?" With Rolf tagging along behind, shaking his head, and bouncing every few steps to see if he could bring himself to the sea giant's height, they entered the dining room.

The dining room was at the top of the chateau. It was open on all sides, and protected from the weather by polarized static fields that were all but invisible and brought the stars too plainly close.

"That fish," Hauptman-Everetsky had passed from awe to

condescension, as he answered someone's question, "I could not throw him back like an undersized trout." He gestured, "And it's about time we had some amusement. We are beginning to bore one another."

Greta felt her companion stiffen, and held onto his arm tighter. He bent his head to her, and said, "Do not fear, I will not fall. It is long since I have walked. I must become accustomed to being unsupported by the friendly weight of the water." She noticed that he stressed the word friendly, and remembered that one of the few things she had heard about the underwater people was that they had brought back dueling. In the infinite reaches of the sea the enforcement of organized law was difficult, encounters with the orca and the shark common, and the lessons they taught strong.

Yet her companion was smiling at Everetsky and his circle of friends, shaking hands with him firmly, and appraising the women. "At least I will not be bored," he said staring at her sister Margreta's painted chest. Greta took his arm again, relieved, and glad she had chosen to wear her blue gown that completely covered all of her except her hands and face.

"Are we going to sit down now, Carl?" she said to Everetsky, and he led the way to the table, placing Gunnar at his right and her at his left.

The dinner went smoothly enough at first, the early conversation centered around the futility of investing money in the moon mines, and the necessity of mollifying the government with sums small enough to be economic and yet larger than mere tokens. All of the men from the rich steppes and Russian mountain regions had recommendations: lobbyists to recommend, purveyors of formuli to complain about, and complaining tales of corruption. While Rolf was concluding a story that centered on a bribed official who refused to honor his obligations without further payments that would have nullified the capital payments he had agreed to save, he rediscovered Gunnar's spherical face amid the contrasting ground of the tanned guests with their pointed chins.

"Nasty little fellow he was—dishonest as the day is long."

Rolf stopped. "But you my seaman friend, you don't understand any of this?"

"I," Bjornstrom-Cousteau burbled laughter, "do not understand these problems, but we have our own with the government." He seemed to like Rolf, but he spoke to his host. "They are difficult to explain."

"I suppose so," Abuwolowo spoke, "but tell us anyway."

Gunnar shrugged, and the massive table trembled slightly as he shifted his knees. "They want us to farm more, and hunt less."

"Why not?" Abuwolowo challenged. "In the past my people adjusted to the changing times. They learned to farm and to work in factories."

"Yes." He was quiet for a moment. "I suppose some day we must, but as Hagar the poet sang—"

"Poets." Abuwolowo dismissed them. "We were talking of the government here."

"Hagar said," the sea guest went on inevitable as the tides, pleasurably quoting a beloved line, "The sea change suffered by we; Cannot make the airmen think free." He chanted on, squaring his shoulders to expose more of his pale flesh, "For we have chosen deep being, not the ease of their far seeing." He stopped to stare out into the night with the depthless stare of his great dilated pupils.

Rolf, always jolly, rubbed his hands together, sniffing at the next course. "Ah, domestic venison," he said, changing the subject, cutting Abuwolowo's rejoinder short. "But our new guest doesn't seem to be eating much, and mine host's cook is excellent."

"The food is cooked," Gunnar said, as if it explained everything. It explained too much, and when he caught the expression on Hauptman-Everetsky's face he stood up and excused himself. "I am still tired from healing my hurts. You will excuse me." The last was a statement, not a question, and he left, moving with a tired lagging stride. His powerful body pushed down by the force of unrelieved gravity.

Morning came, and the first thing Greta did was to look

for Gunnar. She had left the dinner party soon after him and started for his room, but Abuwolowo had overtaken her, and she had gone with him. Now she searched the gardens, moving through the regions of climate. She found him in the subtropical section standing in front of a red rubber plant grown to treelike proportions. He was fingering a paddle sized leaf, pressing his finger tips deep into it as he regarded it with slightly parted lips.

"Like meat," he said. "Whale meat," he said smiling at the picture she made coming down the cedar chip path between the walls of greenery. "You look very pretty this morning."

"And you looked like a child when you were touching that plant, with your mouth open as if you wanted to taste it."

"It does look edible," he gave the leaf a last squeeze that pressed liquid out onto his hands. He licked the juice and made a face, and she laughed happily to see the soft corrugations that wrinkled around his head. "Well, it *is* bitter," he said defensively, and reaching out lifted her off her feet and into the tree. "Bite it and see."

Satisfied after she had clicked her teeth several times with mock gusto he set her down again, and she rubbed her sides. Seriously she looked up at him, appraising his bulk. "I was reading about you this morning," she said, looking down with a strained intensity as if performing the unfamiliar task of following lines of print.

"So now I have become famous."

"Oh, no," she said, "in the encyclopedia. It says you are homo aquati—."

"Homo aquaticus, one of the old words." He touched her bare shoulder. "Yes, and one of the better."

"That's it," she said, dwelling on the pronounciation, "homo aquaticus. And a long time ago a man named Cousteau said that you were to be."

"Cousteau."

"Yes," she altered her pronounciation, "Cousteau. A relative?"

"He is dead, and my surname is said the way you pronounced it the first time."

"No matter," she said, "I will show you the grounds now," and she took his arm. She started out chattering to him about the shrubbery, but she soon discovered that it was another subject she knew very little about. He was naturally silent, and her thoughts turned to the things she had found in the encyclopedia. It had said that the first colonies were set up in the Mediterranean. The warm water was perfect for man, and the sudden mistral born storms were no trouble ten fathoms in the sea. The underwater colonies raised sea slugs, and clams, farmed algae and adapted fruits, and hunted the smaller whales with hand weapons. She had read very quickly, scanning down the page in s-curves in her hurry to go and meet him, but womanlike, she did remember some things about human births under the sea. The children were born into the pressures they would live under, fitted with gill mechanisms that took oxygen from the water, and subjected to chemotherapies that prepared them for their lives.

"But why do you live in the cold seas in the north?" she asked. The question was an outgrowth of her thoughts, yet he seemed to know what she meant.

"Because so many of our people live here?" he went on without needing to have an answer. "My greatgrandfather felt the bottoms were becoming too crowded, that the life would become too easy, and so, we left." He swiveled his head to sniff at the sea offering her a view of the seal foldings of his neck. "And now we could not live here at all. We have changed our bodies, and we have learned to love the hunt."

"But you come to the waters off this island."

"I came only for a short hunt. I would have returned very soon."

Further conversation was cut short by the interesting spectacle of wide eyed gardeners dodging into the bushes to avoid their advance. The servants variously crossed themselves, or made the sign of the horns, some of them did both. They knew, if Greta did not, that there was a conflict between the sea peoples and the dwellers on the land. Servants listened to political conversations, but eighteen year old girls of good family were expert in oblivious attention. The garde-

ners had heard from the house staff how the world government in New Kiev, on the Baltic, was demanding more taxes in algae proteins from the independent sea states. Some of the servants' relatives had served in the fleets of small boats equipped with grapple buckets that were sent in punitive expeditions against the algae beds and the sea slug pens. The duty was dangerous, the seamen darted to the surface in spurting pushes from shallows to rocks and overturned boats, they cut the grapple cables, and tied derisive messages to their severed ends. What the raiders did capture was diseased, or of thin stock that had gone to seed.

The servants did not hate the seamen, they feared them as they feared the storms, and rages of nature. They did not respect them as they did their masters: the seamen were unnatural facts of nature. Not to be dealt with except through the practice of the magics that had come back in the few short years of barbarism after the Two Months War.

Gunnar had some idea of what the men who had run away were thinking, but that part of the problem did not concern him. After all, his dome did not farm enough to be involved in the commercial disputes. He looked at Greta. She was still caught up in the uniqueness of the servants' scuttling disappearance.

"It has been a long time since we went into the sea," he said, touching her on the shoulder again, knowing that physical contacts reassured her, "and they do not remember us. We are strangers." She leaned her weight against his side, as soon as he had touched her, he noticed, and she made many movements with her hips and torso, but he attached no significance to her wriggling.

Greta became silent and swayed away from him. She had worked the individual muscles her governesses had trained her to use. Trained in long gymnasium sessions when she was young for the pleasurable obligations of adulthood, she accepted her expertness, and was piqued by his callous indifference. She almost believed that the sea women were more expert, but, on second thought, she disregarded that. Her

instructors, and Abuwolowo, had assured her that she was perfectly trained in the amatory arts.

Hadji Abuwolowo Smyth watched them from a free standing balcony that projected, fingerlike, out over the gardens. "The girl is infatuated with the Fish," he thought. "It is nothing more than his difference." Abuwolowo remembered the long hours of dancing that had trained him. The great factories that his parents managed, and Greta's brother-in-law's desire for new markets for his heavy machinery, and concluded that he had nothing to worry about. He went into the house to have a suppling rubdown to prepare him for the prelunch wrestling.

Every day all the young men but Rolf wrestled for the amusement of the other guests. They fought in a combination of styles, jiu-jitsu coupled with the less dangerous holds of Greco-Roman wrestling. They were full of energy, had little to do, and they passed the time waiting for the day when they would assume the managerial offices their parents held in the automatic factories.

Gunnar and Greta emerged from the tree lined walk as the matches were about to start. Gunnar blinked, and rocked his head as the forenoon heat bit into his sunburn. Halting he made an effort; Greta felt oil under her hand, and saw his skin flex and knead. His pores opened and a smooth layer of clear oil covered his body. He took several more of his curiously peristaltic breaths, and with each one squeezed more protective fluid onto his skin.

"Now," he said, as she let go of him, "We can go on, but first tell me what is happening here."

"They are wrestling," Greta said shortly, either still angry at his unresponsiveness, or caught up in the combat.

They watched Hadji Abuwolowo win the first fight easily. Throwing his opponent with a hip toss and pinning him with a leap. The Nigerian nodded to Greta with a victory grin on his face. "And you Fish," he said, "do you wrestle?"

"Not with you," Gunnar said politely, intending to imply that Smyth was too practiced a hand for his small skill.

"I am not a worthy opponent," Abuwolowo chose to misunderstand him. "Or perhaps you are afraid?"

Gunnar felt Greta's small hand in his back and walked forward onto the sanded turf looming more and more over Abuwolowo as he went. The Nigerian regretted his impetuousness for a split second, but compensated with a bound that was intended to carry him to the seaman's head. The leap was successful, but his ear-grab hold was not. There was nothing to grip. Gunnar's ears were tiny, and set deep into his skull. Their pavilions were vestigal, the auditory canals covered by membranes, and the skin oil slippery. Abuwolowo's planned knee drive spun him over on his back, and he lay spraddled with his ludicrous failure driving his anger. Rolling backward he bounced up once and came down to jump flat through the air with his legs doubled. Just as he straightened to strike his adversary with the full force of his flight, and kicking legs, Gunnar dropped under the trajectory, folding with the flexibility of an eel. Abuwolowo skidded along the ground, and rolled over to rub sand into his hands. He looked up, and found himself looking at Gunnar's back, certain that the man had not moved his feet. It was too much for him, but his urge to kill made him calculating. He stood up and ran, with short hunter's steps, silently to Gunnar's back, and unleashed an axe-like swing at the neck using the full strength of his wide shoulders. The edge of his hand struck and rebounded, but he was gratified to note that he had staggered Gunnar.

"You forget your title, Hadji," Gunnar said in deeper tones than he had used before. Abuwolowo moved forward a shuffling half step and was thrown four or five feet backwards by an open handed slap he did not see start. When he recovered himself, Gunnar was standing stock still waiting. It was too late to go back, and he charged hopelessly. He felt the long flexible arms, as thick at the wrist as the shoulder, reach out to pick him up, but he could do nothing about it, even though they appeared to be moving very slowly. For a minute Gunnar held him in a strangely compassionate embrace, but then threw him into the air straight up. He felt

himself rise, and he floated for a long interval, but when he fell he could remember no more.

Hauptman-Everetsky leaped to his feet and ran forward, but Gunnar was there before him. He knelt by Abuwolowo's side and twisted him in his hands.

"Guards," Everetsky screamed, and fearlessly rushed toward the seaman.

"Stop," Gunnar's words were commanding, either out of their awesome depth, or because of the certainty of knowledge. "He will be all right. His back was hurt, but I have fixed it." These last words were the ones that broke Everetsky's code of hospitality. They were too much like a repairman speaking about a robot toy.

He stammered, peering out of slitted eyes that accentuated his Mongol blood, but Gunnar could only command his control. His first thought was to stop the guards.

"Back, quiet now," Everetsky's diction was irregular, but his pitch was properly adjusted to the command tone of the mastiffs. The dogs, with the metallic crowns of their augmented skulls glittering, turned back and sat in their places under the chateau wall, once more becoming statues. Now that his first duty was accomplished, he could come back to the business of Gunnar.

"Sir," he said, and now his voice was under control, "You have injured one of my guests. That would be permissible, but it is certain to happen again. There is enmity between you and him, and," he paused, to collect himself, "I must be truthful, I do not like your kind myself. I ask you to leave. If you feel yourself insulted I offer you satisfaction."

"You are a brave man," Gunnar said, and with a sudden baring of his teeth. "Well fleshed too, so the spoils might be worth the fight, but your way is not ours. I cannot ask you to sport with me." He showed Everetsky his teeth, opening his lips back to his neck, and dropping the hinges of his jaw. "I would have to ask you into the water so that we could play, and," he asked with icy rhetoric humor, that amused no one but him, "what chance would you take?"

"Thank you," Everetsky said, not holding his contempt,

"but I must nevertheless ask you when you will leave my house."

"I ask your indulgence to wait until tonight when the tide is good." Everetsky nodded, and the seaman turned and walked toward the beach path as if he remembered using it before.

Down on the beach Gunnar studied the water, watching for the signs of the incoming tide: seawrack would soon be tossed up onto the shore, pieces of the sea's jetsam, thrown there to waste away on the cleansing shore. The dead seaweeds, fish and bubbles would soon push ahead of the growing combers to outline the demarcation between his domain and Everetsky's. "Lubber," he said, "you do not understand," and stopped, putting his hand, palm down, flat on the sand. He felt the vibrations of approaching feet.

Two servants appeared carrying his water suit, signaling their trepidation with stiff backs and firm jaws. Behind them came two more servingmen, and a kitchen maid. The bearers put his suit down at his feet, at a distance they thought out of the radius of his arms. They backed off and squatted on their heels to wait for the others to come up, remaining, guardedly watching him, until the woman and her companions reached them.

"Greetings to you," Gunnar said when the woman had come to a halt, spreading her legs to balance the weight of a waist thickened by years of carrying full water jars up steps cut from island rock.

"Greetings," she said, in a Greek dialect as bastardized as the letters that appeared on ancient Scythian coins. She alone observed him with equanimity.

"Speak," he said, viewing a full half circle of the beach and horizon, moving his eyes independently. He knew what was coming, three times now he had performed this rite.

She waddled up to him pointing the forefinger of her left hand at his face. When it touched his closed mouth a rapturous look transformed her thickened features and the Attic awe encompassed her functioning. Obediently he opened his lips, and, with a sharp snap, clipped the end of her finger off.

The nauseating taste of warm blood, and dirty fingernail, filled his mouth, but he swallowed quickly and spoke again.

"I have accepted. Speak."

The woman could not resist looking back at her entourage with triumph, and Gunnar thought, "Poor fellows, now she is a full fledged witch, ugly and to be obeyed in all things." She would have the ultimate power over her fellows. Commands were to be her normal mode of speech. The mere pointing of her maimed hand, a gesture of pollarded horns, could call a man to her bed, or a maid to his; but, more important, it would fuse the serfs into a unit. They would be a group that would respond to the messages of Gunnar's people when the time came. He knew that the inheritors and owners of the earth understood their world very well from its blueprints; but they could not find the switches and valves and all the simple tools to work them.

"Did you speak your true thoughts when you promised to eat the master, Great Fish?"

Gunnar made the obligatory answer. "You have prayed to us."

"Demon of Poiseidon, my people would be saved." She too was familiar with the ritual.

"I am no demon, but a servant," he rose to his feet, and gave the toothy yawn that had impressed Everetsky. "Poiseidon wants more servants who love the sea."

"We will accept."

Gunnar bit a piece of blubber from his forearm and spit it into the cup of her waiting hands. Immediately she kissed it ritually and squirreled it into the dirty fold of her blouse.

"When the appointed time is come I will return." He watched them go, the woman leading, and the men with their heads inclined to the woman.

Gunnar was ashamed of himself, not for his threats to his host and their outcome. He had planned that series of happenings, and, had in fact, played this role many times before. His people could not hope to fight the land dwellers if the war was to be fought on the basis of numbers and equipment. The sea cities were very vunerable, the simplest sort of

guided torpedo could destroy the domes, and economic sanctions would quickly disrupt the lives of the ocean bed farmers and their cities. He was not ashamed of his tactics, but of the unmanly squeamishness which had overtaken him. To feel his stomach turn at the mere taste of human kind. It was true that the heavy starch diet of the airbreathers and the dark cooked meats they ate gave their flesh an unpleasant, alien taste, but it was not so different from the savor of enemies he had killed in the days-long hunting duels in his home-ground.

He stopped his train of thought, and studied the sea with heightened awareness. Wondering what disturbed him would do no good. He knew it would be better to relax, but the strange dislocation of his abilities was still with him. He breathed deeply, sucking great mouthfuls of air, and held them until his chest and diaphram puffed out in a rotund bladder. Slowly he let the air escape through his nostrils, a silent flow of aspiration, until any observer would have noticed the change in his posture. Everything about his body was lax, his legs lay separately on the sand, and his head lolled, but the eyes were alive. They turned in their sockets independently scanning the surface of the sea. It was a look born in the middle twentieth century studies of frogs' nervous systems. There were circuits spliced into the optical nerves that bypassed the brain and fed the sorted visual stimuli back to the eye muscles. Only the significant motions on the surface of the sea were allowed to reach the brain.

After a few seconds of this activity Gunnar's legs twitched, his eyelids drooped, and the eyes themselves seemed to withdraw back into the skull. He brought his knees up, and hugged them, sitting in this childlike posture with a broad grin on his face.

"Hauptman-Everetsky was foolish," he thought as he changed his position to stand, moving in a serpentine flow that ended in a run toward the surf. His last thoughts before he hit the water in a flat dive were of his hunger, and a mental note to come back to the beach to see if his calculations about Greta were correct. He hit near the bottom of a wave

and let the undertow carry him toward the sudden deep just beyond the breakers. Turning in a free somersault he pushed for the boulder-filled bottom and found a current that carried him between the rocks. As he estimated his speed he slowed himself by pressing his heels into the sand, touching at chosen points much like a professional polo player guides his pony with touches of his spurs. When he saw the bathysphere that Everetsky had ordered sunk, he momentarily regretted not wearing his swim fins, but he did not dwell on the thought. It could hold no more than three men, he thought, and swam towards its hatch.

The three guards saw him as soon as he came into the bathysphere's circle of light. They started out the open hatch. Gunnar caught the first man by the scruff of his neck as he came out, but they had expected to use the vanguard as a delay to allow others to come up on him. What they had not allowed for was the simplicity of Gunnar's tactics. He held the man like a kitten and plucked the mouthpiece of his oxygen recirculator out of his face, pointed him toward the bottom, and, with a wide hand spread across his buttocks, pushed him under trampling feet. The second man tried to divert him with a shot from his speargun. Gunnar, feeling foolishly inept for his slowness, ducked and caught it just over his shoulder, and drove the blunt staff into the marksman's solar plexus. He hauled this opponent out by a flopping arm, without time to watch his agonized contortions. The third member of Everetsky's murder party refused to join the combat. Gunnar showed his grinning face at an illuminated port, and disappeared to the top of the sphere. He took the cable ring in his hands and threshing his legs swam the bathysphere over onto its side. With a little adjustment the hatch fitted neatly into the bottom and Gunnar surveyed his handiwork before he swam to the man curled on the bottom with his legs doubled up over his stomach. No matter how he struggled, the man felt himself being drawn straight out. A round face, suspended inches from his mask, gently studied his last reactions.

The beach was deserted when Greta finally escaped from the chateau to look for the seaman. She kicked a puff of sand into the night breeze in exasperation and would have left, but she saw something break out of the water amid the froth of incoming waves. A second later she could see Gunnar's figure wading ashore. He bent and reached under the water, and taking a handful of sand wiped it across his mouth. As he drew closer she could see the flicker of his tongue picking at the crevices in his teeth.

"Hello," she said, not finding anything else to say for the moment, and wrapped her long cloak tighter around her.

"Hello," he said, noticing her shivers. "Come, you are not used to the night air without screens to protect you." He led the way to the shelter of the cliff, and continued, "What are you doing here?"

Greta did not know, except that she was attracted to him, and that he was the first man she could remember feeling anything but familiarity for, but she said, "Well, you beat Abuwolowo so easily."

"In the jousts of love," Gunnar said declaratively, having thought better of finishing his statement questioningly.

Greta gave him her best arch smile. "But I could talk my brother-in-law into letting you stay. He owes something to me."

Gunnar would have told her about the affair he had just ended in the sea, but the strange repugnance overtook him again. "He would not really want me," he said, but even he, not given to nuances of this sort, noticed the hesitant tone in his own voice.

"But his concern is always for the amusement of his guests," Greta said, and giggled fetchingly at some private joke, "and they are getting bored. Very bored," she said masterfully.

"And I would soon be boring too, Little Greta." He rumpled her hair with a touch of rough power, and she stepped closer to him.

"You couldn't bore me. Ever." She turned her face up and Gunnar saw the plumb line of her throat. Thin, but adolescently rounded with a touching surplus of young fat. The

strangest rules of his dialectic told him that he should destroy her as an incipient breeder.

"No," he said, "I can do better." He explained himself to the elders in the dome under the sea.

Greta was tired of waiting for an embrace that never came. She changed her posture, and spoke with irritation. "What was that?"

"Nothing." Plausibly, he said, "I must go back to my family. I have been gone very long."

"Your wife you mean."

"I am too young to swim in the breeding tides."

The metaphor's meaning escaped Greta, but the surface of the statement could be turned into the small victory of a compliment.

"You will come back when you are ready?"

Gunnar found the source of his weakness. Somehow she had taught him to find the meaning behind simple words. He smiled.

"Of course. Where else would there be for me to go now?"

Greta had forgotten all her careful training: the sophistications that her governesses had taught her. She beamed, threw her arms around his waist, and leaned her head on his sternum. "Thank you," she said, appreciating a compliment with coquetry.

"You are very welcome," Gunnar said, and managed to keep his laughter out of his voice. "But you can do me a favor." Before he spoke he studied the water. Now he must leave, he decided, and turned back to her. "It is very simple." He said, "Remember to tell your brother-in-law this: war will be fought in places he has not yet thought of."

"Yes?" Greta said, bewildered.

"No more." Gunnar patted her head kindly, and sat down, smoothed his suit onto his body, and put his fins on his feet. When he had his mask in place he could no longer speak and he walked silently into the breakers to vanish. Later that same night he talked with the porpoises, chased a school of silvery fish out into the moonlight and then dove to flirt in swirls in

a whirlpool current that spun him out in the direction of home.

Greta gave Hauptman-Everetsky her cryptic message; he took little notice of it, and she remembered less and less of Gunnar with the passing years. When she did recall, it was too late, the figures coming out of the surf, to be greeted by the servants, were not Gunnar, but triumphant victors. The island was without power, the servants in revolt, and nostalgia was not a shield.

The war had been fought; neither she nor her brother-in-law had known it. In the subterranean tunnels the ripped ends of power cables spluttered hopeless sparks, water poured from torn mains, and bells and voices, however loud, brought no servants back from their welcoming songs. The always obedient chattels only watched, with blank dark eyes, as the fish came to play their game with Greta.

BY C. C. MacAPP

DATE: 5 June 1987.
To: Commandant, USSR Hq., Mars. (Personal).
From: Commandant, USSR Pluto expedition.
Code: TS Perishka C.
Subject: Mad American Spaceman.

Wofka: I am taking the precaution of sending this to you personally, because of the obvious possible booby-traps. Perhaps discreet espionage on Mars or Earth will reveal what sort of shell-game the Americans are up to now, before we involve ourselves in some propaganda debacle.

Twelve hours ago radar picked up a small object in space, moving in an orbit that would intercept us fairly closely but at a slightly lower speed. Knowing that an American ship was already near Pluto, and that they surely knew *we* were approaching, I at once placed my ship in a state of maximum defense. However, closer approach revealed the object to be not a mine or torpedo, but a space suit with a number of objects attached to it. Of course the suit or other objects *could* have contained explosives, so I maintained caution.

When we were quite close we picked up a weak radio transmission in English that appeared to be beamed not at us but in the opposite direction. If it was in code we have been

unable to break it. Our interpreter, whom possibly we had better investigate again, could tell us only that the voice, a male one, was reciting some sort of nursery rhyme called Mother Goose. The recitation was monotonous and repetitive.

Shortly thereafter telescopic examination revealed the following:

1—space suit, evidently occupied.
2—tanks of approximately 300 litre capacity, fixed to the suit by short rigid rods.
4—bundles, approximately half a meter cubed, lashed to the legs of the suit.
1—cylindrical container, approximately three metres long by zero point seven metres diameter, fixed between the legs of the suit in such a way that the occupant appeared to be riding as you would ride a horse.
1—large bow, with which the occupant of the suit fired or shot arrows in a direction normal to the orbit of Pluto (that is, away from us) at intervals of eight seconds.

The arrows came from the long cylinder he was riding.

Upon discovering our approach the occupant of the suit stopped shooting arrows and said in English, "If you can still hear me, fellows, I've found Ivan." (His knowing my first name is significant!). He repeated the transmission several times, then waited with apparent calm for us to pick him up.

Upon examination of his equipment, we found no explosives. The small bundles contained batteries to keep the suit operating. One of the 300-litre tanks was about half full of gruel; the other about half full of body wastes. The gruel was made accessible to the spaceman by a plastic tube which had been sealed through his helmet at the front, so he could draw upon it merely by putting his mouth on the tube and sucking. The removal of body waste was accomplished by a similar but more permanent arrangement which was surprisingly effective, though an obvious indignity and by his testimony uncomfortable. The suit's maintenance machinery was in good working order, and the air inside was breathable though not as sweet as one might prefer. The long cylindrical

tank was about one-third full of arrows, the rest having been expended. The arrows were cut from steel (evidently the hull plates of a ship) by means of a hack saw or some similar springy metal and the string of braided fine wire. Both were alloys that held their flexibility in the cold of space.

Quite obviously the shooting of arrows had provided reaction to slow the spaceman's orbit to a speed where we would overtake him. Nevertheless the calculation and execution of such a maneuver would be difficult to the point of unbelievability. The man's story is that he was reciting 'The House That Jack Built' as a sort of mnemonic to maintain the proper rate of fire, and that the arrows averaged out to a chosen weight and the bow delivered consistent reaction when drawn to a certain point. He sticks to this story through all interrogation, and says he was sent to ask us to rescue his comrades, who are (he says) floating in a small portion of their ship in an orbit dangerously close to Pluto. Of course I do not swallow his story. Nevertheless I do not see any harm in cautiously approaching a little closer to investigate. I am confident we can handle any trickery the Americans may have in mind.

The entirety of his statement is so ridiculous that I will not attempt to abstract it, but will attach it in full. I'm sure you will exercise caution equal to mine in sending this to you personally. Old comrades must stick together.

Signed, Ivan Dzbrown,
commanding.

Statement of mad American spaceman:

Hi. No, I don't speak Russian. I know a few words of Basque, though, from my mother's side, if that'll help any. Oh, you speak English! Jeez, you speak it real good. You say you were born in Massachusetts? Nice place. I was there a while when I took my Ph.D.

Well, here's the scoop. I guess you heard about us making up our minds to get to Pluto first. It only cost us four hundred billion bucks, ha, ha! You should have heard old ex-President Johnson yell. Well, anyway, we made it off Mars in

real good shape, and we were latching onto Pluto good, too, but then we noticed the jets weren't working right, and after a computer check and all we decided somebody better go outside and take a squint. I got picked because I've got the most experience in suits. That's why I'm here, too.

Well, right away when I got aft I could see that there was something stuck around the jets; it looked like cinders at first. When I got closer I saw that it was more like as if some grapes, the black kind, were clustered around the orifices. While I was bent down looking, something came along and gave me a hell of a whang on the butt. Right away I thought Jeez, a meteor; but it didn't penetrate the suit and I was all right. Then I began to see more of them coming and I hauled on my line and got away from the jets because that was where they were all headed. I talked to the skipper and he told me to stay out there and watch if I wasn't in any danger.

They were coming from all directions and collecting around the jets like a swarm of bees. But they were not coming as thick, and pretty soon they stopped coming entirely. Then after a while some of them began to go away. They didn't all go, though, and enough of them were still around the jets to goof up the action. Once in a while a single one or two would break off and go away, and maybe a couple more would drift in and gather on.

I took one of the tools that we have on the suits, I guess probably you people have got the same kind of thing, and hacked away at them but they were on tight. The only ones I could get loose seemed to be the ones that were letting go anyway.

Well, I got hold of one and let it go right away because I could feel it sort of squirm, even through the mitten, but it wasn't actually squirming as I found out when I let it go. It was shaped like maybe two-thirds of a marble, one about five-eighths of an inch in diameter. I guess maybe you people work in milli-metres, and your kids don't get to play marbles, huh? Let's see . . . two hundred and fifty-four times six hundred and twenty-five is . . . carry the two . . . where the hell would I put the decimal place . . . say, like a dull

black iron ball-bearing about fifteen point eight seven five millimetres in diameter, with one-third of it sawed off flat. A blue light came off of this flat side and it gave the thing quite a boost of acceleration and that was what I felt. I was worried at first that it was some kind of an ion drive that would burn a hole in my hand or the suit, but it didn't do anything like that. I watched a few more and I saw that they could turn themselves any way they wanted to by giving out a faint glow on one edge of the flat place, then when they wanted to light out and go they just turned it all on. We did some fooling around with them later and found out they could exert about—but there's no sense going into all that now. We've got the figures in the ship, or what's left of it; and hell, the least we can do after you rescue us is let you in on them. Scientific cooperation, ha, ha!

Well I took a chance because I was pretty excited and the next one that drifted in I grabbed it and held it so the blue light was away from my hand. I could feel the push but it wasn't strong enough to get away from me. That may be why they stay out there, where they don't have to deal with fast orbits and stronger gravity close to the sun. They were far enough from Pluto so it wouldn't pull them in.

When I talked to the skipper again he thought sure as hell I'd flipped and got me in right away, but I had the thing to show them. It turned out I was not so damned smart, because I had to go right back out and watch what happened when they gave the jets a little gentle goose. I wished I'd kept my big mouth shut for a little while.

I'll tell you, when those jets went on I thought I was going to get it. Those things came flying from all directions like hornets. You know how an orifice heats up, even with a short burst, and how fast it cools off afterward in space? Yeah, I guess you would. Well, every time we gave it even a little goose, those things came flying. I found out the way to do was to stay a few yards forward of the jets and stand still, and they'd go around me to get at the jets. As soon as the

metal got cold, some of them would go away. But some stayed on. Just lazy, I guess.

Well, we were pretty excited and we tried to radio Mars; Earth's behind the sun right now you know; but the transmission didn't seem to get through. I suppose you can figure out who had to suit up and go outside finally to see what was wrong with the antenna, after the skipper and the Communications Officer had a hell of a beef. And you know what? Every time we tried to transmit with any power at all those damn sawed-off ball-bearings came gathering around the antenna, just like flies around manure. You people've got that, I'm sure; I read somewhere how you were pretty big in ranching and all. It began to look to me like they could soak up any kind of radiant energy, from radio on down to infrared; and that's the way it turned out. And we found out they could resist heat, too. We couldn't even faze them until we got them damn near red-hot; and that killed them. The trouble was, even though some of them got themselves incinerated in the jets, by that time they were welded on. The orifices got so clogged we didn't dare fire them any more.

Of course we tried a lot of things like sawing the jets clear, but it wasn't any use. Every time we turned on even a little squirt we got those damned things back again.

Well then naturally we didn't want to go barging in on Pluto out of control, so we used the retros and spinners to slow ourselves down into a stable orbit. I suppose you've got what's left of the ship on your radar by now. We couldn't go anywhere and we couldn't transmit, but we could hear incoming messages all right, and we heard how you people were headed out this way and we figured if we could warn you soon enough, you could stay down here and pick us up if we could get down far enough. There don't seem to be any of those things this far in. The crew can make it down here all right if you've got room for us. I see you've got a good big ship here.

Well there wasn't any way we could contact you by radio so we talked over how one of us could get down here, and it

figured out that we didn't have enough air tanks and so on to jet a man in. That wouldn't have attracted any bugs. We call them bugs, but I suppose some damn scientist will look at one through a magnifying glass and put some silly name on it.

There was plenty of time, we knew you wouldn't be here for a while yet, so we had a chance to think things over and make a few haywire experiments, and that rig you saw me in was what came out of it. I practiced guiding myself around for about three weeks. When I want to go in a straight line I just shoot arrows the opposite way. You know, for every action there's a . . . And when I want to put on a little spin I just hold one of the arrows out away from me and give it a flip away in the right direction. I'm pretty good at it now. In fact, I figure I can be the world's champion. Maybe in the next Olympic games . . .

You saw all the rest of the stuff.

So that's the scoop, and I don't mind saying I'm damned glad to see you, even if you are a bunch of—even if I don't speak your language. From here you can transmit to what's left of our ship, and the boys'll start coming. They had enough suits rigged for everybody, and by now they ought to have the whole rear end of her sawed up into arrows.

(Statement ends.)

Date: 6 June, 1987.
To: Security Officer, USSR Hq. Mars., (Personal.)
From: Commandant, USSR Hq., Mars.
Code: STS Babushka Y.
Subject: Commandant, USSR Pluto expedition.

Nikolai: Please check subject once again for possible instability or disloyalty. Also find whether he has sent any coded messages to anyone other than me. Also check the security of Code TS Perishka C.

I hope your family is well.

Signed, Vladimir Czmith,
commanding.

Date: 10 August, 1987
To: Ambassador to USA.
From: Kremlin.
Code: None.
Subject: Capitalist propaganda.

Protest vigorously at once ridiculous and insulting story in American newspapers of Soviet spacemen floating in space singing Volga Boat Song and throwing spears.

Signed, J.

VAMPIRES LTD.

BY JOSEF NESVADBA

Translated by Iris Urwin

THINKING BACK to my stay in England a year ago, what I remember most of all are the cars. As if Western Europe had suffered another invasion. An invasion of motorists.

The first time the idea struck me was at Orly airport, listening to the fat Irishman whose artichokes had broken loose and were rolling down the escalator. The plane was due to take off in a couple of minutes, and the escalators were bearing his artichokes away into the waiting-rooms for the Near East, Ecuador and Guadeloupe. He had to resign himself to the loss. All the time we were flying over the Channel he lamented the vanished vegetables, and tried to prepare us for the horrors of English cooking.

"I'm the agent for a car firm," he said proudly. "Our sporting models are going to beat the whole world . . ."

My companion wanted to give him pleasure, and said: "I've got an English car, too, back home. A Hillman." The pink-cheeked Irishman did not reply. As though politely ignoring a rude word. We were traveling first class, and he had obviously taken us for better class people.

"Quite a decent car"—he had himself in hand now—"considering the price . . ." He shrugged. "Now I sell Jaguars. I think we shall be selling them behind the Iron Curtain soon," he added, after unobtrusively but closely examining my tie. "Our cars turn bad roads into good and good roads into

Heaven." I did not ask him whether he believed in life after death. We were coming in for a landing.

The second time cars were forced to my attention was that same evening, when I was trying to find a lady of my acquaintance who lives in Kensington Terrace. I came out of the Underground station and wanted to ask the way to the street I had written in my address book, but there was nobody there to ask. I mean, nobody on the pavement; along the road, at a snail's pace, moved four long snakes of steel boxes, each isolating its driver from the outside world so perfectly that he heard neither questions nor shouts.

Then the most interesting experience of all turned up, and that is what I really want to tell you about. It still seems incredible to me. I stayed too long at my friend's house that night, drinking Johnnie Walker. Seventy proof. I found that out next morning when I failed to find my companion in our hotel. He had left. They said he had waited for me till the very last minute, but that he had had to catch the train. He probably thought I had deserted him. He did not even leave a message in the hotel. I was alone in that city of eight million people, a city quite strange to me, without a penny in my pocket. The lady I had spent the evening with was not at her office, nor was she at home. There was only one thing left to try. I would have to get to Bolster, where the Commission I was supposed to be a member of was sitting, in somebody else's car. Even at home I have never tried hitch-hiking. I'm getting on in years and I doubt whether anyone would stop to pick me up on account of my attractive appearance. Exhausted, I staggered on foot to a Shell petrol pump and gazed yearningly at the cars passing by. They seemed even further away from me than they had the evening before, although at home I am used to driving about in a small car myself.

"Do you want a lift?" a tall pale man with side-whiskers asked me. He spoke with a Public School accent and wore plusfours. I shall never forget him. Or his car. It was a racing model, with disc brakes, eight forward gears—it could do a hundred and fifty kilometers an hour in the one before top—

it was beautifully sprung and did not seem to run on normal petrol, because the owner pulled in at the bar opposite.

"A lift to Bolster," I replied dejectedly. I could not understand why the man wanted to help me; I had never seen him in my life before.

"I'm sure you need a car . . ." he said a few minutes later, when we were on the motorway. He drove on the left, like everybody else in England, and I thought I'd go through the floor of the car, the way I pressed my foot on an imaginary brake at every corner.

"I've got to get to a conference there," I told him. "That's the only reason I'm in England at all. I've simply got to be there in time."

"You know how to drive," he said, and it sounded like a statement of fact; then he stopped the car and staggered out of the driving seat. "I'll pick the car up in Bolster tomorrow. I've got some business to see to in the City today." He was so pale his face looked gray. He seemed more in need of an undertaker.

"I haven't got my license with me, or anything, I'm a foreigner, and . . ." I protested weakly, not wanting to admit that I was scared of driving on the left.

"You won't need any papers with this car," my benefactor replied and stopped a taxi going in the opposite direction. I did not even have time to thank him properly. I thought of the Million Pound Note. Was he trying to win a bet with my help? But he had forgotten to tell me anything about the car, the little peculiarities it might have, how many cylinders it had, and whether the cylinder heads worked on a camshaft like other racing cars. We had not mentioned the compressor ratio or the question of fuel. Sitting at the steering wheel I felt imprisoned. There was very little room in the car, just enough for two, and it was upholstered in special non-slip material; there was a row of dials below the windscreen. The ignition key was still in place. I pressed the starter button. The car leaped forward like a bolting horse; I felt as though I were steering a rocket. I stopped bothering my head about how I came to be at that steering wheel, and concentrated on

gaining the upper hand. It was difficult at first, but I soon saw that everybody on the road was trying to be helpful. Cars stopped and their drivers gazed admiringly. All the Austins, Fords, Rolls-Royces, Morrises, Peugeots, Chevrolets and what not, the common run of cars, stood respectfully waiting for my aristocrat to pass. Even the Flying Squad saluted me. It ought to have aroused my suspicions from the outset; I should have stopped and got out there and then. But I went on.

At the next crossroads I even stopped to give a girl a lift. Her name was Susan, her mother was an actress and had brought her up the modern way. When I told her that we were not used to sixteen-year-olds walking barefoot with rings on their big toes, and smearing purple over their eyelids, she very obediently rubbed the stuff off and took a pair of flat-heeled shoes out of her bag. She said that she was delighted I was a Red and kept examining my face closely. She said her best friend had slept with a jazz drummer at the seaside last year, which put her top of the class. Not one of the others had caught a real Red, though, from behind the Iron Curtain. I began to loathe jazz, actresses and her whole class at school. Susan attracted me quite a bit.

"Let's stop for a cup of tea," she said as we passed one of the petrol pumps; they were as thick along the road as the giant hoardings attacking your pocket all the way. "You can buy me a drink . . ." Since the licensing laws in England allow you to buy whisky only at certain hours, nobody wants to let the chance of buying a drink slip by, thus proving the measure of *his* freedom. We went for a cup of tea. I hoped she had some small change on her, or I would have to try to have the bill sent to the Embassy. I could not shame my country, after all. We stood at a broad wooden bar already occupied by other drivers. I felt a bit dizzy.

"My dear, that's a Bentley. It's certainly not an Arnold-Bristol. It's got disc brakes on all four wheels. A wonderful car. It's not a Morse or a Dellow or a Crossley or a Frazer Nash. It's a Bentley. The last time I saw one was at last year's races at Le Mans. The only car in England that can

keep up with my Cunningham . . ." I heard a voice behind me say, but did not realize at once that it was a woman and that she was talking about my car. She ordered lobster soup, fish and roast beef. She knew all there was to know about Prague. Even about Eliska Junková almost winning the famous Targa Florio race in Sicily in twenty-six, that the most famous woman racing driver in the world was a Czech.

"Things are bad over there now, though. I've heard the Russians race in nothing but adapted Pobeda saloons. I suppose nobody can buy a Bugatti or a Porsche for his own use, can he? How did you get hold of this car you've got now?" I changed the subject and told her I thought the cult of the car as a prestige symbol in the West denoted a crisis in indivualism; every separate individual trying to run his own means of transport until all the roads were blocked and the streets in the towns were impassable and they got nothing out of it. That I thought the crowds of cars were just a symptom of the crisis of the personality in our age. She did not understand what I was talking about, and told me she could overtake everything in her post-war American Cunningham, built by millionaires for road racing in Europe—in America they race on closed tracks. She did not glance at Susan once while she was speaking, and her voice seemed more and more like the sound of a four-stroke engine; I stopped listening, and got up to leave. The Ambassador was going to have a nice bill to pay, I thought to myself. And I was going to have a lot to answer for when I got back to Prague. The waiter assured me the Marchioness had paid for everything. It was the Marchioness of Nuvolari, born Riley, who had married a relative of the famous racing driver simply to be able to boast of the name.

She dashed out of the gaily painted pub after us and hopped into her one-seater, pulling on her helmet and waiting like a true sportswoman for us to get ready to take off. We set off together. It was a good thing it was evening and there were not many cars on the road. It was a race according to the rules; I had to show that bragging woman where she got off. We soon passed her; I don't know what there

was about our engine, but we left the American supercar far behind. The landscape flew by as smudged as an abstract painting; I braked carefully, not to overturn the car. Susan threw her arms round my neck and started kissing me. She was delighted. We had won. Our Mile miglia. Our Targa Florio. Our Le Mans. Our Brno Round, I added for my own satisfaction. We had not killed a single onlooker. I felt proud of myself and I felt as though I had run that race on foot. I was conscious of kissing Susan, and putting my arms round her, and then I slipped down in the seat.

It was night when I came to myself. Susan was giving me Schwepps to drink; it tasted like soda-water and quinine. She had taken my right shoe off and was nursing it in her lap like a doll.

"You didn't tell me you were hurt . . ." I had been for a medical in Prague before I left and I knew there was nothing wrong with me. Then she showed me a fresh scab on my foot, the size of her hand. "You'll have to go to a doctor at once, you must have lost an awful lot of blood . . ." she said.

"I went to see the doctor the day before yesterday and nothing has happened to my foot since then. Where could I have been losing blood? It would be visible, wouldn't it?" She was talking nonsense . . . When I tried to get up I found I was still dizzy; I had to clutch at the car door and stagger out like his lordship had in London when he so incomprehensibly presented me with his car. I had done nothing with my foot except press the accelerator. I frowned.

"Do you know how to open the bonnet of this thing?" I asked her.

"It's your car, isn't it?" She sounded cross. In English they don't use the familiar "thou," but I felt sure she was using it now. It took me a little while to get the bonnet open. The engine looked most unusual. Instead of the carburetor there was a big oval steel box with two thick pipes coming from it, and these led to the engine proper. I knew there existed cars with only one cylinder and so I tried to open the odd contraption. It would not give. I went back to the dashboard, with Susan looking on sulkily. I turned the ignition

key and tried pressing the accelerator with my own empty shoe, avoiding direct contact. Nothing happened. I accidentally knocked against the accelerator with one finger and the car shot forward, knocking our heads against the ceiling.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Susan. "Why don't you drive on?" With an effort I switched on the light and showed her my finger. There was a tiny little scab on it, more like a bruise. "Look at that . . ." She did not get the point.

"This is a very strange car indeed. It's neither a Berkeley nor a Morse, even if it kills its driver in the end, I expect. It runs on human blood. . . ." She started to laugh and showed me the maker's name: James Stuart, Old Georgetown 26. It was engraved on a brass plate beneath the steering wheel.

"D'you think the man sold cars for suicides? Now I can see what nonsense you foreigners have stuffed into you. A car that runs on blood." Then she stopped, for around that strange block which was really nothing other than the steel heart of the car, a steel heart with a pulmonary and a cardiac vein—around that vessel wound thin little veins which were quite transparent, and now they were filling with something dark red. It looked as if I were right. I told her about the strange way the car had come into my hands, and I described the last moments of the former owner's life. I was convinced that he had chosen me as the next victim because I was a foreigner whom nobody knew here and nobody was likely to miss.

"What are we going to do now?" she asked. I had no choice. I would have to walk to the nearest pub and ring my colleague in Bolster. Susan would have to find another car to pick her up, preferably with a more reliable driver.

"I'm not going to leave you in a mess," she said with determination. I had heard that Englishwomen are very faithful and the idea worried me a bit. I told her she couldn't go walking over fields and woods with me, because once I relinquished this technical miracle there would be no more admirers to treat us to lobster soup and oysters. I was going to

have to lead the simple life, and that wasn't good for love's young dream.

She found out I was right. We walked along below the embankment at the edge of the road for about theee hours. The headlamps gleamed above us. I did not want to stop any car; I only wanted to walk to the nearest village and find the first phone I came to.

"That's silly. I can climb up first and even the United States Ambassador would stop for me. We play a sort of game like that in school and I always win." She lifted her breasts proudly. They certainly were attractive enough.

"You risk stopping another car made by Vampires Ltd., and having your blood sucked again . . ." She laughed, no longer believing the tale; now she saw only the advantages of the modern technical age. The advantages which are on the surface and can convince at once. In the end we quarrelled. She had thin-soled shoes on her feet and must have felt every stone through them; she was pretty good to have stuck it so long. I shouted at her, too, because I knew that was the only way to part company and forget each other, the only way for me to free myself from this girl and her masterful affections. I helped her up the bank, then I heard the squeal of brakes, and headlamps stopped just behind her and lit up her figure from all sides. My last glimpse of her was as she shaded her eyes from the glare, looking like a lovely blind girl.

It was morning before I reached a village, and in daylight I realized that the motorway had been planned so as to bypass the villages and allow fast traffic. The place was called Old Georgetown and looked like something out of a dream, tumbledown castle and all. The children wore school uniforms and the men wore very broad trousers. I was in the birthplace of my car. I felt that it must be a dream. I looked for number twenty-six.

"James Stuart died in thirty-two, sir," an elderly secretary with a blonde bun told me in the office. "The firm has been closed down since then. I just look after things for the bank because we cannot find a buyer." She pointed to the

yard beyond the broken window. It was a graveyard for racing cars, piled with unfinished chassis, cars smashed up in races, bones and bonnets of cars. Hens and ducks wandered about in the knee-high grass.

"What happened to the cars he made?" I asked.

"There's not one of them on the road today," said the elderly lady bitterly, and sat down to a typewriter that dated from the beginning of the century, and on which the letters moved instead of the roller. "Not one of the grand old cars that Caracciola himself used to drive. They won every race they went in for," she snapped suddenly, as though I had voiced an objection, and then she pointed to the dusty trophies on the walls. "It was the depression that did for us. There were no rich men left to order hand-made cars. Mr. Stuart finished the last of his cars the day before the banks ruined him. He set out from Old Georgetown in it and was never heard of again. . . ." On a yellowing photograph Mr. Stuart stood with one hand on the bonnet of my car. It was not the thin man I had seen in London. God knows how many people that car had sucked dry in between.

"I have heard of him," I said in my bad English, "and I know where that last car of his is now . . ." I thought she started in fright.

"It's the best car in the world, with sixteen forward gears and two reserve brakes on each wheel. Nobody has made a car that could accelerate like that since."

"A car that kills. . . ." I told her.

"It will win every race in the world for you, you will find the most select circles open to you, you will live in ease and live for nothing but sport . . ."

"And death." She could not understand. Of course she knew all about the car. She had even perhaps helped Mr. Stuart to get his own back on the society that had beggared him and did not give his genius its chance. "Here are the keys," I said as I laid them on the table. "I don't want your car. In return perhaps you will allow me to ring Bolster. . . ."

"You're a foreigner, aren't you," she said when she picked up the keys, as though that explained everything. I nodded

and waited to be put through to Bolster. I had to spell out my friend's name and even then they mixed it up. It took half an hour before they got hold of him. He promised to send someone for me; his surprise gave way to severity, but I was glad to hear him, anyway.

I waited for him in the Stuart yard and that was where the Marchioness of Nuvolari found me.

"Here's our Chaeron," she said. "Now don't try and tell me you've never done any racing. I'd give a lot for your skill. And your car. You were right; I'm going to sell my Cunningham. I don't know how it is but the Americans are no good at racing cars. I want to buy your car. How much do you want for it?" I sent her inside; perhaps if she buys it the old lady will be able to buy a better typewriter. I did not warn her until she came out with the keys in her hand.

"I'll tell you where I left the car, of course, but I must warn you the car will kill you . . ." Then I told her all I knew about the thing.

"How very interesting," she said politely.

"It's a vampire; I must impress it on you. The accelerator sucks your life's blood . . . !" She laughed.

"Then it's really worth the money. What do you think the other cars run on, anyway? What did I pay for my petrol with; what did I have to give for it? I had to sacrifice myself if I wanted to have the cars. And in the most complicated manner. This will only make it so much simpler. The only thing I want is to win the Le Mans race once in my life, and beat all the aces. Then I shall die in peace. I know I shall win; I worked out your speed yesterday. It's a wonderful car; I shall win along the line."

"You will kill yourself . . ."

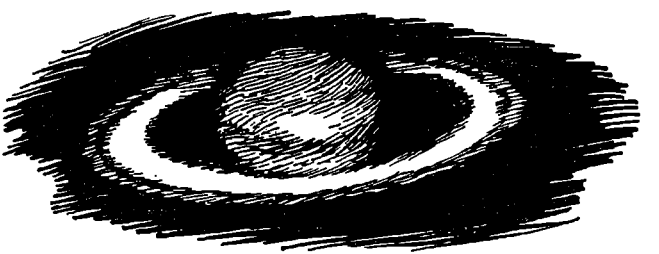
"That doesn't matter." And then I understood why nobody had returned that car in all those years, since nineteen thirty-two, why every driver had gladly sold his soul to that mechanical devil and let that vampire suck his blood. Because they could get ahead of all the others.

Later, as the Marchioness' chauffeur drove me to Bolster in her old Cunningham, it seemed as though all the cars on that

six-lane motorway were competing in the great unofficial race in which death did not matter.

I got to Bolster before the first session started. My colleague had not yet rung up the Embassy to report me. Everything turned out all right except that I did not have time to shave.

And that I never saw Susan Saunders again.



THE LAST LONELY MAN

BY JOHN BRUNNER

"DON'T SEE YOU in here much any more, Mr. Hale," Geraghty said as he set my glass in front of me.

"Must be eighteen months," I said. "But my wife's out of town and I thought I'd drop by for old time's sake." I looked down the long bar and around at the booths against the opposite wall, and added, "It looks as though you don't see anybody much any more. I never saw the place so empty at this time of evening. Will you have one?"

"Sparkling soda, if you please, Mr. Hale, and thank you very much." Geraghty got down a bottle and poured for himself. I never knew him to drink anything stronger than a beer, and that rarely.

"Things have changed," he went on after a pause. "You know what caused it, of course."

I shook my head.

"Contact, naturally. Like it's changed everything else."

I stared at him for a moment, and then I had to chuckle. I said, "Well, I knew it had hit a lot of things—like the churches in particular. But I wouldn't have thought it would affect you."

"Oh, yes." He hoisted himself on a stool behind the bar; that was new since I used to come here regularly. Eighteen months ago he wouldn't have had the chance to sit down all evening long; he'd have been dead on his feet when the bar

closed. "I figure it this way. Contact has made people more careful in some ways, and less in others. But it's cut out a lot of reasons for going to bars and for drinking. You know how it used to be. A bartender was a sort of professional open ear, the guy to spill your troubles to. That didn't last long after Contact came in. I knew a tender-hearted bartender who went on being like that for a while after Contact. He got himself loaded to *here* with lonely guys—and gals too." Geraghty laid his palm on the top of his head.

"Occupational risk!" I said.

"Not for long, though. It hit him one day what it would be like if they all came home to roost, so he went and had them all expunged and started over with people he chose himself, the way anyone else does. And round about then it all dried up. People don't come and spill their troubles any more. The need has mostly gone. And the other big reason for going to bars—chance company—that's faded out too. Now that people know they don't have to be scared of the biggest loneliness of all, it makes them calm and mainly self-reliant. Me, I'm looking round for another trade. Bars are closing down all over."

"You'd make a good Contact consultant," I suggested, not more than half-joking. He didn't take it as a joke, either.

"I've considered it," he said seriously. "I might just do that. I might just."

I looked around again. Now, Geraghty had spelled it out for me, I could see how it must have happened. My own case, even if I hadn't realized it till now, was an illustration. I'd spilled troubles to bartenders in my time, gone to bars to escape loneliness. Contact had come in about three years ago; about two years ago it had taken fire and everyone, but everyone, had lined up for the treatment, and a few months after that I'd quit coming here, where I'd formerly been as much of a fixture as the furniture. I'd thought nothing of it—put it down to being married and planning a family and spending money other ways.

But it wasn't for that. It was that the need had gone.

In the old style, there was a mirror mounted on the wall

behind the bar, and in that mirror I could see some of the booths reflected. All were empty except one, and in that one was a couple. The man was nothing out of the ordinary, but the girl—no, woman—took my eye. She wasn't so young; she could be forty or so, but she had a certain something. A good figure helped, but most of it was in the face. She was thin, with a lively mouth and laughter-wrinkles around the eyes, and she was clearly enjoying whatever she was talking about. It was pleasant to watch her enjoying it. I kept my eyes on her while Geraghty held forth.

"Like I say, it makes people more careful, and less careful. More careful about the way they treat others, because if they don't behave their own Contacts are liable to expunge them, and then where will they be? Less careful about the way they treat themselves, because they aren't scared much of dying any more. They know that if it happens quick, without pain, it'll just be a blur and then confusion and then picking up again and then melting into someone else. No sharp break, no stopping. Have you picked anyone up, Mr. Hale?"

"Matter of fact, I have," I said. "I picked up my father just about a year ago."

"And was it okay?"

"Oh, smooth as oil. Disconcerting for a while—like having an itch I couldn't scratch—but that passed in about two to three months and then he just blended in and there it was."

I thought about it for a moment. In particular, I thought about the peculiar sensation of being able to remember how I looked in my cradle, from outside, and things like that. But it was comforting as well as peculiar, and anyway there was never any doubt about whose memory it was. All the memories that came over when a Contact was completed had indefinable auras that labeled them and helped keep the receiver's mind straight.

"And you?" I said.

Geraghty nodded. "Guy I knew in the Army. Just a few weeks back he had a car-smash. Poor guy lived for ten days with a busted back, going through hell. He was in bad shape when he came over. Pain—it was terrible!"

"Ought to write your Congressman," I said. "Get this new bill through. Hear about it?"

"Which one?"

"Legalize mercy-killing provided the guy has a valid Contact. Everyone has nowadays, so why not?"

Geraghty looked thoughtful. "Yes, I did hear about it. I wasn't happy about it. But since I picked up my buddy and got his memory of what happened—well, I guess I'm changing my mind. I'll do like you say."

We were quiet for a bit then, thinking about what Contact had done for the world. Geraghty had said he wasn't happy at first about this euthanasia bill—well, I and a lot of other people weren't sure about Contact at first, either. Then we saw what it could do, and had a chance to think the matter out, and now I felt I didn't understand how I'd gone through so much of my life without it. I just couldn't think myself back to a world where when you died you had to stop. It was horrible!

With Contact, that problem was solved. Dying became like a change of vehicle. You blurred, maybe blacked out, knowing you would come to, as it were, looking out of somebody's eyes that you had Contact with. You wouldn't be in control any more, but he or she would have your memories, and for two or three months you'd ease around, fitting yourself to your new partner and then bit by bit there'd be a shift of viewpoint, and finally a melting together, and *click*. No interruption; just a smooth painless process taking you on into another installment of life as someone who was neither you nor someone else, but a product of the two.

For the receiver, as I knew from experience, it was at worst uncomfortable, but for someone you were fond of you could take far more than discomfort.

Thinking of what life had been like before Contact, I found myself shuddering. I ordered another drink—a double this time. I hadn't been out drinking for a long while.

I'd been telling Geraghty the news for maybe an hour, and I was on my third or fourth drink, when the door of the bar opened and a guy came in. He was medium-sized, rather

ordinary, fairly well-dressed, and I wouldn't have looked at him twice except for the expression on his face. He looked so angry and miserable I couldn't believe my eyes.

He went up to this booth where the couple were sitting—the one where the woman was that I'd been watching—and planted his feet on the ground facing them. All the attractive light went out of the woman's face, and the man with her got half to his feet as if in alarm.

"You know," Geraghty said softly, "that looks like trouble. I haven't had a row in this bar for more than a year, but I remember what one looks like when it's brewing."

He got up off his stool watchfully, and moved down the bar so he could go through the gap in the counter if he had to.

I swiveled on my stool and caught some of the conversation. As far as I could hear, it was going like this.

"You expunged me, Mary!" the guy with the miserable face was saying. "*Did* you?"

"Now look here!" the other man cut in. "It's up to her whether she does or doesn't."

"You shut up," the newcomer said. "Well, Mary? *Did* you?"

"Yes, Mack, I did," she said. "Sam had nothing to do with it. It was entirely my idea—and your fault."

I couldn't see Mack's face, but his body sort of tightened up, shaking, and he put his arms out as though he was going to haul Mary out of her seat. Sam—I presumed Sam was the man in the booth—seized his arm, yelling at him.

That was where Geraghty came in, ordering them to quit where they were. They didn't like it, but they did, and Mary and Sam finished their drinks and went out of the bar, and Mack, after glaring after them, came up and took a stool next but one to mine.

"Rye," he said. "Gimme the bottle—I'll need it."

His voice was rasping and bitter, a tone I realized I hadn't heard in maybe months. I suppose I looked curious; anyway, he glanced at me and saw I was looking at him, and spoke to me.

"Know what that was all about?"

I shrugged. "Lost your girl?" I suggested.

"Much worse than that—and she isn't so much a lost girl as a heartless she-devil." He tossed down the first of the rye that Geraghty had brought for him. I noticed that Geraghty had moved to the other end of the counter and was washing glasses. If he was out of the habit of listening to people's troubles, I wouldn't blame him, I thought.

"She didn't look that way," I said at random.

"No, she doesn't." He took another drink and then sat for a while with the empty glass between his hands, staring at it.

"I suppose you have Contacts?" he said at last. It was a pretty odd question, and I answered it automatically out of sheer surprise.

"Well—yes of course I have!"

"I haven't," he said. "Not now. Not any more. *Damn* that woman!"

I felt the nape of my neck prickle. If he was telling the truth—well, he was a kind of living ghost! Everyone I knew had at least one Contact; I had three. My wife and I had a mutual, of course, like all married couples, and as insurance against our being killed together in a car wreck or by some similar accident I had an extra one with my kid brother Joe and a third with a guy I'd known in college. At least, I was fairly sure I did; I hadn't heard from him in some months and he might perhaps have expunged me. I made a mental note to look him up and keep the friendship moving.

I studied this lonely guy. His name was Mack—I'd heard him called that. He was probably ten years older than I was, which made him in his middle forties—plenty old enough to have dozens of potential Contacts. There was nothing visibly wrong with him except this look of unspeakable misery he wore—and if he really had no Contacts at all, then I was surprised the look was of mere misery, not of terror.

"Did—uh—did Mary know that she was your only Contact?" I said.

"Oh, she knew. Of course. That's why she did it without telling me." Mack refilled his glass and held the bottle to-

wards me. I was going to refuse, but if someone didn't keep the poor devil company he'd probably empty the bottle himself, and then maybe walk out staggering drunk and fall under a car and be done for. I really felt sorry for him. Anyone would have.

"How did you find out?"

"She—well, she went out tonight and I called at her place and someone said she'd gone out with Sam, and Sam generally brings her here. And there she was, and when I put it to her she confessed. I guess it was as well the bartender stepped in, or I'd have lost control and maybe done something really serious to her."

I said, "Well—how come she's the only one? Have you no friends or anyhing?"

That opened the floodgates.

The poor guy—his full name was Mack Wilson—was an orphan brought up in a foundling home which he hated; he ran away in his teens and was committed to reform school for some petty theft or other, and hated that too, and by the time he got old enough to earn his living he was sour on the world, but he'd done his best to set himself straight, only to find that he'd missed learning how. Somewhere along the line he'd failed to get the knack of making friends.

When he'd told me the whole story, I felt he was truly pitiable. When I contrasted his loneliness with my comfortable condition I felt almost ashamed. Maybe the rye had a lot to do with it, but it didn't feel that way. I wanted to cry, and I hardly even felt foolish for wanting.

Round about ten or ten-thirty, when most of the bottle had gone, he slapped the counter and started to get down from his stool. He wobbled frighteningly. I caught hold of him, but he brushed me aside.

"Home, I guess," he said hopelessly. "If I can make it. If I don't get run down by some lucky so-and-so who's careless what he hits because he's all right, he has Contacts aplenty."

He was darned right—that was the trouble. I said, "Look, don't you think you should sober up first?"

"How in hell do you think I'll get to sleep if I'm not

pickled?" he retorted. And he was probably right there, too. He went on, "You wouldn't know, I guess; what it's like to lie in bed, staring into the dark, without a Contact anywhere. It makes the whole world seem hateful and dark and hostile . . ."

"Jesus!" I said, because that really hit me.

A sudden glimmer of hope came into his eyes. He said, "I don't suppose—no, it's not fair. You're a total stranger. Forget it."

I pressed him, because it was good to see any trace of hope on *that* face. After a bit of hesitation, he came out with it.

"You wouldn't make a Contact with me, would you? Just to tide me over till I talk one of my friends around? I know guys at work I could maybe persuade. Just a few days, that's all."

"At this time of night?" I said. I wasn't sure I like the idea; still, I'd have him on my conscience if I didn't fall in.

"They have all-night Contact service at LaGuardia Airport," he said. "For people who want to make an extra one as insurance before going on a long flight. We could go there."

"It'll have to be a one-way, not a mutual," I said. "I don't have twenty-five bucks to spare."

"You'll do it?" He looked as though he couldn't believe his ears. Then he grabbed my hand and pumped it up and down, and settled his check and hustled me to the door and found a cab and we were on the way to the airport before I really knew what was happening.

The consultant at the airport tried to talk me into having a mutual; Mack had offered to pay for it. But I stood firm on that. I don't believe in people adding Contacts to their list when the others are real friends. If something were to happen to me, I felt, and somebody other than my wife, or my brother, or my long-time friend from college, were to pick me up, I was certain they'd all three be very much hurt by it. So since there were quite a few customers waiting to make an extra Contact before flying to Europe, the consultant didn't try too hard.

It had always been a source of wonder to me that Contact was such a simple process. Three minutes' fiddling with the equipment; a minute or two to put the helmets properly on our heads; mere seconds for the scan to go to completion during which the brain buzzed with fragments of memory dredged up from nowhere and presented like a single movie frames to consciousness . . . and finished.

The consultant gave us the standard certificates and the warranty form—valid five years, recommended reinforcement, owing to personality development, temporal-geographical factor, in the event of death instantaneous transfer, adjustment lapse, in the event of more than one Contact being extant some possibility of choice, and so on. And there it was.

I never had been able to make sense of the principle on which Contact worked. I knew it wasn't possible before the the advent of printed-molecule electronics, which pushed the information capacity of computers up to the level of the human brain and beyond. I knew vaguely that in the first place they had been trying to achieve mechanical telepathy, and that they succeeded in finding means to scan the entire content of a brain and transfer it to an electronic store. I knew also that telepathy didn't come, but immortality did.

What it amounted to, in lay terms, was this: only the advent of death was enough of a shock to the personality to make it want to get up and go. Then it wanted but *desperately*. If at some recent time the personality had been as it were shown to someone else's mind, there was a place ready for it to go to.

At that point I lost touch with the explanations. So did practically everybody. Resonance came into it, and maybe the receiver's mind vibrated in sympathy with the mind of the person about to die; that was a fair picture, and the process worked, so what more could anyone ask?

I was later in coming out from under than he was; this was a one-way, and he was being scanned, which is quick, while I was being printed, which is slightly slower. When I came out he was trying to get something straight with the consultant, who wasn't interested, but he wouldn't be just pushed

aside—he had to have his answer. He got it as I was emerging from under the helmet.

"No, there's no known effect. Sober or drunk, the process goes through!"

The point had never occurred to me before—whether liquor would foul up the accuracy of the Contact.

Thinking of the liquor reminded me that I'd drunk a great deal of rye and it was the first time I'd had more than a couple of beers in many months. For a little while I had a warm glow, partly from the alcohol and partly from the knowledge that thanks to me this last lonely man wasn't lonely any more.

Then I began to lose touch. I think it was because Mack had brought the last of the bottle along and insisted on our toasting our new friendship—or words like that. Anyway, I remember that he got the cab and told the hackie my address and then it was the next morning and he was sleeping on the couch in the rumpus room and the doorbell was going like an electric alarm.

I pieced these facts together a little afterwards. When I opened the door, it was Mary standing there. The woman who had expunged Mack the day before.

She came in quite politely, but with a determined expression which I couldn't resist in my morning-after state, and told me to sit down and took a chair herself.

She said, "Was it true what Mack told me on the phone?"

I looked vacant. I *felt* vacant.

Impatiently, she said, "About him making a Contact with you. He called me up at two a.m. and told me the whole story. I wanted to throw the phone out the window, but I hung on and got your name out of him, and some of your address, and the rest from the phone book. Because I wouldn't want anybody to have Mack wished on him. Not anybody."

By this time I was starting to connect. But I didn't have much to say. I let her get on with it.

"I once read a story," she said. "I don't remember who by. Perhaps you've read it too. About a man who saved another man from drowning. And the guy was grateful, gave him

presents, tried to do him favors, said he was his only friend in all the world, dogged his footsteps, moved into his home —and finally the guy who'd saved him couldn't stand it any longer and took him and pushed him back in the river. That's Mack Wilson. That's why Mack Wilson has been expunged by everybody he's conned into making Contact with him in the past two mortal years. I stood it for going on three months, and that's about the record, as I understand it."

There was a click, a door opening, and there was Mack in shirt and pants, roused from his sleep in the rumpus room by the sound of Mary's voice. She got in first. She said, "You see? He's started already."

"You!" Mack said. "Haven't you done enough?" And he turned to me. "She isn't satisfied with expunging me and leaving me without a Contact in the world. She has to come here and try to talk you into doing the same! Can you imagine anybody hating me like that?"

On the last word his voice broke, and I saw that there were real tears in his eyes.

I put my muddled mind together and found something to say.

"Look," I said. "All I did this for was just that I don't think anyone should have to go without a Contact nowadays. All I did it for was to tide Mack over." I was mainly talking to Mary. "I drank too much last night and he brought me home and that was why he's here this morning. I don't care who he is or what he's done—I have Contacts myself, I don't know what I'd do if I didn't, and until Mack fixes up something maybe with somebody where he works I'll go bail for him. That's all."

"That's the way it started with me," Mary said. "Then he moved into my apartment. Then he started following me on the street to make sure nothing happened to me. He said."

"Where would I have been if something had?" Mack protested.

Just then I caught sight of the clock on the wall, and saw it was noon. I jumped up.

"Jesus!" I said. "My wife and kids get back at four, and

I promised to clear the apartment up while they were away."

"I'll give you a hand," Mack said. "I owe you that, at least."

Mary got to her feet. She was looking at me with a hopeless expression. "Don't say you weren't warned," she said.

So she was right. So Mack was very helpful. He was better around the house than a lot of women I've known, and though it took right up until my wife got home with the children the job was perfect. Even my wife was impressed. So since it was getting on towards the evening she insisted on Mack staying for supper with us, and he went and got some beer and over it he told my wife the spot that he'd been put in, and then at around nine or half past he said he wanted an early night because of work tomorrow, and went home.

Which seemed great under the circumstances. I dismissed what Mary had said as the bitterness of a disappointed woman, and felt sorry for her. She hadn't looked the type to be so bitter when I first saw her the evening before.

It was about three or four days later that I began to catch on. There was this new craze for going to see pre-Contact movies, and though I didn't feel that I would get a bang out of watching soldiers and gunmen kill each other without Contact to look forward to, my wife had been told by all her friends that she oughtn't to miss out on this eerie thrill.

Only there was the problem of the kids. We couldn't take eleven-month twins along, very well. And we'd lost our regular sitter and when we checked up there just didn't seem to be anyone on hand.

I tried to talk her into going alone, but she didn't like the idea. I'd noticed that she'd given up watching pre-Contact programs on TV, so that was of a piece.

So we'd decided to scrap the idea, though I knew she was disappointed, until Mack called, heard the problem, and at once offered to sit in.

Great, we thought. He seemed willing, competent, and even eager to do us the favor, and we had no worries about going out. The kids were fast asleep before we left.

We parked the car and started to walk around to the movie house. It was getting dark, and it was chilly, so we hurried along although we had plenty of time before the start of the second feature.

Suddenly my wife glanced back and stopped dead in her tracks. A man and a boy following close behind bumped into her, and I had to apologize and when they'd gone on asked what on earth was the trouble.

"I thought I saw Mack following us," she said. "Funny. . . ."

"Very funny," I agreed. "Where?" I looked along the sidewalk, but there were a lot of people, including several who were dressed and built similarly to Mack. I pointed this out, and she agreed that she'd probably been mistaken. I couldn't get her to go beyond *probably.*

The rest of our walk to the movie was a kind of sidelong hobble, because she kept staring behind her. It got embarrassing after a while, and suddenly I thought I understood why she was doing it.

I said, "You're not really looking forward to this, are you?"

"What do you mean?" ?" she said, injured. "I've been looking forward to it all week."

"You can't really be," I argued. "Your subconscious is playing tricks on you—making you think you see Mack, so that you'll have an excuse to go back home instead of seeing the movies. If you're only here because of your *kaffeeklatsch* friends who've talked you into the idea, and you don't actually think you'll enjoy it, let's go."

I saw from her expression I was at least half right. But she shook her head. "Don't be silly," she said. "Mack would think it was awfully funny, wouldn't he, if we came right home? He might think we didn't trust him, or something."

So we went in, and we sat through the second feature and were duly reminded of what life was like—and worse, what death was like—in those distant days a few years ago when Contact didn't exist. When the lights went up briefly between the two pictures I turned to my wife.

"I must say—" I began, and broke off short, staring.

He *was* there, right across the aisle from us. I knew it was Mack, not just someone who looked like Mack, because of the way he was trying to duck down into his collar and prevent me from recognizing him. I pointed, and my wife's face went absolutely chalk-white.

We started to get to our feet. He saw us, and ran.

I caught him halfway down the block, grabbing his arm and spinning him around, and I said, "What in hell is this all about? This is just about the dirtiest trick that anyone ever played on me!"

If anything happened to those kids, of course, that was the end. You couldn't make a Contact for a child till past the age of reading, at the earliest.

And he had the gall to try and argue with me. To make excuses for himself. He said something like, "I'm sorry, but I got so worried I couldn't stand it any longer. I made sure everything was all right, and I only meant to be out for a little while, and—"

My wife had caught up by now, and she turned it on. I never suspected before that she knew so many dirty words, but she did, and she used them, and she finished up by slapping him across the face with her purse before leading me into a dash for the car. All the way home she was telling me what an idiot I'd been to get tangled up with Mack, and I was saying what was perfectly true—that I did the guy a favor because I didn't think anyone should have to be lonely and without a Contact any more—but true or not it sounded hollow.

The most terrifying sound I ever heard was the noise of those two kids squalling as we came in. But nothing was wrong with either of them except they were lonely and miserable, and we comforted them and made a fuss over them till they quieted down.

The outside door opened while we were breathing sighs of relief and there he was again. Of course, we'd left him a key to the door while we were out, in case he had to step around the corner or anything. Well, a few minutes is one thing—but

tracking us to the movie house and then sitting through the show was another altogether.

I was practically speechless when I saw who it was. I let him get the first few words in because of that. He said, "Please, you must understand! All I wanted was to make sure nothing happened to you! Suppose you'd had a crash on the way to the movie, and I didn't know—where would I be then? I sat here and worried about it till I just couldn't stand any more, and all I meant to do was make sure you were safe, but when I got down to the movie house I got worried about your coming home safe and—"

I still hadn't found any words because I was so blind angry. So, since I couldn't take any more, I wound up and let him have it on the chin. He went halfway backwards through the open door behind him, catching at the jamb to stop himself falling, and his face screwed up like a mommy's darling who's got in a game too rough for him and he started to snivel.

"Don't drive me away!" he moaned. "You're the only friend I have in the world! Don't drive me away!"

"Friend!" I said. "After what you did this evening I wouldn't call you my friend if you were the last guy on Earth! I did you a favor and you've paid it back exactly the way Mary said you would. Get the hell *out* of here and don't try to come back, and first thing in the morning I'm going to stop by a Contact agency and have you expunged!"

"No!" he shrieked. I never thought a man could scream like that—as though red-hot irons had been put against his face. "No! You can't do that! It's inhuman! It's—"

I grabbed hold of him and twisted the key out of his fingers, and for all he tried to cling to me and went on blubbering I pushed him out of the door and slammed it in his face.

That night I couldn't sleep. I lay tossing and turning, staring up into the darkness. After half an hour of this, I heard my wife sit up in the other bed.

"What's the trouble, honey?" she said.

"I don't know," I said. "I guess maybe I feel ashamed of myself for kicking Mack out the way I did."

"Nonsense!" she said sharply. "You're too soft-hearted. You couldn't have done anything else. Lonely or not lonely, he played a disgusting, wicked trick on us—leaving the twins alone like that after he'd promised! You didn't promise him anything. You said you were doing him a favor. You couldn't know what sort of a person he'd turn out to be. Now you relax and go to sleep. I'm going to wake you early and make sure of getting you to a Contact agency before you go in to work."

At that precise moment, as though he'd been listening, I picked him up.

I could never describe—not if I tried for twenty life times—the slimy, underhand, snivelly triumph that was in his mind when it happened. I couldn't convey the sensation of "Yah, tricked you again!" Or the undertone of "You treated me badly; see how badly I can treat you."

I think I screamed a few times when I realized what had happened. Of course. He'd conned me into making a Contact with him, just as he'd done to a lot of other people before—only they'd seen through him in good time and expunged without telling him, so that when he found out, it was too late to cheat on the deal the way he'd cheated me.

I'd told him I was going to expunge him in the morning—that's a unilateral decision, as they call it, and there wasn't a thing he could do to stop me. Something in my voice must have shown that I really meant it. Because, though he couldn't stop me, he could forestall me, and he'd done exactly that.

He'd shot himself in the heart.

I went on hoping for a little while. I fought the nastiness that had come into my mind—sent my wife and kids off to her parents again over the weekend—and tried to sweat it out by myself. I didn't make it. I was preoccupied for a while finding out exactly how many lies Mack had told me—about his reform school, his time in jail, his undiscovered thefts and shabby tricks played on people he called friends like the one he'd played on me—but then it snapped, and I had to go and call up my father-in-law and find out if my wife had arrived yet, and she hadn't, and I chewed my nails to the knuckle

and called up my old friend Hank who said hullo, yes of course I still have your Contact you old so-and-so and how are you and say I may be flying up to New York next weekend—

I was *horrified.* I couldn't help it. I guess he thought I was crazy or at any rate idiotically rude, when I tried to talk him out of flying up, and we had a first-rate argument which practically finished with him saying he'd expunge the Contact if that was the way I was going to talk to an old pal.

Then I panicked and had to call my kid brother Joe, and he wasn't home—gone somewhere for the weekend, *my* part of my mind told me, and nothing to worry about. But Mack's part of my mind said he was probably dead and my old friend was going to desert me and pretty soon I wouldn't have a Contact at all and then I'd be permanently dead and how about that movie last night with people being killed and having no Contacts at all?

So I called my father-in-law again and yes my wife and the twins were there now and they were going on the lake in a boat belonging to a friend and I was appalled and tried to say that it was too dangerous and don't let them and I'd come up myself and hold them back if I had to and—

It hasn't stopped. It's been quite a time blending Mack in with the rest of me; I hoped and hoped that when the *click* came things would be better. But they're worse.

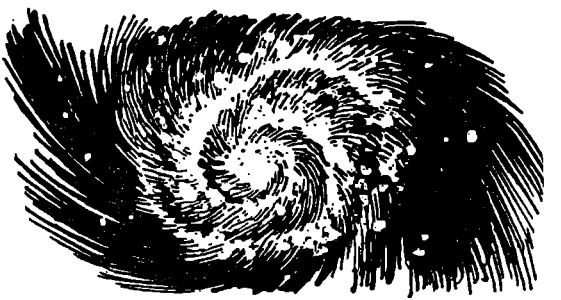
Worse?

Well—I can't be sure about that. I mean, it's true that until now I was taking the most appalling risks. Like going out to work all day and leaving my wife at home alone—why, anything might have happened to her! And not seeing Hank for months on end. And not checking with Joe every chance I got, so that if he was killed I could have time to fix up another Contact to take his place.

It's safer now, though. Now I have this gun, and I don't go out to work, and I don't let my wife out of my sight at all, and we're going to drive very carefully down to Joe's place, and stop him doing foolish things too, and when I've got him lined up we'll go to Hank's and prevent him from mak-

ing that insanely risky flight to New York and then maybe things will be okay.

The thing that worries me, though, is that I'll have to go to sleep some time, and—what if something happens to them all when I'm asleep?



THE STAR PARTY

BY ROBERT LORY

I FEEL BAD about the killing, especially since it wouldn't have happened if I'd listened to Vicki. We should stay away from Hadley's party, she said. She had reasons—none of them the right one, but she had reasons.

"These things are always such bores," she complained as she put up her long blonde hair.

"I can't stand your Madison Avenue beetle-brains playing their character roles," was her reason as I started the car.

"They're all a bunch of mashers," she said as we entered the elevator in Hadley's building.

"And Hadley's a lush," she snapped when the elevator arrived at the ninth floor.

I was pressing Hadley's buzzer when Vicki sounded her last, pouting argument. "His breath is repulsive too."

I nodded agreement, just as I had nodded agreement with everything else she had said. I pointed out in rebuttal that to get established on the Avenue such things were necessary—the parties, the mashers and Hadley's bad breath. I didn't say anything about Isvara. Though Vicki didn't know him, Isvara was why we were showing at this particular party.

The door opened and sounds of loud good fellowship flooded the hallway. A fat and drooling Hadley blocked the view of the goings-on inside.

"George, old man! And lovely, lovely, *lovely* Vicki!" We

stepped in and Hadley stumbled his way to the closet, dropping Vicki's coat before making it. He was loaded already.

"My, and how beautiful you certainly do look," he said, returning to Vicki's side. The slob was right, of course. He had one lone talent, but it was enough to make him a high-salaried art director. He could judge beauty. And Vicki—tall, blonde and shapely in her silver gown—was female beauty itself tonight.

"Hey kids, look who's here—it's Georgie Bond. Ho there, wonder boy!" These words bubbled forth from the most loud-mouthed account executive in New York. How Breem ever got along with clients was beyond my understanding. He did have a way with words, though—so I grimaced, waiting for the sequel to the "wonder boy" he'd just tagged me with.

It came, with a sickening guffaw: "Yes sir, we all *wonder, boy,* how you ever got yourself a woman like that. Haw ha ha.

We haw-ha-ha'd our way through Hadley's living room and dining room, receiving greetings ranging from half-hearted smiles to stinging slaps on the back. Every woman in the place seemed bent on seeing how close to me they could thrust their breasts.

I don't know what most men think, but it's my opinion that breasts are great—in their place. Which is *not* trussed up so far that they look like deformed shoulders. The whole human race disgusts me sometimes. Vicki gets disgusted too, especially at parties.

"Enjoying yourself?" she asked sourly.

I was preparing a flip answer when an ugly copywriter named Pitcorn grabbed my arm and shoved a potato chip into my face. "Try one, George? The dip is excellent. Marcia made it."

The dip he referred to was a vile shade of cream. I swallowed hard and managed a smile. "No thanks, Pit. Diet, you know," I told him and gave his back a hearty thump. It was as hearty as I could make it. Pitcorn coughed up at least three potato chips.

My sadistic joy was interrupted by a tug on the sleeve

from Vicki. When we were out of Pitcorn's hearing, she said, "I'm glad you did that. I think he had designs on me."

"Never fear," I said. "You'd be the death of him and he knows it. Let's get something to drink."

As we headed for the mahogany bar in Hadley's large living room, my eyes wandered across the giggling and frothing faces that were jabbering, singing and leering round us. The party had reached the stage where men's jackets were off, ties were loose, and the women's gowns were showing effects of that unmentionable subject, perspiration.

My mind took all this in matter-of-factly while I tried to spot the person whose presence at this orgy was the only reason for mine.

"Who is it?" Vicki said as I poured her a martini. "The one you're looking for—who is it?"

I smiled. It was a smile of pride. How superior Vicki was to the clownish creatures here. What other woman in the place could know, instinctively, exactly what her man was thinking? "Who?" she repeated.

"Him," I said, relieved that I'd found the tall, lean man who was now coming through the frosted glass door separating the room from a balcony outside. "The one in the turban. Name is Isvara."

"Interesting name. Is it really his?"

Someone who has studied deeply in man's religious beliefs would recognize—as Vicki did—Isvara as one of the titles of the Hindu's boss god. Whether our Isvara was born with that name or had substituted it for Ali Baba or Sam O'Rourke I didn't know, and I told Vicki that.

We watched as a plump redhead I didn't recognize offered Isvara a drink of some kind. He declined with the slightest nod of his head and, leaving the redhead staring in indignation, he squatted on the backs of his heels in an isolated corner of the room.

"He plays the mystic very well," Vicki observed. "Where did Hadley latch onto him?"

"The agency. Isvara is posing for some cigaret ads. He's

also probably here to entertain us tonight. He reads people's characters."

Vicki sipped her martini. "A crystal baller, or does he use tea leaves?" she asked sourly.

"Neither. Stars—a kind of astrology. Pitcorn told me about it. Isvara watches somebody's actions closely and from these he determines the person's ruling planet or the stars that influenced his birth. The rest of his deductions are supposed to follow logically."

"And you believe it?"

"Pitcorn does. Isvara told him that his big problem in life was never adjusting to his step-mother's death, and that if he ever marries it better be to an elderly librarian."

Vicki laughed at the image of Pitcorn's future bride, but her face abruptly became serious. "Did you see that? He was looking in our direction. At me."

A heavy clap on the shoulder stopped whatever comment I might have made. "Have fun, Georgie—hey!" Hadley roared and lunged for Vicki. She side-stepped his poised-for-pinch talons and our host staggered off to the divan where he flopped into the lap of a blue-haired matron who had been wildly defending her personal theory of great literature.

"I think I'm afraid of that man," Vicki said.

"He's harmless. Just fancies himself a great lover, that's all."

"I'm not talking about Hadley. *Him.*" She was looking at Isvara. "He makes me feel creepy. I'm certain he's been watching me."

"Sure," I said, mocking her anxious tone. "He's probably quite smitten with you. After all, he has a great affinity toward stars, and to any discerning man you're the star of this party."

Vicki murmured something about not liking it just the same, when I realized to my horror that my glass was empty. I learned at my first agency party that the only way to get through them with your sanity intact was to get completely smashed. " 'Nuther?" I asked Vicki.

She said no, so I had to wade alone through the weaving

bodies that danced—if you could call it that—to the rhythms of some bad jazz.

At the bar I traded my regulation-size martini glass for an eight-ounce water tumbler. Gin and vermouth tumbled around the ice and had reached the top of the glass when I noticed that an agency artist named Goddard had cornered Vicki near a potted palm.

Goddard the Dullard, I called him. A dunce. Whenever I reflected that the reason for my wanting to work in advertising was to be near people like Goddard, Pitcorn and the rest, I had to question my intelligence. Intelligence was at the heart of the matter. Artists and writers—creative men—I figured would be more intelligent than other men, would be closer to understanding the meaning of life. I was wrong.

Yet, there was Isvara, now standing in a corner of the room. Maybe he . . . I decided to put him to the test.

He answered my hello with, "Your wife is a most charming person."

I agreed, thinking that I could discuss my wife's attributes with anybody at any time and that right now I wanted to talk astrology with somebody who claimed to know something about it.

"Most charming," he repeated, "but odd."

My conscious mind swam through the gin and vermouth and snapped to attention. "Odd?"

"Yes," he said. "You know of my abilities, Mr.—?"

"Bond—George Bond."

"Mr. Bond—you have heard, I think, of my ability to analyze people's characters from their actions. You have, have you not, been waiting all evening for an opportunity to discuss this subject with me?

"The deduction was not hard, Mr. Bond—based on mere surface observations. It's your wife I've been concentrating on, as she has told you already."

Vicki was right, then. He had been watching her. "I'll be interested in your analysis," I said.

Isvara shook his head. "There is no analysis. Your wife is . . . unfathomable, and I do not say that lightly. Because,

Mr. Bond, when my talents cannot take me inside a person's very soul, that person is—unfathomable. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't," I admitted.

"I do." The voice was Vicki's. She evidently had managed to brush Goddard aside. "I understand perfectly. Mr.—Isvara?—Mr. Isvara is telling you, George, that when his infallible system fails, it cannot be that the failure lies with his system or with himself. The fault, obviously, must lie with the subject." Vicki winked at me and smiled. "In other words, I'm a very naughty girl."

If I was the sort who blushes easily, I would have then. Isvara—the one person in the place I was beginning to have some respect for—and Vicki acting her nastiest. I started to apologize, but I was cut off short.

"Mrs. Bond is quite right, even though she spoke in jest. The fault does indeed lie with her." He said it calmly, like a teacher explaining to a grade school class that hydrogen and oxygen combine to make water. I laughed. It served Vicki right. I would have laughed more, but Isvara continued.

"It's true. Whether or not you realize it, Mr. Bond, your wife is trying very hard to be something she's not. She's putting on a very special act."

"Act?" I stared at Vicki.

"Act," he said. "A variety of characteristics tell me she is a Capricorn. Her charm, her type of sensual attraction, certain marks left by experience—they all point to that sign ruled by Saturn. But she lacks the dignity and reservation found in Capricorns. She smiles too eagerly, and even an amateur psychologist can spot a . . . a phony smile. Notice, Mr. Bond, that she is not smiling now."

He couldn't have been more correct there. Vicki's face was placid, but inside she was a volcano about two seconds before eruption time. I was her husband and I could tell. And so could Isvara.

She had followed my thoughts, I knew. I'll handle this, her eyes said. She began to try.

"Mr. Isvara, perhaps you have me dead to rights. Maybe

I do put on some kind of front to be sociable at these gatherings which I cannot stand. So what? Many people put on the same kind of front. You say I'm a Capricorn, under the influence of—Saturn, was it? Well, why not let it go at that?"

Isvara smiled. It wasn't a pleasant smile. "Because you defy analysis under Saturn's sign. You dress like a Taurus, behave publicly like an Aries, and think like a Libra. While I have nothing but contempt for popular astrology, any practitioner will tell you that both Aries and Libra are incompatible with Capricorn."

"Which means?" Vicki said icily.

"Which means that either you have a multiple-personality neurosis—which you do not—or you are consciously living a very large lie."

"I beg your pardon!" I said, making an effort to sound gruff. The effort failed miserably, but I had to try.

"That was *not* meant as an insult, Mr. Bond." Isvara now was looking square into my eyes. "What I say is fact. The stars are fact. Their positions, although capable of a variety of influences, are nonetheless fact. And these influences are observable to those who know how to read them."

"And he sure can read them," a new voice chimed in. Of all the times when Pitcorn's face seemed repulsive, it was now. "Is he doing you, George?"

I smiled weakly. "Not me. Vicki."

Pitcorn said oh and pointed to the glass in my hand. "About ready for a refill? I'll stroll over with you."

"Yes, George—do go," Vicki said, handing me her glass. "And go easy on the vermouth." Her laugh sounded sincere, but it wasn't.

"Relax, man," Pitcorn told me as we crossed to the bar. "You look as jumpy as a—a pole-vaulter." He chuckled at his joke.

"Too much to drink," I grumbled and latched onto a full gin bottle.

I downed a glass of the stuff straight before filling our glasses with semi-respectable martinis. When I looked across

the room to where I'd left Vicki and Isvara, my pulse quickened.

They were gone.

"Hey, where are you going?" Pitcorn asked as I brushed by him in panic. In the kitchen and dining room, several low-cut gowns winked at me, but no Vicki. Back in the living room, I spotted her. She was closing the frosted glass door to the balcony.

"Quick, Isvara's outside," she whispered. Her panic was greater than mine.

I followed her to where Isvara stood, cold as stone, near the edge of the balcony. His eyes were blank, his heart was still. He was dead. Vicki had iced him.

"Did he know?" I asked.

"He was beginning to guess." She looked in nervously at the party. "We've got to hurry."

I made Isvara's body limp and lifted it up on the balcony ledge. "Get ready to scream," I told Vicki.

Nine floors above concrete, I pushed the body into the air. Vicki screamed.

"He said that . . . that he was trying to defy gravity," Vicki sobbed when Hadley and the others questioned us. We repeated the story when the police arrived.

"He just stepped off and . . . and—" Vicki cried hysterically.

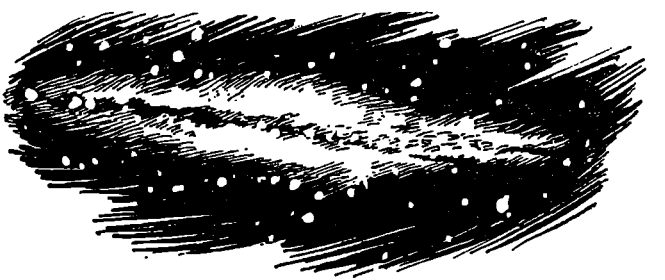
"He was kind of a nut, and I guess he was loaded like the rest of us," I added.

Everybody accepted our explanation. A character like Isvara—a mystic screwball, the police sergeant called him—would be very likely to test his powers by walking off a balcony. "We see a lot of this kind of thing," the sergeant assured Vicki, who shuddered convincingly. Nobody suspected us. We had no motive.

Of course, nobody knew what Isvara had told Vicki before she suggested they get a breath of fresh air. "But," he'd said, "the stars would be in different patterns if . . . they were viewed from . . . from somewhere else."

He was on to us—or he would have been soon. War is

war, but I still feel bad about his death. The man's intelligence, and the fact that he was so right about Vicki! She *is* a Capricorn—at least, Saturn is her ruling planet. It'll be everybody's, after our troops arrive.



THE WEATHER IN THE UNDERWORLD

BY COLIN FREE

THE CLOCK-VOICE chanted 37.05, 37.05. Humidity faded to a crisp 53 and the temperature steadied off at 68. It was night time.

"What shall I wear?" she said. "Tetraline or nothing?"

"Nothing," he said. He was in the cradling arms of the cuddle chair and its soft caressing sensuality was easing him away from the pressures of the hour. He notched the controls into Maximum and the spines undulated all along his body. He sighed; kept sighing.

Then Ilda stabbed her hand through the contact beam and the chair stuttered and went dead.

He jerked his head around. "What did you do that for?"

"I said what shall I wear? You didn't answer. You never do."

"I did."

"You didn't."

"I did. I did." He heaved himself out of the chair and the old tensions throbbed again. "I said nothing, wear nothing. What more do you want?"

Ilda strode into the bedroom.

He walked across to the window and the cells of the U-Vu leaped alive with its impeccable panorama of sand, sea, cliffs and sky. Wind teased the pines and birds flew up. In a moment, a vintage rocket would crackle across the blue silence. In a moment, it did.

He shouted at the bedroom, "You haven't changed the window."

"You haven't told me what you wanted, yet."

It was true. She was right, always right. The U-Vu catalogue was still in the rack. He tried to control the tension that hammered behind his eyes and clamped his damp fingers across his face, but it was like wings within trying to break free. From habit he walked to the wall console which murmured its consideration, measured his discomfort and slammed out a wafer stimulant. He rejected it. Undaunted, the console offered him a sleep capsule, but he walked away.

It is New Year Seven, he recited, and the best place on earth is UnderEarth. But he could not feel the truth of it or give it the conviction that was pre-supposed.

The time-tube said 41.03, 41.03.

He swigged down a quick tranquilla and the tension took on a kind of palpitation, a dying fall, he thought.

"How much longer?" he said at the bedroom door.

"Plenty of time."

"It's nearly 45."

"We'll get there."

He went in. The dressing closet was stenciling her body with long, sinuous diamonds so that her appearance, he thought, was unpleasantly reptilian.

"But it's nearly 45," he repeated.

She snapped on her waist belt and helmet, tossed the silver box into his unready hands. "Here. Plug in and shut up."

He nursed its warm metal silkiness. "Let's wait till we get to the Circuit Way."

"No. Plug in now." She sat down, leaned forward, and the closet obediently teased and set her hair, dusting it with gentle phosphorescence. "Sometimes I think you need a visit to the mentalizer," she said. "Do you?"

He knew but could not tell her. The disintegration of his memory pattern was incomplete; his therapy had failed and he was afraid. At sleep time, rejecting the prescribed capsule, thoughts came back: the familiar annihilation nightmare fuming up into his consciousness, then the moan and mutter of

the earth as they burrowed down and down, and finally the long descent into the lull and comfort of the warming air. Or else his unbidden memory provided him with the sounds of air locks sucked vacuum tight, and he heard again the howling of those outside, until the long cries were clipped short by the suction locks—and he wept again for those who could not come, the exiles, abandoned on the blue and bitter ice.

Yet here in the womb of UnderEarth, he too was exiled, if only by the clamoring chatter of those whose memories began at New Year One.

The tumblers fell and the thin voice rasped 45.00, 45.00.

He looked at Ilda's bleached and stenciled body, and was aggrieved in an ancient way, that he felt nothing. It had been assigned to him, or he to it, and there was no significance. It was merely an implicit fecundity motivated and geared by the mentalariums and change stations of the UnderWorld—but it was a mechanism without purpose, a body-machine of impotent perfection. He did not love her. He was not supposed to.

"You're thinking," she said.

"I'm not. What is there to think about?"

She put her hand on him, looked at him bleakly. "There's something wrong with you. What is it?"

"I'm tired, that's all."

Softly she said, "What do you actually think about?"

"Nothing. I told you—nothing."

He clipped the silver box at the base of his throat and the antennae activated immediately and pierced him through the implanted nodes and made prefrontal contact. For a moment there was a great throbbing zero, the profound nothing until his brain responded and he began to think the way a man ought to think.

The box throbbed warm against his skin, bleating out its approval and the knowledge that a night out with one's woman was the best thing, the finest thing a man could hope for. He tingled with happiness. He laughed.

"Come on," he said. "Come on, we'll miss the Circuit Way."

As the civic clocks piped 53, there were 12 points of pre-

arranged golden rain which fell in lazy drifts across the crowded forum. It was enjoyed by all.

Ilda sat close to him on the chair float and they caressed each other. The whole audience was effervescent, simmering with lightly suppressed laughter, for they were geared to Unit 5. Each box pulsed with irresistible titillations. The best place on earth was UnderEarth. It was good to be alive.

"Great to be alive!" she said.

His silver box bleated its response. "Absolutely!" he said.

She laughed hysterically, groping for her controls. It was the funniest thing she had ever heard.

His box dredged up the notion: *Why don't you do this more often?*

"We should do this more often," he said.

She shrieked with laughter.

His box piped: *As often as possible.*

"We should do it all the time," he said.

She flung her arms around him.

His box triggered off the prime edict and he began immediately. "The best place on earth . . ."

"Don't. Don't," she gasped. "It hurts when I laugh all the . . ."

". . . is the UnderEarth!" He finished on a chuckling exclamation. But even as his mood expanded and blossomed, the time-play began and he was caught midway in his reactions, seeing himself suddenly naked in his exile, imprisoned less by stone than by his own submission.

All at once, traumatically, he wrenched the antennae out of his head. Sweat glistened on him; fear dragged his eyes to the silver box which he clawed from his throat. He thought: my brain's in there! It's a murder box—and he recognized his own irrationality and rejoiced in it.

The box had a hot dampness in his hand; the metal was obscenely alive. It shuddered but he couldn't let it go.

Ilda cried out between laughter, "Where . . . where are you going?"

He dropped down from the chair and stumbled back to the conditioning room, fell on to the suspension couch, fin-

gers plucking at the studs, grinding his head into yielding foam. The box lay on the floor confused, unused to paradox.

He closed his eyes and sighed himself steadily towards the edge of sleep.

Then someone's cool hand touched his shoulder and he looked up.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

"No," he said. "No."

"You look ill."

He ignored the remark. "I came back for conditioning," he said.

"So did I," she said.

He sat up to study her, for there was an unfamiliar fire in her voice. She was some years younger than Ilda; her hair was not yet synthetic and she still affected briefs.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Vena."

"Married?"

"Assigned. I have three circuits to wait."

"I see." He stood up and reached out and touched her, touched her arm and the cold dome of her shoulder and her hair and her lips, touching them as though from a hunger of blindness. His hand fell and the box at his feet rolled away, afraid.

She was gazing at him now, as though in recognition. "It would be safer to accept conditioning," she said, "for both of us."

He noted now that her own box was disconnected. "Come with me," he said.

"No."

"Come with me."

"I don't know, without the box, without . . ."

He leaned down and picked up the silver-cased brain at his feet. For a moment it resisted in his hand, then died. He looked at Vena and she followed him out of the forum into the mainway and the autodoor said, "Thank you, call again."

The civic clocks said 58.12, 58.12 and some silver rain fell at the appointed time.

They sat on the rim of the canal on the nightside of the UnderWorld. He took her hand, but did not speak.

The vertical leaves of the metalwork trees scissored above their heads, and the long blades of artificial grass made a sound in the false wind like fracturing glass.

"No one has ever held my hand before," she said.

"Do you mind?"

"It seems pointless."

He laid her hand gently and sadly to one side as though it were expiring, then threw himself backwards into the grass which shattered beneath him.

"What shall we do now?" she said.

"Nothing, I suppose."

"Then what are we doing here?"

"Nothing."

"Are you sure you don't need a mentalizer?"

There was silence. He could feel the grass renewing itself under his body.

"I know," she said, "let's put our boxes on again."

"I only use mine at public functions."

"They'd like you to use them all the time."

"Who's 'they'? Have you ever seen them?"

The question was unfair for he knew that the omnipotent Controllers had been erased from her memory. But he knew that the idea was disconcerting.

"Let's put our boxes on."

He laughed. It was as humorless a sound as the scissoring leaves.

"I should get back to the forum," she said.

"Why?"

"Let me go," she said. But he was not holding her. "I'm . . ."—she searched for the word that was almost beyond memory—". . . frightened."

"Of what?"

"Everything."

He kissed her and she writhed under him and the grass broke with a wild chattering. She broke away.

"Why did you do that?" she said.

"It was just something I remembered."

"It's nothing *I* remember."

"From another time," he explained.

"When? When? Who are you?"

A sea breeze blew across them at the scheduled time, but there was no sea.

"I'm going to put my box on," she said, "and find out what I really think of you."

He had no argument with her, only the box. He grabbed an antenna at the point of insertion.

"You're hurting her," she pleaded. The box began to sing with a high thin note of alarm. She took it off.

He dropped his head and gazed into the mercury stillness of the canal. "I thought you might have understood," he said. "I made a mistake."

"Understood what?"

His fingers splintered the grass. "You don't recall New Year One?"

"The beginning of the world?"

"The end of the world."

"But in the first year . . ."

"The long shuffle and murmur of the queues at the selection depot, their anguished eyes, their hidden faces, and all the sobbing farewells that echoed across the ice. In the north, remember? the last rocket burned out and smeared the endless night . . ."

"I don't know." She was shivering.

But he thought that she did know.

"Right through it all the moan of the people and the whine of the wind. Their eyes like chips of dead ice." He held her fiercely now. "Why did we have to leave them behind?" He shook her. "What right did we have to leave them? All the aged, the lame and the blind. And the stunted children standing stiff with death on the ice?"

"Don't," she said.

"Did you hear them at the air locks? They pulped their hands trying to beat their way in. Remember? While we—

yes—huddled mother-tight in the dark of earth's insides. And submitted ourselves to *them*. Remember?"

"What's remember?" she asked.

"How could you forget?"

She tried to get up but he held her, and suddenly she rocked in his arms, but whether from despair or defeat he could not tell. Then suddenly he knew that he wanted to fall in love, he knew at once what love was, the simplicity and the therapy of it, and the word itself floated into his mind like a crystal, he thought, like a heartbeat. Love. He said it to her: "Love."

"What?" she said.

But his tongue could not yield the phrasing that he sought, the delicacies and seductions of another time, another age. "Love." He uttered the sound of the word again as though it might generate some magic of its own, but all it did was bring a sting of tears to his eyes. He remembered love, its sensations and exhilarations, remembered that one might live, breathe, regenerate—but there was no one to show him the way. All that was left was the dull metal of a badly minted word, like lead on his tongue, impure and unliving.

She struggled and stood, adjusted the box. The antennae homed, quivering. Suddenly, she was one of them again. "You ought to be neutralized," she said.

His hand grabbed her ankle with crippling force and she fell and the grass powdered. He grabbed the box at her throat and tightened his grip until the circuits shrieked. The sweating metal writhed in his hand and issued a dying discharge that jolted the length of his arm until he fell to his knees. He gave a sudden whimper. The wind stopped. The girl was dead.

The box sobbed and withdrew its antennae that glinted blood-wet in the light of the musk-colored moon.

They applied the usual mentalizers, conditioners and even attempted total circuiting, but he was beyond repair. So, during sleep-time, they took him quietly to the air shaft, put him in a pellet and let him drift up to the world above. The

air lock received him, passed him into the discharge chamber, and expelled him.

For a moment he thought the atmosphere had altered, for it was painful to breathe, but he soon adjusted and forced himself to walk. It was as dark as he remembered it, but the long-bedded ice glowed chill white, enough for him to see the pallor of his freezing hands.

The wind lamented the wasteland. Ice screeched with an endless shifting.

He fell down.

A drift of snow washed over him and burned his eyes. He knew without doubt that he was going to die. He got up and walked again. He fell again. He crawled for a few yards and then he could no longer feel his legs. He was without thought.

Then suddenly he looked up and saw them coming; he saw the three of them coming towards him.

He got up and tried to run. Seeing them pause, he waved again; he croaked out a cry to the three old men, the exiled men, bearded white and robed in the skin of animals. He shouted to them and they looked in his direction, shading their eyes against starlight. He tottered towards them, feet dancing on the crackling ground.

"Brother!" he shouted. "Brother!"

He fell at their feet and they took out short clubs and bludgeoned him to death.

They were so famished that they could not wait and the feasting began without further delay.

OH TO BE A BLOBEL!

BY PHILIP K. DICK

HE PUT a twenty-dollar platinum coin into the slot and the analyst, after a pause, lit up. Its eyes shone with sociability. It swiveled about in its chair, picked up a pen and pad of long yellow paper from its desk and said:

"Good morning, sir. You may begin.

"Hello, Doctor Jones. I guess you're not the same Doctor Jones who did the definitive biography of Freud; that was a century ago." He laughed nervously. Being a rather poverty-stricken man he was not accustomed to dealing with the new fully-homeostatic psychoanalysts. "Um," he said, "should I free-associate or give you background material or just what?"

Dr. Jones said, "Perhaps you could begin by telling me who you are und warum mich—why you have selected me."

"I'm George Munster of catwalk 4, building WEF-395, San Francisco condominium established 1996."

"How do you do, Mr. Munster." Dr. Jones held out its hand, and George Munster shook it. He found the hand to be of a pleasant body-temperature and decidedly soft. The grip, however, was manly.

"You see," Munster said, "I'm an ex-GI, a war veteran. That's how I got my condominium apartment at WEF-395. Veterans' preference."

"Ah, yes." Dr. Jones said, ticking faintly as it measured the passage of time. "The war with the Blobels."

"I fought three years in that war," Munster said, nervously smoothing his long, black, thinning hair. "I hated the Blobels and I volunteered. I was only nineteen and I had a good job—but the crusade to clear the Sol System of Blobels came first in my mind."

"Um," Dr. Jones said, ticking and nodding.

George Munster continued, "I fought well. In fact I got two decorations and a battlefield citation. Corporal. That's because I single-handedly wiped out an observation satellite full of Blobels; we'll never know exactly how many because of course, being Blobels, they tend to fuse together and unfuse confusingly." He broke off then, feeling emotional. Even remembering and talking about the war was too much for him. He lay back on the couch, lit a cigarette and tried to become calm.

The Blobels had emigrated originally from another star system, probably Proxima. Several thousand years ago they had settled on Mars and on Titan, doing very well at agrarian pursuits. They were developments of the original unicellular amoeba, quite large and with a highly-organized nervous system, but still amoebae, with pseudopodia, reproducing by binary fission, and in the main offensive to Terran settlers.

The war itself had broken out over ecological considerations. It had been the desire of the Foreign Aid Department of the UN to change the atmosphere on Mars, making it more usable for Terran settlers. This change, however, had made it unpalatable for the Blobel colonies already there; hence the squabble.

And, Munster reflected, it was not possible to change *half* the atmosphere of a planet, the Brownian movement being what it was. Within a period of ten years the altered atmosphere had diffused throughout the planet, bringing suffering—at least so they alleged—to the Blobels. In retaliation, a Blobel armada approached Terra and put into orbit a series of technically sophisticated satellites designed eventually to alter the atmosphere of Terra. This alteration had never come about, because of course the War Office of the UN

had gone into action; the satellites had been detonated by self-instructing missiles . . . and the war was on.

Dr. Jones said, "Are you married, Mr. Munster?"

"No sir," Munster said. "And—" he shuddered—"you'll see why when I've finished telling you. See, Doctor, I'll be frank. I was a Terran spy. That was my task. They gave the job to me because of my bravery in the field, I didn't ask for it."

"I see," Dr. Jones said.

"Do you?" Munster's voice broke. "Do you know what was necessary in those days in order to make a Terran into a successful spy among the Blobels?"

Nodding, Dr. Jones said, "Yes, Mr. Munster. You had to relinquish your human form and assume the form of a Blobel."

Munster said nothing; he clenched and unclenched his fist bitterly. Across from him Dr. Jones ticked.

That evening, back in his small apartment at WEF-395, Munster opened a fifth of Teacher's scotch and sat sipping from a cup, lacking even the energy to get a glass down from the cupboard over the sink.

What had he gotten out of the session with Dr. Jones today? Nothing, as nearly as he could tell. And it had eaten deep into his meager financial resources . . . meager because—

Because for almost twelve hours out of the day he reverted, despite all the efforts of himself and the Veterans' Hospitalization Agency of the UN, to his old wartime Blobel shape. To a formless unicellular-like blob, right in the middle of his own apartment at WEF-395.

His financial resources consisted of a small pension from the War Office. Finding a job was impossible, because as soon as he was hired the strain caused him to revert there on the spot, in plain sight of his new employer and fellow workers.

It did not assist in forming successful work-relationships.

Sure enough, now, at eight in the evening, he felt himself once more beginning to revert. It was an old and familiar experience to him, and he loathed it. Hurriedly, he sipped

the last of the cup of scotch, put the cup down on a table . . . and felt himself slide together into a homogeneous puddle.

The telephone rang.

"I can't answer," he called to it. The phone's relay picked up his anguished message and conveyed it to the calling party. Now Munster had become a single transparent gelatinous mass in the middle of the rug. He undulated toward the phone—it was still ringing, despite his statement to it, and he felt furious resentment; didn't he have enough troubles already, without having to deal with a ringing phone?

Reaching it, he extended a pseudopodium and snatched the receiver from the hook. With great effort he formed his plastic substance into the semblance of a vocal apparatus, resonating dully. "I'm busy," he resonated in a low booming fashion into the mouthpiece of the phone. "Call later." Call, he thought as he hung up, tomorrow morning. When I've been able to regain my human form.

The apartment was quiet now.

Sighing, Munster flowed back across the carpet to the window, where he rose into a high pillar in order to see the view beyond. There was a light-sensitive spot on his outer surface, and although he did not possess a true lens he was able to appreciate—nostalgically—the blur of San Francisco Bay, the Golden Gate Bridge, the playground for small children which was Alcatraz Island.

Dammit, he thought bitterly. I can't marry; I can't live a genuine human existence, reverting this way to the form the War Office bigshots forced me into back in the war times. . . .

He had not known then, when he accepted the mission, that it would leave this permanent effect. They had assured him it was "only temporary, for the duration," or some such glib phrase. Duration! Munster thought with furious, impotent resentment. It's been *eleven years.*

The psychological problems created for him, the pressure on his psyche, were immense. Hence his visit to Dr. Jones.

Once more the phone rang.

"Okay," Munster said aloud, and flowed back laboriously

across the room to it. "You want to talk to me?" he said as he came closer and closer; the trip, for someone in Blobel form, was a long one. "I'll talk to you. You can even turn on the vid-screen and *look* at me." At the phone he snapped the switch which would permit visual communication as well as auditory. "Have a good look," he said, and displayed his amorphous form before the scanning tube of the video.

Dr. Jones voice came, "I'm sorry to bother you at your home, Mr. Munster, especially when you're in this, um, awkward condition." The homeostatic analyst paused. "But I've been devoting time to problem solving vis-à-vis your condition. I may have at least a partial solution."

"What?" Munster said, taken by surprise. "You mean to imply that medical science can now—"

"No, no," Dr. Jones said hurriedly. "The physical aspects lie out of my domain; you must keep that in mind, Munster. When you consulted me about your problems it was the psychological adjustment that—"

"I'll come right down to your office and talk to you," Munster said. And then he realized that he could not; in his Blobel form it would take him days to undulate all the way across town to Dr. Jones' office. "Jones," he said desperately, "you see the problems I face. I'm stuck here in this apartment every night beginning about eight o'clock and lasting through until almost seven in the morning. I can't even visit you and consult you and get help—"

"Be quiet, Mr. Munster," Dr. Jones interrupted. "I'm trying to tell you something. You're not the only one in this condition. Did you know that?"

Heavily, Munster said, "Sure. In all, eighty-three Terrans were made over into Blobels at one time or another during the war. Of the eighty-three—" he knew the facts by heart—"sixty-one survived and now there's an organization called Veterans of Unnatural Wars of which fifty are members. I'm a member. We meet twice a month, revert in unison. . . ." He started to hang up the phone. So this was what he had gotten for his money, this stale news. "Goodbye, Doctor," he murmured.

Dr. Jones whirred in agitation. "Mr. Munster, I don't mean other Terrans. I've researched this in your behalf, and I discover that according to captured records at the Library of Congress fifteen *Blobels* were formed into pseudo-Terrans to act as spies for *their* side. Do you understand?"

After a moment Munster said, "Not exactly."

"You have a mental block against being helped," Dr. Jones said. "But here's what I want, Munster. You be at my office at eleven in the morning tomorrow. We'll take up the solution to your problem then. Good night."

Wearily, Munster said, "When I'm in my Blobel form my wits aren't too keen, Doctor. You'll have to forgive me." He hung up, still puzzled. So there were fifteen Blobels walking around on Titan this moment, doomed to occupy human forms—so what? How did that help him?

Maybe he would find out at eleven tomorrow.

When he strode into Dr. Jones' waiting room he saw, seated in a deep chair in a corner by a lamp, reading a copy of *Fortune*, an exceedingly attractive young woman.

Automatically, Munster found a place to sit from which he could eye her. Stylish dyed-white hair braided down the back of her neck—he took in the sight of her with delight, pretending to read his own copy of *Fortune*. Slender legs, small and delicate elbows. And her sharp, clearly-featured face. The intelligent eyes, the thin, tapered nostrils—a truly lovely girl, he thought. He drank in the sight of her . . . until all at once she raised her head and stared coolly back at him.

"Dull, having to wait," Munster mumbled.

The girl said, "Do you come to Dr. Jones often?"

"No," he admitted. "This is just the second time."

"I've never been here before," the girl said. "I was going to another electronic fully-homeostatic psychoanalyst in Los Angeles and then late yesterday Dr. Bing, my analyst, called me and told me to fly up here and see Dr. Jones this morning. Is this one good?"

"Um," Munster said. "I guess so." We'll see, he thought. That's precisely what we don't know yet.

The inner office door opened and there stood Dr. Jones. "Miss Arrasmith," it said, nodding to the girl. "Mr. Munster." It nodded to George. "Won't you both come in?"

Rising to her feet, Miss Arrasmith said, "Who pays the twenty dollars, then?"

But the analyst was silent; it had turned off.

"I'll pay," Miss Arrasmith said, reaching into her purse.

"No, no," Munster said. "Let me." He got out a twenty-dollar piece and dropped it into the analyst's slot.

At once, Dr. Jones said, "You're a gentleman, Mr. Munster." Smiling, it ushered the two of them into its office. "Be seated, please. Miss Arrasmith, without preamble please allow me to explain your—condition to Mr. Munster." To Munster it said, "Miss Arrasmith is a Blobel."

Munster could only stare at the girl.

"Obviously," Dr. Jones continued, "presently in human form. This, for her, is the state of involuntary reversion. During the war she operated behind Terran lines, acting for the Blobel War League. She was captured and held, but then the war ended and she was not tried."

"They released me," Miss Arrasmith said in a low, carefully controlled voice. "Still in human form. I stayed here out of shame. I just couldn't go back to Titan and—" Her voice wavered.

"There is great shame attached to this condition," Dr. Jones said, "for any high-caste Blobel."

Nodding, Miss Arrasmith sat clutching a tiny Irish linen handkerchief and trying to look poised. "Correct, Doctor. I did visit Titan to discuss my condition with medical authorities there. After expensive and prolonged therapy with me they were able to induce a return to my natural form for a period of about one-fourth of the time. But the other three-fourths . . . I am as you perceive me now." She ducked her head and touched the handkerchief to her right eye.

"Jeez," Munster protested, "you're lucky! A human form is infinitely superior to a Blobel form. I ought to know. As a Blobel you have to creep along. You're like a big jelly-fish, no skeleton to keep you erect. And binary fission—it's lousy, I

say, really lousy, compared to the Terran form of—you know. Reproduction." He colored.

Dr. Jones ticked and stated, "For a period of about six hours your human forms overlap. And then for about one hour your Blobel forms overlap. So all in all, the two of you possess seven hours out of twenty-four in which you both possess identical forms. In my opinion—" it toyed with its pen and paper—"seven hours is not too bad, if you follow my meaning."

After a moment Miss Arrasmith said, "But Mr. Munster and I are natural enemies."

"That was years ago," Munster said.

"Correct," Dr. Jones agreed. "True, Miss Arrasmith is basically a Blobel and you, Munster, are a Terran. But both of you are outcasts in either civilization. Both of you are stateless and hence gradually suffering a loss of ego-identity. I predict for both of you a gradual deterioration ending finally in severe mental illness. *Unless* you two can develop a rapprochement." The analyst was silent then.

Miss Arrasmith said softly, "I think we're very lucky, Mr. Munster. As Dr. Jones said, we do overlap for seven hours a day . . . we can enjoy that time together, no longer in wretched isolation." She smiled up hopefully at him, rearranging her coat. Certainly, she had a nice figure; the somewhat low-cut dress gave an ideal clue to that.

Studying her, Munster pondered.

"Give him time," Dr. Jones told Miss Arrasmith. "My analysis of him is that he will see this correctly and do the right thing."

Still rearranging her coat and dabbing at her large, dark eyes, Miss Arrasmith waited.

II

THE PHONE in Dr. Jones' office rang, a number of years later. He answered it in his customary way. "Please, sir or madam, deposit twenty dollars if you wish to speak to me."

A tough male voice on the other end of the line said, "Listen, this is the UN Legal Office and we don't deposit twenty dollars to talk to anybody. So trip that mechanism inside you, Jones."

"Yes, sir," Dr. Jones said, and with his right hand tripped the lever behind his ear that caused him to come on free.

"Back in 2037," the UN legal expert said, "did you advise a couple to marry? A George Munster and a Vivian Arrasmith, now Mrs. Munster?"

"Why, yes," Dr. Jones said, after consulting his built-in memory banks.

"Had you investigated the legal ramifications of their issue?"

"Um, well," Dr. Jones said, "that's not my worry."

"You can be arraigned for advising any action contrary to UN laws."

"There's no law prohibiting a Blobel and a Terran from marrying."

The UN legal expert said, "All right, Doctor, I'll settle for a look at their case histories."

"Absolutely no," Dr. Jones said. "That would be a breach of ethics."

"We'll get a writ and sequester them, then."

"Go ahead." Dr. Jones reached behind his ear to shut himself off.

"Wait. It may interest you to know that the Munsters now have four children. And, following the Revised Mendelian Law, the offspring comprise a strict one, two, one ratio. One Blobel girl, one hybrid boy, one hybrid girl, one Terran girl. The legal problem arises in that the Blobel Supreme Council claims the pure-blooded Blobel girl as a citizen of Titan and also suggests that one of the two hybrids be donated to the Council's jurisdiction." The UN legal expert explained, "You see, the Munsters' marriage is breaking up. They're getting divorced and it's sticky finding which laws obtain regarding them and their issue."

"Yes," Dr. Jones admitted, "I would think so. What has caused their marriage to break up?"

"I don't know and don't care. Possibly the fact that both adults rotate daily between being Blobels and Terrans. Maybe the strain got to be too much. If you want to give them psychological advice, consult them. Goodbye." The UN legal expert rang off.

Did I make a mistake, advising them to marry? Dr. Jones asked itself. I wonder if I shouldn't look them up; I owe at least that to them.

Opening the Los Angeles phonebook, it began thumbing through the M's.

These had been six difficult years for the Munsters.

First George had moved from San Francisco to Los Angeles. He and Vivian had set up their household in a condominium apartment with three instead of two rooms. Vivian, being in Terran form three-fourths of the time, had been able to obtain a job; right out in public she gave jet flight information at the Fifth Los Angeles Airport. George, however—

His pension comprised an amount only one-fourth that of his wife's salary and he felt it keenly. To augment it, he had searched for a way of earning money at home. Finally in a magazine he had found this valuable ad:

MAKE SWIFT PROFITS IN YOUR OWN CONDO! RAISE GIANT BULLFROGS FROM JUPITER CAPABLE OF EIGHTY-FOOT LEAPS. CAN BE USED IN FROG-RACING (where legal) AND—

So in 2038 he had bought his first pair of frogs imported from Jupiter and had begun raising them for swift profits, right in his own condominium apartment building, in a corner of the basement that Leopold, the partially-homeostatic janitor, let him use gratis.

But in the relatively feeble Terran gravity the frogs were capable of enormous leaps, and the basement proved too small for them; they ricocheted from wall to wall like green ping-pong balls and soon died. Obviously, it took more than a por-

tion of the basement at QEK-604 Apartments to house a crop of the damned things, George realized.

And then, too, their first child had been born. It had turned out to be pure-blooded Blobel; for twenty-four hours a day it consisted of a gelatinous mass and George found himself waiting in vain for it to switch over to a human form, even for a moment.

He faced Vivian defiantly in this matter, during a period when both of them were in human form.

"How can I consider it my child?" he asked her. "It's an alien life form to me." He was discouraged and even horrified. "Dr. Jones should have foreseen this. Maybe it's *your* child —it looks just like you."

Tears filled Vivian's eyes. "You mean that insultingly."

"Damn right I do. We fought you creatures. We used to consider you no better than Portuguese men-o'-war." Gloomily, he put on his coat. "I'm going down to Veterans of Unnatural Wars Headquarters," he informed his wife. "Have a beer with the boys." Shortly he was on his way to join his old wartime buddies, glad to get out of the apartment house.

VUW Headquarters was a decrepit cement building in downtown Los Angeles, left over from the twentieth century and sadly in need of paint. The VUW had little funds because most of its members were, like George Munster, living on UN pensions. However, there was a pool table and an old 3-D television set and a few dozen tapes of popular music and also a chess set. George generally drank his beer and played chess with his fellow members, either in human form or in Blobel form; this was one place in which both were accepted.

This particular evening he sat with Pete Ruggles, a fellow veteran who also had married a Blobel female, reverting, as Vivian did, to human form.

"Pete, I can't go on. I've got a gelatinous blob for a child. My whole life I've wanted a kid, and now what have I got? Something that looks like it washed up on the beach."

Sipping his beer—he too was in human form at the moment—Pete answered, "Criminy, George, I admit it's a mess.

But you must have known what you were getting into when you married her. And my God, according to Mendel's Revised Law, the next kid—"

George broke in, "I mean I don't respect my own wife. That's the basis of it. I think of her as a *thing*. And myself, too. We're both things." He drank down his beer in one gulp.

Pete said meditatively, "But from the Blobel standpoint—"

"Listen, whose side are you on?" George demanded.

"Don't yell at me," Pete said, "or I'll deck you."

A moment later they were swinging wildly at each other. Fortunately Pete reverted to Blobel form in the nick of time; no harm was done. Now George sat alone, in human shape, while Pete oozed off somewhere else, probably to join a group of the boys who had also assumed Blobel form.

Maybe we can found a new society somewhere on a remote moon, George said to himself. Neither Terran nor Blobel.

I've got to go back to Vivian, George resolved. What else is there for me? I'm lucky to find her; I'd be nothing but a war veteran guzzling beer here at VUW Headquarters every damn day and night, with no future, no hope, no real life . . .

He had a new money-making scheme going now. It was a home mail-order business; he had placed an ad in the *Saturday Evening Post* for MAGIC LODESTONES REPUTED TO BRING YOU LUCK. FROM ANOTHER STAR SYSSYSTEM ENTIRELY! The stones had come from Proxima and were obtainable on Titan; it was Vivian who had made the commercial contact for him with her people. But so far, few people had sent in the dollar-fifty.

I'm a failure, George said to himself.

Fortunately the next child, born in the winter of 2039, showed itself to be a hybrid. It took human form fifty per cent of the time, and so at last George had a child who was —occasionally, anyhow—a member of his own species.

He was still in the process of celebrating the birth of Maurice when a delegation of their neighbors at QEK-604 Apartments came and rapped on their door.

"We've got a petition here," the chairman of the delegation said, shuffling his feet in embarrassment, "asking that you and Mrs. Munster leave QEK-604."

"But why?" George asked, bewildered. "You haven't objected to us up until now."

"The reason is that now you've got a hybrid youngster who will want to play with ours, and we feel it's unhealthy for our kids to—"

George slammed the door in their faces.

But still he felt the pressure of the hostility from the people on all sides of them. And to think, he thought bitterly, that I fought in the war to save these people! It sure wasn't worth it!

An hour later he was down at VUW Headquarters once more, drinking beer and talking with his buddy Sherman Downs, also married to a Blobel.

"Sherman, it's no good. We're not wanted; we've got to emigrate. Maybe we'll try it on Titan in Viv's world."

"Chrissakes," Sherman protested, "I hate to see you fold up, George. Isn't your electro-magnetic reducing belt beginning to sell, finally?"

For the last few months, George had been making and selling a complex electronic reducing gadget which Vivian had helped him design; it was based in principle on a Blobel device popular on Titan but unknown on Terra. And this had gone over well. George had more orders than he could fill. But—

"I had a terrible experience, Sherm," George confided. "I was in a drugstore the other day, and they gave me a big order for my reducing belt, and I got so excited—" He broke off. "You can guess what happened. I reverted, right in plain sight of a hundred customers. And when the buyer saw that he canceled the order for the belts. It was what we all fear. You should have seen how their attitude toward me changed."

Sherm said, "Hire someone to do your selling for you. A full-blooded Terran."

Thickly, George said, "*I'm* a full-blooded Terran, and don't you forget it. Ever."

"I just mean—"

"I know what you meant," George said. And took a swing at Sherman. Fortunately he missed and in the excitement both of them reverted to Blobel form. They oozed angrily into each other for a time, but at last fellow veterans managed to separate them.

"I'm as much a Terran as anyone," George thought-radiated in the Blobel manner to Sherman. "And I'll flatten anyone who says otherwise."

In Blobel form he was unable to get home; he had to phone Vivian to come and get him. It was humiliating.

Suicide, he decided. That's the answer.

How best to do it? In Blobel form he was unable to feel pain; best to do it then. Several substances would dissolve him . . . he could, for instance, drop himself into a heavily-chlorinated swimming pool, such as QEK-604 maintained in its recreation room.

Vivian, in human form, found him as he reposed hesitantly at the edge of the swimming pool, late one night.

"George, I beg you—go back to Dr. Jones."

"Naw," he boomed dully, forming a quasi-vocal apparatus with a portion of his body. "It's no use, Viv. I don't *want* to go on." Even the belts; they had been Viv's idea, rather than his. He was second even there . . . behind her, falling constantly further behind each passing day.

Viv said, "You have so much to offer the children."

That was true. "Maybe I'll drop over to the UN War Office," he decided. "Talk to them, see if there's anything new that medical science has come up with that might stabilize me."

"But if you stabilize as a Terran," Vivian said, "what would become of me?"

"We'd have *eighteen entire hours* together a day. All the hours you take human form!"

"But you wouldn't want to stay married to me. Because, George, then you could meet a Terran woman."

It wasn't fair to her, he realized. So he abandoned the idea.

In the spring of 2041 their third child was born, also a girl,

and like Maurice a hybrid. It was Blobel at night and Terran by day.

Meanwhile, George found a solution to some of his problems.

He got himself a mistress.

III

At the Hotel Elysium, a rundown wooden building in the heart of Los Angeles, he and Nina arranged to meet one another.

"Nina," George said, sipping Teacher's scotch and seated beside her on the shabby sofa which the hotel provided, "you've made my life worth living again." He fooled with the buttons of her blouse.

"I respect you," Nina Glaubman said, assisting him with the buttons. "In spite of the fact—well, you are a former enemy of the people."

George protested, "We must not think about the old days. We have to close our minds to our pasts." Nothing but our future, he thought.

His reducing belt enterprise had developed so well that now he employed fifteen full-time Terran employees and owned a small, modern factory on the outskirts of San Fernando. If UN taxes had been reasonable he would by now be a wealthy man. Brooding on that, George wondered what the tax rate was in Blobel-run lands, on Io, for instance. Maybe he ought to look into it.

One night at VUW Headquarters he discussed the subject with Reinholt, Nina's husband, who of course was ignorant of the modus vivendi between George and Nina.

"Reinholt," George said with difficulty as he drank his beer, "I've got big plans. This cradle-to-grave socialism the UN operates . . . it's not for me. It's cramping me. The Munster Magic Magnetic Belt is—" he gestured—"more than Terran civilization can support. You get me?"

Coldly, Reinholt said, "But George, you are a Terran. If

you emigrate to Blobel-run territory with your factory you'll be betraying your—"

"Listen," George told him, "I've got one authentic Blobel child, two half-Blobel children, and a fourth on the way. I've got strong *emotional* ties with those people out there on Titan and Io."

"You're a traitor," Reinholt said, and punched him in the mouth. "And not only that," he continued, punching George in the stomach, "you're running around with my wife. I'm going to kill you."

To escape, George reverted to Blobel form; Reinholt's blows passed harmlessly deep into his moist, jelly-like substance. Reinholt then reverted too, and flowed into him murderously, trying to consume and absorb George's nucleus.

Fortunately fellow veterans pried their two bodies apart before any permanent harm was done.

Later that night, still trembling, George sat with Vivian in the living room of their eight-room suite at the great new condominium apartment building ZGF-900. It had been a close call, and now of course Reinholt would tell Viv. It was only a question of time. The marriage, as far as George could see, was over. This perhaps was their last moment together.

"Viv," he said urgently, "you have to believe me; I love you. You and the children—plus the belt business, naturally—are my complete life." A desperate idea came to him. "Let's emigrate now, tonight. Pack up the kids and go to Titan, right this minute."

"I can't go," Vivian said. "I know how my people would treat me, and treat you and the children, too. George, *you go*. Move the factory to Io. I'll stay here." Tears filled her dark eyes.

"Hell," George said, "what kind of life is that? With you on Terra and me on Io—that's no marriage. And who'll get the kids?" Probably Viv would get them. But his firm employed top legal talent—perhaps he could use it to solve his domestic problems.

The next morning Vivian found out about Nina. And hired an attorney of her own.

"Listen," George said, on the phone talking to his top legal talent, Henry Ramarau. "Get me custody of the fourth child; it'll be a Terran. And we'll compromise on the two hybrids; I'll take Maurice and she can have Kathy. And naturally she gets that blob, that first so-called child. As far as I'm concerned it's hers anyhow." He slammed the receiver down and then turned to the board of directors of his company. "Now where were we in our analysis of Io tax laws?"

During the next weeks the idea of a move to Io appeared more and more feasible from a profit and loss standpoint.

"Go ahead and buy land on Io," George instructed his business agent in the field, Tom Hendricks. "And get it cheap. We want to start right." To his secretary Miss Nolan he said, "Now keep everyone out of my office until further notice. I feel an attack coming on, from anxiety over this major move off Terra to Io." He added, "And personal worries."

"Yes, Mr. Munster," Miss Nolan said, ushering Tom Hendricks out of George's private office. "No one will disturb you." She could be counted on to keep everyone out while George reverted to his war-time Blobel shape, as he often did these days. The pressure on him was immense.

When, later in the day, he resumed human form, George learned from Miss Nolan that a Doctor Jones had called.

"I'll be damned," George said, thinking back to six years ago. "I thought it'd be in the junk-pile by now." To Miss Nolan he said, "Call Doctor Jones and notify me when you have it. I'll take a minute off to talk to it." It was like old times, back in San Francisco.

Shortly Miss Nolan had Dr. Jones on the line.

"Doctor," George said, leaning from side to side and poking at an orchid on his desk. "Good to hear from you."

The voice of the homeostatic-analyst came in his ear, "Mr. Munster, I note that you now have a secretary."

"Yes," George said, "I'm a tycoon. I'm in the reducing belt game; it's somewhat like the flea-collar that cats wear. Well, what can I do for you?"

"I understand you have four children now—"

"Actually three, plus a fourth on the way. Listen, that

fourth Doctor, is vital to me; according to Mendel's Revised Law it's a full-blooded Terran and by God I'm doing everything in my power to get custody of it." He added, "Vivian —you remember her—is back now on Titan. Among her own people, where she belongs. And I'm putting some of the finest doctors I can get on my payroll to stabilize me. I'm tired of this constant reverting, night and day; I've got too much to do for such nonsense."

Dr. Jones said, "From your tone I can see you're an important, busy man, Mr. Munster. You've certainly risen in the world since I saw you last."

"Get to the point, Doctor," George said impatiently.

"I, um, thought perhaps I could bring you and Vivian together again."

"Bah," George said contemptuously. "That woman? Never. Listen, Doctor, I have to ring off. We're in the process of finalizing on some basic business strategy, here at Munster, Incorporated."

"Mr. Munster," Dr. Jones asked, "is there another woman?"

"There's another Blobel," George said, "if that's what you mean." And he hung up the phone. Two Blobels are better than none, he said to himself. And now back to business. He pressed a button on his desk and at once Miss Nolan put her head into the office. "Miss Nolan," George said, "get me Hank Ramarau; I want to find out—"

"Mr. Ramarau is waiting on the other line," Miss Nolan said. "He says it's urgent."

Switching to the other line, George said, "Hi, Hank. What's up?"

"I've just discovered," his top legal advisor said, "that to operate your factory on Io you must be a citizen of Titan."

"We ought to be able to fix that up," George said.

"But to be a citizen of Titan—" Ramarau hesitated. "I'll break it to you as easy as I can, George. You have to be a Blobel!"

"Dammit, I am a Blobel!" George said. "At least part of the time. Won't that do?"

"No," Ramarau said, "I checked into that, knowing of your

affliction, and it's got to be one hundred per cent of the time. Night *and* day."

"Hmmm," George said. "This is bad. But we'll overcome it somehow. Listen, Hank, I've got an appointment with Eddy Fullbright, my medical coordinator. I'll talk to you after, okay?" He ran off and then sat scowling and rubbing his jaw. Well, he decided, if it has to be. Facts are facts, and we can't let them stand in our way.

Picking up the phone he dialed his doctor, Eddy Fullbright.

IV

THE TWENTY-DOLLAR platinum coin rolled down the chute and tripped the circuit. Dr. Jones came on, glanced up and saw a stunning, sharp-breasted young woman whom it recognized by means of a quick scan of its memory banks as Mrs. George Munster, the former Vivian Arrasmith.

"Good day, Vivian," Dr. Jones said cordially. "But I understood you were on Titan." It rose to its feet, offering her a chair.

Dabbing at her large, dark eyes, Vivian sniffled, "Doctor, everything is collapsing around me. My husband is having an affair with another woman . . . all I know is that her name is Nina and all the boys down at VUW Headquarters are talking about it. Presumably she's a Terran. We're both filing for divorce. And we're having a dreadful legal battle over the children." She arranged her coat modestly. "I'm expecting. Our fourth."

"This I know," Dr. Jones said. "A full-blooded Terran this time, if Mendel's Law holds . . . although I thought it only applied to litters."

Mrs. Munster said miserably, "I've been on Titan talking to legal and medical experts, gynecologists and especially marital guidance counselors. I've had all sorts of advice during the past month. Now I'm back on Terra but I can't find George—he's *gone*."

"I wish I could help you, Vivian," Dr. Jones said. "I talked to your husband briefly the other day, but he spoke only in generalities. Evidently he's such a big tycoon now that it's hard to approach him."

"And to think," Vivian sniffled, "that he achieved it all because of an idea *I* gave him. A Blobel idea."

"The ironies of fate," Dr. Jones said. "Now, if you want to keep your husband, Vivian—"

"I'm determined to keep him, Doctor Jones. Frankly I've undergone therapy on Titan, the latest and most expensive . . . it's because I love George so much, even more than I love my own people or my planet."

"Eh?" Dr. Jones said.

"Through the most modern developments in medical science in the Sol System," Vivian said, "I've been stabilized, Doctor Jones. Now I am in human form twenty-four hours a day instead of eighteen. I've renounced my natural form in order to keep my marriage with George."

"The Supreme sacrifice," Dr. Jones said, touched.

"Now, if I can only *find* him Doctor—"

At the ground-breaking ceremonies on Io, George Munster flowed gradually to the shovel, extended a pseudopodium, seized the shovel, and with it managed to dig a symbolic amount of soil. "This is a great day," he boomed hollowly, by means of the semblance of a vocal apparatus into which he had fashioned the slimy, plastic substance which made up his unicellular body.

"Right, George," Hank Ramarau agreed, standing nearby with the legal documents.

The Ionan official, like George a great transparent blob, oozed across to Ramarau, took the documents and boomed, "These will be transmitted to my government. I'm sure they're in order, Mr. Ramarau."

"I guarantee you," Ramarau said to the official, "Mr. Munster does not revert to human form at any time. He's made use of some of the most advanced techniques in medical

science to achieve this stability at the unicellular phase of his former rotation. Munster would never cheat."

"This historic moment," the great blob that was George Munster thought-radiated to the throng of local Blobels attending the ceremonies, "means a higher standard of living for Ionans who will be employed. It will bring prosperity to this area, plus a proud sense of national achievement in the manufacture of what we recognize to be a native invention, the Munster Magic Magnetic Belt."

The throng of Blobels thought-radiated cheers.

"This is a proud day in my life," George Munster informed them, and began to ooze by degrees back to his car, where his chauffeur waited to drive him to his permanent hotel room at Io City.

Someday he would own the hotel. He was putting the profits from his business in local real estate. It was the patriotic—and the profitable—thing to do, other Ionans, other Blobels, had told him.

"I'm finally a successful man," George Munster thought-radiated to all close enough to pick up his emanations.

Amid frenzied cheers he oozed up the ramp and into his Titan-made car.

THE UNREMEMBERED

BY EDWARD MACKIN

MRS. GREGWOLD buttoned the auto-chef, and turned to her husband who was sitting near the picture-window, gazing out over the Levels.

"Tea's on, Timothy," she said, as the meal rattled out on to the service table.

Timothy Gregwold got to his feet, and stretched his limbs, grunting as he did so.

"Those sporter-flivs got faster all the time," he remarked. "I just saw two playing skeet across the Levels. Must have been doing all of three-hundred. Beats me what these youngsters use for brains these days. They're speed mad."

He sat down at the table, and looked at the processed stew, and at the price on the credit tag.

"One of them crashed over on Tenth last night," his wife told him. "It killed three people and a labrador dog. A lovely animal. I saw its picture in the News Flash."

"A point-one increase," frowned Mr. Gregwold. He examined the other dishes. "Fruit's up, too," he grumbled. "If this goes on we'll be raiding our capital."

"Its the Rejuvenation Clinics," his wife said. "They're costing more to run, I believe."

"Oh, we mustn't knock them, must we?" he said, sarcastically. "Where would we be without them?"

"Dust hath closed Helen's eye," she quoted, vaguely.

"Two hundred years dead." He dug at the stew. "I sometimes wonder why we bother, though."

She sat opposite him, and unwrapped the ready-buttered bread, arranging the pieces carefully on a plate. "You know why," she said, quietly. "One of *them* was here today."

He swallowed some of the food, and looked uneasy. "Here? You mean outside the flat?"

She nodded. "I was going to have a chat with Mrs. Benz. She gets very lonely, you know, being on her own. Well, I opened the door and he was standing there. I felt as though I should know him; but I didn't. And then he'd gone. He was near the end of the corridor, walking away from me."

"No time interval?"

"You know how it is. He was by the door, and then he wasn't. I've been trying to think ever since about what he looked like; but I can't."

"I know. He looked like everyone you ever knew, and nobody in particular."

"Oh, someone in particular, I think; but it was hazy."

They finished the meal in silence, and when she pressed the appropriate button the center of the table with the remnants of the meal rolled silently back into the wall and disappeared. He turned in his chair, and switched on the video. After idly watching the images form on the mock stage he switched off again, and sat with his back to it.

"No washing up," he mused, looking at the early sky-ads flare up over Ford Capitol on East Twelfth Level, which was the highest they'd got. "No rattle of dishes, no smell of cooking. I've lived too long."

She came and sat next to him, moving her chair through the floor slots. "Stew doesn't agree with you," she said. "Maybe you should have milk and bananas odd days."

He shook his head. "Not for me. You never see a real banana these days. They're always ready-skinned and in one of those cute little plastic jackets. What was wrong with the original skin? I'll tell you what. They couldn't charge it, that's what. They're pre-package mad these days. Oranges peeled so you can see the fruit, all yellow and slimy. And those ap-

ples, sans peel, sans core, and sans taste. Or maybe you want a fresh egg so you can go old-fashioned and actually beat it up yourself in your milk. Well, the machine will humor you, if you press the right button. But what do you get? You get the palest of pale yellow eggs in a transparent little doodah. It's indecent! An egg should be in a shell."

She smiled at him indulgently, and switched off the table light. It was silly to waste credits. Timothy, it seemed, was in one of his grumbling moods. These were usually triggered off by indigestion, and covered everything from food and other Government shortcomings to the putrid programs on the video, which he never looked at anyway.

"Perhaps you should have a talk with the hens," she chaffed. "They could be eating plastic instead of grit."

"Hens?" He sounded as though he couldn't believe his ears. "Hens? Get up to date, woman, for heaven's sake! You know what? I saw an egg production unit once. It's just a damn great automated hell! There were three-thousand hens there; but you couldn't see a single one. Not one. They were de-squawked and built in. Machines of flesh. Just parts of a larger machine, and each one fed at precise intervals with measured quantities of food through the neck. What does a hen want with head or eyes? It doesn't need to peck grit either. The soft eggs drop into neat little plastic containers, which are whipped away by the belt to be sealed and stamped.

"When the production figures decline for any unit it is automatically replaced, and still you don't see a hen. Just a metal box, wired and tubed, and inside is a legless, featherless, headless creature; a bit of equipment that wore out. So, I don't like eggs without the shells."

She was horrified. "You're making it up," she said. "No one would be so wicked." She tried to think when she had last seen a shell-egg; but gave it up. "Someone should do something about it," she decided.

He nodded. "That's up to the youngsters. But they won't do anything. They have that mindless look about them."

"The young always seem like that to the old. They'll be all right. You see."

"Maybe they'll blow us all up," he said, with a grin, "and go off somewhere else to live on an acre apiece and a cow. By God, if only I were young again! That's what I'd do. I'd blow it so high it would rain plascrete and people for three days solid. What good are we doing? What's the use of it all?"

"You've been missing attendances at the clinic," she said. "You shouldn't do that. You don't want to be like . . . like . . ."

"One of those," he finished for her. "No, I don't. When I feel it coming on I'm going to walk off the Level."

She looked at him a trifle anxiously. The tell-tale signs of neglect were there on his thin, almost waxen face, as though a warm hand had been passed over the image of a man, erasing his personality.

"You'll really have to go to the vats very soon, Timothy," she urged. "It must be three years since you were there last."

"Five years and some odd days," he corrected her. "You could do with some treatment yourself."

She nodded, brightly, and essayed a brief smile. "I'm going this afternoon," she said.

"Forget it," he told her. "I went along yesterday. The vats are closed for extensive alterations, or so the notice says. They've been closed for over a week."

Her eyes widened with fear. "You mean you can't get treatment until the stupid alterations are finished?"

"That's just an excuse," he said. "It's all over the city that the Lunar strike petered out. The total stock of selenite could be heaped on a dinner plate. Process that and you are left with maybe a teaspoon of catalyst-49; just about enough for three full treatments. I videoed the Appointments Bureau six times before I finally got through. I was told that they are only doing emergencies; but my name would be placed on the priority list. They'll get in touch with me in due course, I don't think. It's my guess that the emergencies are really private stockholders."

He shifted his position so that he faced the video, and

snapped the News-Flash button. A smooth-faced announcer with a little brush moustache was halfway through an item on traffic casualties. Timothy switched off.

"Fifty-per-cent up on last weeks's," he remarked. "With the birthrate falling the way it is, and the youngsters killing themselves off wholesale, this will be a world of ghosts before another century has passed. Unless, of course, Professor Gorgon is successful with his artificial womb. In that case we can look forward to having a race of zombies to nod at. Those of us who are left, that is. With a bit of luck we'll be dead by then, though."

"You shouldn't talk like that," she said uneasily.

"Better that than being a kind of wraith, blocked off from both life and death, and existing in some sort of Limbo. I've been thinking about it a lot lately. There's not much else to do, is there, at our age? Anyway, I've come up with a kind of theory." He drew an imaginary line on the table with his forefinger. "The Life Force carrier wave," he explained. "Now we'll have some modulation." His finger traced this up and down and along the carrier wave. "You know what that is? It's a speech pattern wave. It's the *Word*. A single word spoken by the Almighty." He placed an imaginary dot near where he thought he'd drawn the base line. "A point of life," he said, while she watched with a faint, puzzled frown; but the frown was for the closed Rejuvenation Clinics. Worrying about this she hardly heard what he was saying, and wouldn't have understood anyway.

He gave a quick side glance to ensure that he had her attention, and then tapped the dot again. "A point of life," he repeated, "which moves gradually upwards and forwards as the creature matures. The whole wave train feeds it at first, and then it begins to miss the shorter peaks, which is when time seems to be going faster, and then faster, still as we grow older, and older. When we are really old only the longer peaks feed life into us. Normally, around about this time we'd be old and tottery, and a fair target for everything lethal; in fact, a living write-off."

"Yes," she said quickly, as he paused and looked at her again.

"Nowadays, however," he went on, and allowed himself a sardonic smile, "the catalyst treatment can pull you back; but if, after a great many years, you stop the treatment what happens? What happens is that you shoot up and away from the Life Force modulation, if you see what I mean, until just the tip of an occasional peak fires your conscious mind, and then only the tip of an exceptionally long peak. Eventually—we don't know when because we don't know how long the longest peaks are—we should just fade into oblivion.

"As it is," he said, seeing it all in his mind's eye, and searching for the means to describe it, "there is a period when we are just asprawl in the great gaps between the longer peaks, and during that time we aren't here at all. We? I mean *they,* of course. Those poor ghosts we see all around us these days, and almost recognize. They exist only in spasms, and even though we may have known them we find it impossible to recollect anything about them. Oh, they are never completely forgotten, just unremembered. They are beyond help, and too insubstantial even for Death to claim."

"You sound just like the man on the video," she said, contriving a smile. "He was on last week sometime, and he was explaining it all with diagrams and things, and squiggly bits that didn't make any kind of sense at all. But he said that the apparitions—he called them that—he said the apparitions would increase; but not to be frightened because they were harmless."

"Did he?" he said, and seemed disconcerted. "I didn't see it," he added, "but I heard someone talking about it, and it set me thinking . . ."

There was a haziness about him. She began to think of the dog that had been killed in the crash, and wondered why she should be more concerned about an animal than the human beings killed at the same time. It was its essential innocence, of course. It wasn't in any way concerned with the mechanical muddle that Man had got himself into.

She looked at the empty chair next to her, and something flickered in her mind, some vague memory that wouldn't reveal itself. It was almost as though someone should have been sitting there with her. Nonsense, of course, she told herself. There had never been anyone.

She got to her feet slowly, almost painfully, and looked out of the picture window. Just below, on the near Level someone was looking up at her. She wondered who it could be, and decided it looked like the man she had seen standing outside the door of the flat earlier that day. Then he was gone, to reappear further down the Level. It was one of *them*, she thought, and felt troubled.

She looked around the room, and a little frown creased her rapidly ageing features. There seemed to be something missing somehow. She sighed.

"I'll have to get a little dog," she said, aloud.

On Level 17, East Block, where the flat building that housed the Rejuvenation Clinic was situated, there was a small crowd of people of both sexes assembled in a rough queue. Timothy Gregwold joined them.

"What goes?" he asked the man in front. "Have they got the vats working?"

The other shook his head. "They're issuing euthanasia permits."

So it had come to that. Timothy looked around at the busy Levels; at the tall buildings, the cloud-toppers, piercing the huge layered structures, and at the linking flyovers and pedways, bright with the late spring sunshine. He watched the hordes of jets, and hovercabs, and the stripped-down sporter-flivs darting like dragonflies between the shining facade of glass and plascrete and suddenly, for the first time in years, he realized, with a little tug at the heart, that it meant something to him. He didn't want to leave it. *Idiot*, he thought. You sentimental old idiot! There's no room here for you. Your world is dead and buried. All this belongs to the younger ones, God help them!

A young couple passed, arms around each other, and

glancing towards the queue laughed loudly. The young man said something that Timothy took to be derisive, and they laughed again; but the oldsters queueing for death ignored them. They had passed the point of no return, and felt themselves already dead.

Timothy Gregwold turned on his heel and walked away. He felt that the important thing now was not to panic, and to try and preserve some semblance of human dignity. *He* wasn't queueing for permission to die. If he reached the point where it was either that or worse then he would do it in his own way, and under his own steam. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed a tall, wavering shape that shifted its position constantly over to his left. One of *them*, he thought. A lonely ghost looking for solace.

On a sudden impulse he walked to the edge of the Level, and looked over the parapet. Here there was a sheer drop of nearly a thousand feet. He put one leg over and sat on the smooth plascrete. Then he tried to bring the other leg over to join it preparatory to a plunge that would take him into an abyss of fear and pain and then oblivion; but he couldn't do it.

"Haven't got the nerve," he said at last.

A uniformed patrolman came over to him, hand resting lightly on his stun gun. "Not that way, old-timer," he said. "It makes such a mess. What's the problem? Credits or the clinic?"

Timothy brought his leg back over the parapet and stood up. "Neither," he said, bitterly. "Just lack of guts."

He walked away. The patrolman's mocking voice came after him. "Try a Mother Reilly's special. That's our problem just now."

He was referring to a drink consisting of three parts of cheap wine with one part of pure alcohol and a dash of wood spirit. It was much favored by the city's poorer drunks and the flotsam that could be found in every niche and doorway on almost every Level despite the Government's massive welfare programs. The trouble was, Timothy reflected, that most of the money was being siphoned off and into the pockets of

a rat pack of professional leeches, and greedy entrepeneurs.

Just the same, he decided, a drink might help at that. In an effort to combat alcoholism and its attendant ills the authorities had opened a number of bars as an experiment. The idea was to wean the bulk of the addicts from the more lethal concoctions. Ironically, they had been taken up by the bored but respectable strata of society, and no member of the submerged tenth would have dared to show his nose in any of them, even supposing he could pay the exorbitant prices now demanded.

He called in at *Randy's Bar,* and asked the white-coated barman for a double Scotch. He drank this off almost in a gulp, while the man passed his credit card through the register, and ordered another.

The barman looked sympathetic. "They'll be shipping a load in any day now," he reassured Timothy.

Timothy gave a wry smile. "It shows, huh?" he said.

"I've had over a dozen in this morning all worried to hell about the same thing, the Clinic shut-down."

The old man looked around the empty bar. "We must be your only customers," he remarked.

The barman took up a spotless glass and polished it. "It brightens up towards evening," he said. "People calling in on the way home from business mostly; but later on we get crowded. I have to switch over to auto-service. Can't cope on my own. It makes me wonder sometimes what blessed use I am. The auto could handle it right through."

"The human touch," Mr. Gregwold said, a bit thickly after downing his second double. "This place would be nothing without the human touch. Will you have one with me?"

"Thank you, sir," the barman said. He passed Timothy's card through the register again, and transferred the drink price to his tip credit. Then he poured the double whisky for his customer, and ginger ale for himself out of a similar bottle. "Your good health, sir," he said, "and here's to the Clinics opening again shortly." They drank to that.

"Yes," murmured Timothy to himself, "that's what the whole damn set-up lacks. The human touch." He nodded to

the barman. "That's what makes this place such an oasis. I should have come here more often; but now I won't be able to."

"Any day now they'll be shipping it in," said the barman. "You see if they don't."

This time it sounded even less convincing. Timothy shook his head. "The mines are worked out. They were just pockets anyway. The only deliveries still going through are from private stockpiles."

The barman nodded, and began to polish the same glass all over again. "You tumbled to it," he said. "I hear a lot in this bar. People forget you're around when they've had a few. That's what it is, dad. They're slinging in the private stuff because that's all there is. These characters were allowed to buy themselves in to ease Government expenditure, and they were able to stockpile about twenty per cent of the raw selenite. On top of this they took ten per cent of Earth deliveries in lieu of freightage for their own stock. Now these boys are the only ones with any selenite. Only they're not selling. They're keeping it for their old age, and their children's old age, if they have any children. Yeah, that's it; but what can you do about it?"

"Get drunk, maybe," said Timothy. "That's about all."

The barman put the glass under the counter somewhere. "What about a massive dose of anabolic steroids? I've heard they're treating some people with that and a few other drugs. They used to get some pretty spectacular results with those things years ago." He wiped his hands on the cloth, and hung it up.

"I'm past that," Timothy said. "Long past it." He drank the rest of the whisky and slid the glass across the counter. The barman looked at him, pityingly. As he moved away the room shifted slightly, and he was outside without knowing how he got there.

"Just missed a couple of low peaks," he told himself, fear gripping him. "No need to get panicky, though. There's still a chance."

He saw the same patrolman approaching him, and turned and walked the other way. He was staggering a bit because of the unaccustomed drinking bout; but looking back he saw that the patrolman had stopped to watch a helicab, which was coming down in a restricted parkway. He moved off purposefully towards it, and Timothy began to run towards the edge of the Level. Without any hesitation this time he threw himself over the low parapet and fell, turning over and over, to a projecting lower Level.

Then, miraculously, he was walking away unhurt. It had happened after all. He had been just too late, and he was between the peaks, a reluctant immortal. He felt the hard laughter inside him. Nothing could kill him now.

After this he just seemed to wander about in a soundless world, which came to noisy life in occasional bursts when he hit an exceptionally long peak. He had a sense of timelessness, and was conscious of being everywhere at once: outside the Rejuvenation Clinics; looking up at his apartment; gazing at strange people, whom he felt he should know, and seeing only vague recognition mixed with fear in their faces; walking along all the Levels; standing in all the bars, and peering at everyone from everywhere in the city. This awful ubiquity filled him with black horror.

Sometimes he was aware of being outside the solar system altogether, journeying through the galaxy with the ice-cold radiance of the unblinking stars his only company, and this was worse. His personality was reduced to shards and then to dust, and the dust scattered over the cosmic wastes, and along the star trails. He saw the myriad planets teeming with strange life forms, experienced the impact of a million alien cultures, and was afraid in every part of him.

The last enemy was not that which he had expected. It was an awareness of the white hot hate of Truth. Not man's truth; but the truth that was the original Chaos. The truth that he had always rejected with all of his being; for man had risen above this, molding it to his own image and burying, in his subconscious, what wouldn't fit.

Suddenly, and quite without warning, he beheld the *real.*

It was like the lifting of a third curtain, the truth behind the truth behind the truth. The glimpse that he had was of pure beauty, terrible to behold. He fled across the galaxies and, with each screaming mote of his being, prayed that it would end. Nothing now to be added or taken away, oh Lord, he prayed, except awareness. Let me not be forever and forever . . .

Yet, somehow, it was borne upon him that it could not end like this. It was the final disintegration before the ultimate integration. Gradually, as the realization came, the fear went, and then he *knew*. He was an integral part of a multidimensional pattern; a part of everyone who had gone before and who would come after, before man even and after man. That terrifying ubiquity, fading now that he had become orientated to something greater than self, was a manifestation of the many facets of that part of the universal mind that he had occupied as an entity, and enclosed.

After the first death there can be no other; only the scattered light returning to its source. He felt a drawing-in of his fragmented personality, and he was content. Somewhere at the center of this spiritual lodestone, serene and ineffable, would be the Word before it was made flesh . . . the healing Word . . . the world's end, and a new beginning. . . .

WHAT HAPPENED to Sergeant Masuro?

BY HARRY MULISCH

Translated by Roy Edwards

ON HER NETHERLANDS MAJESTY'S SERVICE
Ministry of War

To: Bureau O. Z.
Section A, Room 3,
The Hague, Holland.

Gentlemen,
It is a calm man who is writing this to you—a man with the calm that comes to the surface when hope has fled.

I suppose you know this tone. I do not know who you are, or under what Ministry you come, or what the initials for your name mean. I have never heard of your Bureau before. I should not be surprised if you also came under a Ministry I had never heard of before. Lieutenant-Colonel Stratema, Commanding Officer of the Fifth Battalion, 124th Regiment of Infantry, in New Guinea, gave me your address and told me I had to notify you of the affair of Sergeant Masuro "as if I was telling it to a friend."

Right . . . so you are my friend, Gentlemen. You shall hear what I know about it. I know *nothing* about it. I only know that it happened and that I was there. Incidentally, I have the impression that you have also received a report from the

Colonel, and from Dr. Mondrian—and that they do not know anything about your Bureau either, except that, as I assume, it collects information about cases like Sergeant Masuro's.

There are other cases of the kind, are there, Gentlemen? I am not surprised. Only too many? Is that why I had to swear on the Bible to keep it secret? They also occur in Holland? I should not be surprised at that either. When Dr. Mondrian, at Kaukenau, had looked at Masuro till he could look no more, he began to interrogate me, with a drawn face, about our life in the interior. "God above, Lieutenant, it stands to reason, all that inhumanity round about you is more than human nature can endure."

I knew what he was thinking. He thought it had come of fear. Fear is capable of anything. It is a magician like Apollonius of Tyana, a prophet like Isaiah, a political mass-murderer, and a greater lover than Don Juan. But what happened to Masuro cannot have had anything to do with fear.

"I know the interior better than you do, Doctor. It could have happened just as easily in Amsterdam, in an office, or on a warm summer evening as he sat behind his paper near the open window, with the radio tuned in to Hilversum."

My panic, even then, was different from his—paler, more restrained, but not less violent. I told him that, in my opinion, it hardly had anything to do with *Masuro*, even. That it could happen to *anyone*, to him, Mondrian, as easily as to me—at any moment.

"Perhaps it's already at work in one of us, Doctor."

I saw that he could not take it. With a haggard face he looked at what was left of Masuro. He wanted a *reason*—otherwise, where was he? And the only thing that could pass for a reason, with a great deal of good (and occult) will, was fear. But there was no fear. Masuro hadn't known what fear was.

I knew Masuro well, in a manner of speaking. So I shall tell it to you as if you were a friend, Gentlemen, although it's a mystery to me what you will do with the information when you have it.

WHAT HAPPENED TO SERGEANT MASURO?

Two years ago, when he was posted to my section at Potapègo, I happened to be standing jabbering to the village headman. The truck from Kaukenau arrived, and out of the cab stepped a swarthy, heavily built fellow with a big head, round eyes and thick lips. Then, suddenly, I saw his name in the Major's letter before me again.

"Harry Masuro!"

He came towards me grinning.

"Afternoon, sir. Who'd have thought you'd be boss over me one day, down on the planet's backside?"

I had met him for the first time in the dressing-room of the gymnasium, when I was eleven years old. He was in the sixth class of the elementary school; I was in the fifth. I came to fetch something I had forgotten. Masuro was sitting alone in the sweaty atmosphere of the poky room, immobile as an image among the dingy little heaps of clothes. From the gym came the sound of pupils exercising, and a voice of command counting up to four, over and over again.

"Aren't you allowed to join in?"

"I'm being punished."

"What for?"

He looked at me with his big brown eyes.

"For nothing."

Even then, he had that same appearance of something that was both heavy and sharply outlined. I felt he was not lying. I should have liked to become friends with him, but that was hardly possible with someone in a class lower or higher than one's own. Nowhere in the world is there such class consciousness as in schools; it is enough to turn communists green with envy. Occasionally I had a talk with him, and he came one evening to peer at the moons of Jupiter through my telescope.

"The universe is a great sack full of stones and light."

Two years later I went to secondary school, and sat in the same form with him; he had failed to pass up at the end of the year. But by then it was too late; the time for becoming friends was gone. Things like that often depend on a month or a week; perhaps even on a day or a minute. If I had met

my wife a year later than I did, our marriage would have been the happiest in the world, and I should not be here now, at Kaukenau in New Guinea.

We hardly ever talked to each other; a feeling of something like shame had come between us. He had few interests; and in those days broad rivers of biology and history were flowing through my head. But if I got to know one thing about him, it was that he was not afraid. And yet he was no braggart either. I never heard him say: "Dare you to do this!" or "Dare you to do that!"—and then perform some heroic stunt or other. That was only done by boys who were actually afraid of doing what they did, and, above all, afraid of being thought to be afraid. And that kind of fear, too, was lacking in Masuro. But when it came to doing something which really called for courage, we saw Masuro do it while we shat in our trousers. (As, for instance, when someone had to break into the headmaster's study in order to find out what was in the examination papers.) But in his case it was not courage, but the absence of fear. And it seemed as if that gave him a certain invulnerability. When he was punished, it was always for nothing—never for anything he *had* done.

Otherwise, he was a perfectly ordinary boy, Harry Masuro, cool as a cucumber and cheeky as the devil. If it should now appear otherwise, Gentlemen, it is because I am trying, perhaps rather too hard, to refute that fear theory of Dr. Mondrian's; and perhaps because, in spite of myself, I too am looking for a reason for what happened to him, a reason which is not there.

Another two years passed, and, shortly before the war I lost sight of him. He left school and I heard that he had gone to the East Indies with his parents.

"Just so as to be shoved into a camp by the Japs," he told me at Potapègo, where we celebrated our reunion after fifteen years: I, a National-Service lieutenant, he a regular sergeant posted to my section.

By then, he had already seen eight years of tropical service. Once, out of the internment camp he had immediately volunteered for the army. His father and mother had both

died in camp. He had trodden the whole length of the Indonesian "Via Dolorosa": the defeat of the Japanese; the breakdown of the Linggajati agreement between the Dutch and the Republic; the police actions; punitive expeditions in Java and Sumatra . . . he also appeared to have had something to do with "Turk" Westerling's attempt at counter-revolution. Naturally, I did not ask further questions. It was all rather obscure and difficult to piece together. No doubt you have at your disposal better channels than I have, to help you to find out more about it.

You can, of course, search in that direction, but you will find nothing. That is to say, nothing *directly* bound up with what happened. I don't know . . . perhaps there are such things as "hidden connections"—it's quite possible; but if so, they are very subterranean, round-the-back, underhand, not to be found. Over the whole planet something indescribable is under way, a sort of process . . . even the sun shines differently now from before the war. I wouldn't know how to express it more clearly. Innumerable totally new, incomprehensible powers have come into play; a new kind of people . . . in Singapore, Prague, Amsterdam, Alamogordo, Jakarta (and the Hague), gentlemen of an entirely new kind sit around tables in cafes and government buildings; *they* are the powers. Two tables or rooms farther off, and nobody knows who they are. It has ceased to have anything to do with politics. A party of men drives through Borneo in a column of motor vehicles. What language do they speak? Nobody understands it. But it has *something to do with it.* Above Ceram a small, drab aircraft without distinguishing marks is shot down by an Indonesian battery. It is empty. Nor are there any cameras on board. Only radio apparatus for remote control; or was it a living creature? Everything has something to do with it. No one has got the hang of it as yet; no one understands what is going on, what is possible, where it will end; and anyone who may think that at home in Holland things are different, lives in a world which no longer exists, and is making a terrible mistake.

But Masuro was not afraid. In that unnamable process he

had played his part—undoubtedly a small part, but a part that could not bear the light of day, a part played behind a lowered curtain, in a play that no one knows, and with nobody in the prompter's box. I could see that he looked upon service with me as a kind of holiday. He was right—so it was. So it *was!* I ask myself whether it still is, after what happened to him.

In any case, with my unit there was less reason for fear than anywhere else in the Archipelago. I am responsible for law and order in an area about as big as London. But the powers that beset us do not sit ensconced in the mountains or the jungles. Those poor Papuans . . . they wave our flag, and they build bungalows for us; what do they know? New Guinea is way back in the Pleistocene, 100,000 B.C. Only when one of my men shoots a cassowary or a cockatoo is a shot heard; otherwise never. Sometimes, between the lianas or on in a stinking swamp, we discover Dutch subjects four feet six inches high, who have never seen a white man. Such a kraal we then christen Nieuw Emmercompascuum, just as British soldiers might christen it New Middle Wallop; or we give it a name derived from the metabolic processes: Cocksuckington, or Fuckshot. We have to do something. Provided there is law and order.

For the rest, wherever we come, law and order is at an end; then the air rings with shouts and curses in Dutch, with shots—and sometimes with blows, when I am not looking. We drive around in three jeeps and a truck full of food, petrol and ammunition. Often we are on the road for weeks at a stretch, in touch with Kaukenau by radio. It was right up Masuro's street; he was mad on hunting and shot the monkeys out of the trees from where he sat in the moving jeep. Naturally, I had more to do with him than with the other seven men; but also, in a way, less. Between us there was still something of that shamefacedness which we had had at secondary school on account of our neglected friendship. To him I talked about other things than to the others: about the past, about Holland, about nothing. Once he told me he had

four children, two in Java, one in Celebes, and one in Halmahera.

When he was on guard duty at night, he hummed to himself between the tents, or on the verandas of the log huts which we had had built for us here and there by the Papuans. He liked keeping guard; he often let the next on duty sleep on, and he took his watch as well. It gave him a rest from something. His music was a great, gleaming, throbbing ball, which floated through the night between the tents. Hour after hour he hummed with a throat like an organ, and gazed at the mountains or at the black jungle, where everything rustled and murmured and screeched. Sometimes the Stone Age squatted down at a respectful distance from him, and listened absorbedly.

Everything went well for two years.

On the day that things went wrong, we were camping in Shitorbust, a hamlet of twenty huts full of dwarfs. That was Sunday a week ago, 19th July 1955. It was in May that we discovered it. It lies at the edge of the jungle, on the bank of the Titimuka river. We had not been able to make ourselves understood.

When I was about eighteen years old, Gentlemen—during the war—I wanted to become a Magus. I held my breath, tried to tie my legs in a knot, concentrated my attention on the patch made on the wall by a squashed mosquito, gazed at the bridge of people's noses and read books on 'Personal Magnetism' and 'Thought Power.' From these I learned the exercise of recalling the events of the past day before going to sleep, and quickly running through them again, from the moment of waking onwards. That has since become a habit of mine. I am astonishingly clever at it. When I am not too tired I see the tiniest details again before me, and even such as had escaped my notice during the day. In a certain sense I live twice, and the second time more intensely than the first.

Gentlemen at The Hague, I have passed in review that day at Shitorbust, and the journey thither, not once but a dozen times. I remember every branch under which we

drove, every stone in the foaming Titimuka, every cry from the black gnomes. I know that on that day, except for a spot of trouble with Private Steiger, *nothing* remarkable happened, *nothing* that made it different from the other days, and in any case *nothing* that had anything to do with Masuro.

Because it was pouring rain, we had been rather late in leaving our last camping-place, a hole called Umigapa. It was a shower from the mountains; when it stopped, we had half an hour of lovely weather, and at twelve o'clock the sun was beating down on our heads again. The troop was a bit browned off; we had been on the road for a fortnight, and I had promised that Shitorbust would be our last port of call. After that, it would be still another three or four days before we were back at Kaukenau. I sat in the second jeep, next to Private Elsemoor. Masuro was in the back, lounging across the seat with his carbine between his legs, and staring up at the tree tops. We didn't say much. I remember every word of what we said, but it was of no importance.

At about two o'clock I allowed Elsemoor to break column and drive off the road, to have a talk with a group of kapaukos who were dragging a dead kangaroo behind them to the swamps. At four o'clock we reached the Titimuka, and drove upstream on the narrow, shady strip of ground between the tropical forest and the water, half stupefied by the stench of rotting plants and leaves. Corporal Persin, in the first jeep, espied footprints in the mud, and five of us went for a short distance into the pitch-black jungle, but in vain. It was as dense and impenetrable as a city.

Otherwise, nothing happened. When we were bumping and jolting along the road again, Masuro turned once quickly onto his stomach and shot a crocodile to the bottom of the river. At half past six we drove into Shitorbust.

The Herr Geheimrat was already waiting to receive us, at the head of the whole tribe. He was the village chief, a naked little man hardly higher than my waist, with a civilized Mormon beard and wild eyes; to cover his privates he had a magnificent pointed calabash, which stood up as far as his nipples. He was growing bald at the temples, like an intellec-

tual; I had told my men that the Germans call those patches of thinning hair "Geheimratsecken" ("Privy Councillor's corners"), and from then on he had his name. I suspect him of being the head of a gang of cannibals. "Manowe?" I had asked him the previous time, "Manowe?" His whole face lit up; it proved to be the only word he understood. With us, in any case, he had to make do with corned beef. He ate his fill at our welcoming banquet, together with two other village bigwigs; the representatives of our side were Masuro and I. The others were busy putting up the tents, while the village looked thoughtfully on.

During that meal, *nothing* happened that was out of the ordinary.

After eating, some of the men got their heads down under the mosquito curtains, while I made contact with Kaukenau and reported. Later, we went and lay in front of our tents, smoking and listening to the radio. Jakarta was broadcasting a lecture on Malayan poetry, but there was dance music on Sydney. Behind us and on the other side of the plashing river everything grew steadily taller and blacker and the darkness turned into millions of crickets. When it had become almost entirely dark, we lit the lamps, and saw that we were surrounded by motionless squatting dwarfs, listening to the music. Persin shouted at them, but they did not go away. When he fired his Sten gun off, they scattered into the night in all directions.

From now on I shall just report it verbatim, Gentlemen, then you'll be able to judge for yourselves.

"Where's Steiger?" I asked Masuro. During dinner I had seen him laughing and leering at a girl of about sixteen, with fine breasts and a belly as round as a ball.

"He's in love."

"Is he gone?"

"Yes."

"Did you *know?*"

"Yes."

"It was your duty to tell me so, God damn. Call him."

"Steiger!" Masuro bellowed.

A few seconds passed. Then an answering shout came from somewhere behind the vehicles.

"Stick it back in your stinking pants and come here! Double!" Excuse me, Gentlemen, but that was what he said, and that was how I would tell it to a friend. He shouted quite goodhumoredly, though. He was on holiday.

I began to get very worried. A moment later Steiger stood before me, sweating.

"At it again, Steiger?"

"Yes, sir. Thought you wouldn't notice it, sir."

"Where is that kid?"

"Run off, sir."

"Did anyone in the village see you go away with her?"

"No, sir. She was sitting by herself under the truck, listening to the music."

That was a load off my mind. But I was still seething.

"You kept your hand over her mouth, I suppose?"

"No sir. She wanted it."

"Hold your hands out."

He held out his hands. In the left one there were deep marks of teeth.

"I've . . . always had that, sir."

"From sucking your thumb, I suppose? Just stand like that for a while, and keep your hands out."

I let Steiger stand with his hands held out for a full quarter of an hour. No one said anything more. The music sounded softly through the rushing of the river. The insects clotted in a thick, crackling, dying layer around the lamps, so that the light was only half as strong. In the jungle on the other side something began to scream and abruptly stopped.

After a quarter of an hour had passed, I rubbed my thumb over Steiger's palm. The imprints were as good as gone.

"Double the guard tonight, Sergeant," I said to Masuro.

"Right, sir."

"Get to your wank-pit, Steiger, and report to the Captain when you get to Kaukenau. You knew what you were letting yourself in for?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then bugger off."

I could do that sort of thing to Steiger—no one liked him much, except perhaps Masuro. When he had disappeared, and the others had turned to minding their own business again, Masuro came and sat down beside me, and smoked a fat cigar in silence.

"I know more or less what you're thinking," I said, after a while. "But you should have told me, all the same."

"Never done anything of the kind yourself, Lonestein?"

That was something new. For the first time in fifteen years he called me by my name; throughout the last two years I had been "sir" to him. It mollified me—probably I had greatly admired him formerly; and I suddenly started getting confidential.

"If I hadn't, I might perhaps have given him his head."

I could feel Masuro looking at me.

"You're used to the islands, Masuro," I said. "There they eat rice."

He continued to look at me. I stared at the other side of the river. A rustling came from the forest, followed by a soft rumble. A tree falling, after a thousand years.

"It happened to me somewhere on the Mimika; when I had just arrived here. A bit of stuff just like Steiger's. I hadn't had a nibble for three months. What did it matter—a kapauko bint right from the middle of the wilderness of a hundred thousand years ago . . . I held my hand over her mouth, but when I'd got halfway she bit into it, began to yell, and I had to let her go. When we came back a month later, she was no longer in the village." I looked into his eyes. "They had killed and eaten her."

You may as well know it, Gentlemen of Bureau O.Z. After what has happened to Masuro, I have no further interest in keeping secrets of that kind . . . if it comes to that (it suddenly occurs to me) perhaps your Bureau's job is not so much to investigate cases like Masuro's—which are not to be investigated—as to keep an eye on those who witnessed them.

You're quite welcome to discharge me from the Service, Gentlemen. I'm no longer interested in that either.

But, to go on. Masuro asked: "How do you know that?"

I shrugged my shoulders and looked straight in front of me again.

"They were manowes."

"She can just as easily have been ill, or married off to someone in another tribe, or simply dead."

"Maybe," I nodded. "But Steiger's going to pay for it."

The rustling and rumbling in the forest still went on—trees that collapsed under the burden that had come to hang on them, and dragged other trees down with them in a panic of breaking nests and crushed animals.

I did not know whether they had eaten her. In any case, it was possible. But it had never been possible for me to grasp that idea in all its implications, and to figure out what it would mean to me. (Slaughtering, cutting in pieces, cooking, spicing . . .)

I looked at my watch. If I shut my eyes now, I can see the dial again: three minutes past nine. On the roof of the truck glowed the cigarette of Persin, who was on guard. From behind us came, once or twice, a clear sound that was like a tick and a sob at the same time. Masuro sat puffing at his cigar like a farmer after the day's work.

Nothing happened that was out of the ordinary.

I had the wireless switched off, Masuro posted the double guard, and gradually everyone went to sleep. Only Elsemoor was still about, sitting a little farther up the river bank with his feet in the water. Masuro was no talker, and I was in need of distraction.

"Be careful of the sand fleas, Elsemoor, or you'll be dancing tomorrow."

"I'm not touching the bottom, sir."

"He's thinking about his girl," said Masuro. "Perhaps at this moment she's being dragged behind the cars in Rotterdam."

"Care to come and sit with us, Elsemoor?"

"Thanks, sir."

Always that "sir." He came and sat down beside Masuro like a little boy shaking hands with the Queen.

"I suppose you were thinking about your girl?"

"No, sir; I haven't got a girl. I was thinking about school."

"About school? Did you know that the Sergeant and I sat together in the same form once?"

He looked at us reverently. I began to laugh, and offered him a cigarette.

"And school, then? *What* were you thinking about it?"

"Nothing in particular," he said shyly. "As it happens . . . about country-conquering."

"Country-conquering?"

When he described it, I remembered it again. A game with knives. Each player gets a piece of a square of trodden-down sand. The players take it in turn to throw the knife into a neighboring "country," and the part cut off from it in that way has been conquered, provided it adjoins the attacker's country. The player whose territory is no longer big enough to stand on has lost.

"What's the odds?" I said to Masuro. "Shall we go country-conquering, the three of us?"

Although, in various respects, I had an ascendancy over him (and not only because of my rank), in a way Masuro was always the boss: from the tone in which he said something, or did not say something, from a look in his eye, from the manner in which he now stood up and opened his pocket-knife. He had seen more of life than I had, and past experiences play a part in the slightest word and gesture. They are always weightier than innate powers of intelligence or character. Sometimes I felt diffident about giving him an order, and then I was amazed, and almost embarrassed, by the meticulousness with which he carried it out.

Like a conscientious lackey suffering somewhat under the whims of his masters, Elsemoor cut the plants out of the ground and prepared an immaculate arena. He must have been the sort of lad who couldn't make love if one corner of the carpet was turned up. In the meantime it had become pitch-black; the lamp shone like a planet and evoked against

the edge of the forest a superghastly phantasmagoria of caverns, animal's heads, grottoes and enchantments of which none of us, with the best will in the world, could be frightened any more. (So much for Dr. Mondrian's theory.)

And now, Gentlemen, I have to treat you to a little report on a competition. After all, it's *data* you want, isn't it?

Masuro threw first, and cut off three quarters of my country at one stroke. Elsemoor gave the impression of being faced with a difficult dilemma. If he annexed territory from Masuro, extra guards might result; if he annexed any from me, cancellation of leave hung above his head. He confined himself to taking a small bite from the piece that Masuro had robbed from me, looking at me like an Italian as he did so. I had bad luck; my knife repeatedly fell flat on the ground, which mishap Elsemoor never failed to follow up with a sporting, sympathetic "Oh." Masuro planted his knife in the earth like a toreador, ate away everything round about us, and challenged us over and over again to prove that we were able to stand on our plots. But, blenching with fright, Elsemoor suddenly conquered almost all of his, so that Masuro had a job to maintain himself even on the toes of one foot.

I enjoyed myself enormously. Once Masuro nodded in the direction of the village, and I saw the shape of Herr Geheimrat. Quite alone, he squatted on the bank of the river and watched the white men stabbing his ground to death with knives and jollity. It put me off, and I called to Persin, ordering him to do something about it. Two shots rang out, and the headman was gone at once.

Masuro won again. Tacitly, Elsemoor and I ganged up against him, but suddenly Elsemoor fell out: after a brilliant throw on the part of Masuro, he suddenly had not a square centimeter left. With a gesture by which he acknowledged his master, and a sigh of relief, he went and sat down. I robbed Masuro of another small piece, and then he lifted his hand, holding his knife far behind his back, in order to eliminate me too in one throw.

But his arm remained immobile, and the knife dropped be-

hind him with its point in the ground, outside the "country." His eyes grew bigger and bigger.

"I can't get my arm down," he said.

I stared at him. Above us I heard the deep buzzing of a hornbill as it flew over.

I thought I was dreaming. I went up to him and felt his right arm. There seemed no longer to be a joint in it.

"Sit down," I said.

Submissively, Masuro went and sat down on the countries right across all frontiers, with his arm in the air. Carefully I began to pull on it, and slowly he yielded to my pulling, as if he was keeping all his muscles tense. He had to support himself on the ground with his other arm.

"Pain?"

"No."

Elsemoor sat looking on, open-mouthed. At last the arm was down.

"Can you move it?"

He moved it, arm and fingers; I saw, that he had to make a tremendous effort to do so. Panickily he looked at it.

"Are you ever bothered by rheumatism in that arm?"

"No—never."

He was upset, so very upset that it astonished me. Suddenly he shouted at Elsemoor: "Why don't you try wearing another bloody mug on your head?"

I heard a note in his voice I had never heard before. It was no longer a holiday voice. Alarmed, Elsemoor sprang to his feet, saluted and made off.

"Go and kip down yourself," I said, Heaven knows why. "I'll do your guard for you."

I was surprised that he took it from me. (Yes, that was the silliest part about it: that he took it!) Without saying anything, he stood up and walked woodenly to our tent. His right arm hung stiffly down, but I saw that his left arm did not move either, and that his knees were as rigid as a cavalry officer's.

"It'll be gone by tomorrow," I added.

I may as well tell you, I write with little or no conviction. With what conviction can one write about an avalanche? One can talk with conviction about the *causes*: how it could have happened, what was done to prevent it. The avalanche itself is merely *brute*, insensate, something which is not our concern because we can't defend ourselves against it. And if we perceive that there were no causes, even? Then there is absolutely nothing left of us, Gentlemen in Room 3, *absolutely nothing.*

Masuro slept like a log all night, with his clothes on. I shared the last watch with Kranenburg, and we talked about the stars, but at the back of my mind I never stopped worrying about Masuro. In spite of Steiger everything remained quiet in the village.

When I shook Masuro awake at half past six, I was suddenly seized by something like a feeling of panic in my hands: *no human being was as heavy as that!* I pulled him up, I pulled a horse up, a rhinoceros, but the realization did not get any farther than my hands. With eyes as round as billard balls he stood in the tent, tottering, like a robot, from one leg to the other. It was as if he did not see me. With stiff legs he tottered out to where the men stood washing, and blinked at the sun. The ground under my feet shook with the weight of his body. He raised his hand to his face as if it were a dumbbell weighing a ton, belched and shut his eyes.

I felt as if my feet were in my head and my head was in my boots. For several long seconds I stared at his back. Suddenly it came home to me—how heavy he had been. *Impossibly* heavy. I began to swallow hard, a dozen times at least, and at last managed to get the words out:

"Sergeant . . . come into the tent a moment, will you, please."

He looked at me and tottered back. In the tent I stood and faced him; my hands were trembling.

"Listen, Masuro, you're ill, do you hear, you're ill. We're striking camp immediately and getting back to Kaukenau as quickly as possible."

He looked at me and said nothing.

"Do you understand me, Masuro?"

"Yes."

"We'll strike camp immediately."

I eyed him for a moment, and then left him standing there. Outside, I called the men together, and said as calmly as I could:

"Lads . . . the Sergeant's ill. Something wrong with his joints . . . and with his weight . . . I don't know what it is, but it's something pretty bad. If we manage to reach the valley before dark, we can drive through the night and be at Kaukenau tomorrow afternoon. We'll leave the whole mess as it is, and take the route via Ugei. We're leaving at once."

They ran to the tents and I remained where I was. I dared not go back to Masuro. I went to the wireless operator and quickly called up Kaukenau, and briefly told them that Masuro had been attacked by an unknown disease, and that we were on our way. I got the Captain; he was rather skeptical, and asked for further details, but I made the wireless produce interference, and switched the transmitter off.

I knew it was not a disease. Growing heavier is no disease. I wanted to get to Kaukenau in order to be among people, as if I believed that such a thing could not subsist among people.

Ten minutes later we drove away. I had no more time to spare for Herr Geheimrat, and waved goodbye to him from my jeep. The entire tribe was present again, with children on backs and breasts. Herr Geheimrat nodded, holding on to his calabash with a grin.

I sat in the back; Masuro was in the front, next to Elsemoor. Masuro bolt upright, not turning his head a centimeter to left or right; Elsemoor at the steering-wheel with an expression on his face as if he were having to pass his driving-test. We did not speak. I dared not utter a word. All the time, I had to look at the back of Masuro's head; I was afraid as I had never been before, and nevertheless . . . nevertheless, I still could not take it in. I could not take in a hundredth part of it. Nor will that ever be possible. Just imagine, in Amsterdam, the statue of General Van Heutsz

stepping down off his pedestal and starting to talk to you about the colonial war in Achin. You would never manage to take it in.

At noon I called a halt, so that we could eat something. While everyone was getting out, I walked sweating around to the front of the jeep, to look at Masuro. Small patches had appeared under his skin, all over his face.

"How do you feel now, Masuro?"

Glassily he looked into my eyes.

"I don't feel."

"Have you pain anywhere?"

He shook his head almost imperceptibly.

"Wouldn't you like to get out and stretch your legs?"

He closed his eyes.

"Just leave me alone."

Suddenly I seized him and shook him by the shoulders—an elephant, a three-ton truck.

"Masuro, what's the matter with you?"

He panted, and his teeth began to chatter.

My head spun. He did not want to eat either. I went and fetched something for myself from the truck, where the men were sitting on the ground among empty tins. They looked at me, but asked no questions. I got my ration and walked a short distance into the barren plain, where I sat down to eat. Empty and silent, the vehicles stood behind each other, looking as if they would stand like that forever. In the second vehicle, the motionless body of Masuro. I tried to realize that something impossible was taking place, but I did not succeed, any more than I could imagine that the girl beside the Mimika had been eaten—while *that* was nevertheless within the realm of possibility. I looked at the sky. Something incomprehensible was busy about its evil work in Masuro.

We drove on, hour after hour, endlessly. I never took my eyes off Masuro: a massive neck, covered with black hair; a square head. I had taken his carbine and put it beside me. Was I afraid he might start shooting? We drove fast, and his body bounced up and down like a tree trunk on a lorry. I decided to go on to Fuckshot, where we had a bungalow

and could cook a hot meal. It was a journey to the moon; my brain had long ceased to ponder on it, it wasn't a subject for brains, it was brute, brute, brute and impenetrable as a stone. We arrived at half past seven, and then it seemed as if the time had flown.

Cackling exuberently, the village headman came up to our jeep, smacking his lips at the prospect of the welcoming feast. I got rid of him, saying that we had a case of serious illness with us. He edged away, walking backwards in fear; the whole tribe began to walk backwards.

I gritted my teeth and began to help Masuro out of the jeep. As soon as I touched him, I knew he had become a great deal heavier. The men looked on in silence. Slowly, very slowly we walked to the log hut. The steps of the little stair creaked and sagged under his weight. I pushed the door open; a fat toad scrambled away. With both my arms around him, I let him down onto one of the rude wooden chairs. It was quite impossible for him to bend his knees any more. When he sat down he fell through the chair, and hit the ground with a crash that made the whole place shake.

He began to cry.

"*Masuro . . .*" I whispered.

I was at my wits' end. I ran to the still-open door and began to shout that we had to go on at once, that there was no time for cooking. The men must have heard the crash; motionless they sat, half in and half out of the vehicles.

I knelt beside Masuro. He was sobbing like a child. Except for those specks on his face there was nothing out of the ordinary to be seen on him, but he must have weighed at least a quarter of a ton.

"What's happening to me?" he blubbered.

"Oh Jesus Christ, Masuro, Jesus Christ, Masuro!"

I held him tight with both hands. Big tears trickled down his cheeks.

"What *is* happening to me, Lonestein? I'm getting stiffer and heavier all the time. What have I done?"

"Perhaps we'll be at Kaukenau by tomorrow morning, and then they'll give you treatment at once! In the hospital they're

sure to . . ." I could say no more. "Keep your pecker up, Masuro," I whispered. "Lie down."

He was done for, and he knew it, and I knew it. Docilely he let me lay him over backwards. I took him by his shoulders and began to push. It was like manhandling a railway truck along the rails. A sweet woody smell hung in the twilight of the hut. When I pushed too quickly his legs shot into the air with the weight of a piano. Suddenly I began to cry myself. Masuro looked up at me with big eyes.

"Surely it's impossible, that such a thing should happen . . ." he said. In despair, I shook my head.

"No, Masuro, it's impossible."

"I'm so tired."

He closed his eyes; his chest rose and fell laboriously. The patches on his face were more distinct than they had been in the afternoon; they were coming up everywhere under the skin, as if something was going to break through it. His hands were covered with them too . . . To Kaukenau! To human beings!

"I can hardly get my breath any more," he groaned. "It's just as if there's a Roman sitting on my chest."

God in Heaven, I thought, help Masuro. He has done nothing. He has grown so heavy that he falls through his chair. There's a Roman sitting on his chest.

But I would sooner have shot him, and buried him on the spot, as deep as I could. Persin, Elsemoor, Steiger, Kranenburg—they would all have kept as quiet as the grave, that much is certain. They would have let him disappear from their thoughts like a splinter from their flesh.

And now you're licking your lips and settling yourselves back in your chairs, aren't you, Gentlemen of Section A? Now for the revelations, you think. Whispered between sobs, into my ear! They didn't come. No admissions. No confession. Nothing. He only lay crying on the floor, getting heavier and heavier, and didn't know what was happening to him. Nor did his spirit go forth from him, winging up into the blue in stately flight—anything but! What is the spirit? Sometimes

a Napoleon, whose dream externalizes itself and floods all Europe, and, when it slowly retreats, leaves behind it tangible tokens over the entire continent: palaces, obelisks, triumphal arches, corpses, legal systems, Holy Alliances and, in Holland, surnames—Jan Pieter's son becomes Jan Lonestein, and so forth. But generally the spirit is a hat we wear on our heads against the draught; when we meet a woman, we politely take it off.

Kranenburg came timidly in with one or two tins in his hands. Masuro still did not want to eat anything; and I knew that I should not be able to get anything down my throat either. I had the tins put in the jeep, and called Corporal Persin. When he appeared in the doorway and looked into my eyes, I knew that *he* would have made sure no one said anything if I had killed Masuro.

"Give me a hand with the Sergeant, will you, Persin. Then we'll go on."

For a second or two he did not move; then he came. Neither of us was a milksop, but this was too much. With trembling lips Masuro looked at our faces, growing red with exertion. Gasping, out of breath, we finally succeeded in getting him upright. Then he fell through the floor, between us, with an ear-splitting crash. From down by our knees he began to scream, with a sound such as the jungle had never heard before—smaller than a pygmy he was, with the splintered planks around his waist. A moment later Persin brought the butt of his revolver down on the crown of the screaming head. Suddenly all was still; the head did not fall over.

Beside myself, I looked at Persin. God, Gentlemen! It was as if I had made an endless journey through France, Burgundy, Trèves, Cluny, in the few seconds that the screaming lasted. A vision, a fantastic vision that had nothing whatsoever to do with the case, unless it was via the Lord alone knew what subterranean connections! I saw a vast crowd in the square of Rheims, at the foot of the Cathedral, exulting in the execution of a tall fair-haired man in a violet mantle embroidered with gold, while trumpeters with gaudy emblems on their breasts blew the azure air infinitely high and empty.

I saw a Pope amid a small retinue traveling over the Alps to Germany, and in the north a king, with his family, was stumbling through the snow to meet him, on bare feet—and above the head of the Pope hovered his voice and said: "Thou, Hildebrand, Pope no more, but recreant monk! I, Henry, King by the Grace of God, with all my Bishops I say unto you: descend from the throne, descend from the throne, Thou, accursed through all the ages!" And at Loches I saw a French king, weeping and wringing his hands, had the forest cut down in which the news of his little son's death had reached him. King, kings, narrow streets tapering to a point, full of the clang of iron on iron, iron on copper, bronze on silver; the churches full of rotting and moaning beggars; trumpets, and mounted knights with pieces of meat between their teeth, in dense russet-brown crowds of the common people. I saw that that entire land of Europe looked different from now, more fairy-tale-like, warmer, olive-green, with bizarre mouse-gray rocks which sprouted out of the ground between the houses, waxed larger and shriveled up; slight trees grew, slender and delicately feathered, heathen gods with bows in their hands toppled from their pedestals, and sometimes a grayheaded man walked the same road, three times, always a dozen yards at a time, without seeing himself. The third time he met Jesus. I constantly saw the backs of cripples, bent between their crutches, disappearing behind a hill on their way to the city. And everywhere, everywhere had been built over; behind an olive-green forest eight deserted skyscrapers towered up. There was not only another time but another *dimension* in Masuro's screaming—impossible to regain. There were rocks there which are no more, without a geological reason for it.

The vision must have risen from the very marrow of my bones. I felt as if I had died. New Guinea. I looked from Persin back to Masuro. With two more men to help us we pulled him out of the floor and carried him in silence to the truck. Fifty yards away the kapaukos stood huddled together, jumping and barking like monkeys. They must have heard the screaming—but perhaps they had got wind of

something else, something for which they had an organ of reception that made them jump and bark in panic in an unknown world.

Friend, we know as little about life as a new-born baby knows about a woman. If we happen to turn around and glimpse a little more of it, our knees turn to water.

That night I sat in the pitch-black beside Masuro—a looming block of darkness in a world of roaring engines. I could have made a light, but something kept me from doing so. (What? Paracelsus' fur cap. The sun of Austerlitz.) Masuro grew so heavy that his body no longer bounced as we rode over a stone or through a rut; I heard nothing more. I sat on my haunches against the back of the cab and was slung to and fro. My eyes had glided from their sockets and hung in all the corners, and themselves had darkness.

Masuro spoke once more, for the last time; perhaps he had long been conscious. "Lonestein? . . . are you there? . . . just lay me down in the open, and they can break their teeth on me."

It was the darkness that spoke, with a voice as if through a telephone, without depth, one-dimensional. I made no answer. It was all over with him—and with me too. Or was it perhaps only just beginning? A new kind of human being . . . For the future: calm without hope, prepared for anything. I was in the utter darkness of the truck; I thought that night the darkness became my body.

The rest you know. The following morning, when Dr. Mondrian tried to stick his lancet into Masuro for the post-mortem (on the floor: the operating-table would not have supported him), the point broke off. What was left of the skin he scratched away—a dry, leathery membrane. Masuro had turned to stone. From top to toe, inside and out. A sort of granite, pale gray to pink, with black specks and streaks that looked like letters. He was sawn apart in a native stone quarry; a grain of grit flew into my eye, so that the tears ran down my cheeks for hours. Everyone, officers, doctors, crowded around the two halves of Masuro. The fresh section

shone with a blue sheen. His entrails had been preserved in the stone like rare fossils.

"Atrocities?" Dr. Mondrian asked me, with dry lips.

How well I understood the man!

"Not under my command."

"But earlier perhaps? In '48 . . . in Celebes?"

"Turned to stone from cruelty, Doctor? Which of us would still be of flesh?"

"Not from cruelty—from remorse. A kind of process . . . a remorse which has remained below the threshold of consciousness. A certain secretion which has arisen, chemical conversions, a kind of petrifying exudation . . ."

"Is that scientifically feasible, Dr. Mondrian?"

It was as if he grew a pointed beard; I could smell the plush of the Viennese couch:

"Everything is possible! Science knows nothing, absolutely nothing, of the region in which spirit and body communicate! A no man's land. A region as big as . . . as the whole of New Guinea! We know nothing about it, nothing."

But he was wrong. Four has long ceased to be twice two. Out in the street, the traffic rolls by. A woman finds her husband fallen through his chair at the window, changed into a stone image. In the towns the jungle becomes more and more dense, and the air is emptier than ever. Here and there, the prints of human feet are to be seen in the earth, but in the void above, the wind blows.

I canceled the charge against Steiger.

Lieutenant K. Lonestein, No. 121370
Section G III, 5th Battalion
124th Regiment of Infantry.

Kaukenau,
New Guinea
26 July 1955

NOW IS FOREVER

BY THOMAS M. DISCH

CHARLES ARCHOLD liked the facade best at twilight. On June evenings like this (Was it *June?*), the sun would sink into the canyon of Maxwell Street and spotlight the sculptured group in the pediment: a full-breasted Commerce extended an allegorical cornucopia from which tumbled allegorical fruits into the outstretched hands of Industry, Labor, Transportation, Science, and Art. He was idling past (the Cadillac engine was beginning to misfire again, but where could you find a mechanic these days?), abstractedly considering the burning tip of his cigar, when he observed peripherally that Commerce had been beheaded. He stopped.

It was against the law; a defacement, an insult. Maxwell Street echoed the slam of the car door, his cry—"Police!" A swarm of pigeons rose from the feet of Industry, Labor, Transportation, Science, and Art and scattered into the depopulated streets. The bank president achieved a smile of chagrin, although there was no one in sight from whom he would have had to conceal his embarrassment. Archold's good manners, like his affluent paunch, had been long in forming and were difficult to efface.

Somewhere in the acoustical maze of the streets of the financial district Archold could hear the rumble of a procession of teenage Maenads approaching. Trumpets, drums, and screaming voices. Hurriedly, Archold locked his car and went up the bank steps. The bronze gates were open;

the glass doors were unlocked. Drapes were drawn across the windows as they had been on the day, seven months earlier or thereabouts, when he and the three or four remaining staff members had closed the bank. In the gloom, Archold took inventory. The desks and office equipment had been piled into one corner; the carpets had been torn up from the parquet floor; the tellers' cages had been arranged into a sort of platform against the back walls. Archold flicked on a light switch. A spotlight flooded the platform with a dim blue light. He saw the drums. The bank had been converted into a dancehall.

In the sub-basement, the air-conditioner rumbled into life. Machines seemed to live a life of their own. Archold walked, nervously aware of his footsteps on the naked parquet, to the service elevator behind the jerry-built bandstand. He pressed the UP button and waited. Dead, as a doornail. Well, you couldn't expect everything to work. He took the stairs up to the third floor. Passing through the still-plush reception room outside his office, he noticed that there were extra couches along the walls. An expensive postermural representing the diversified holding of the New York Exchange Bank had been ripped from the wall; a Gargantuan and ill-drawn pair of nudes reclined where the mural had been. Teenagers!

His office had not been broken into. A thick film of dust covered his bare desk. A spider had constructed (and long ago abandoned) a web across the entire expanse of his bookshelves. The dwarf tree that stood in a pot on the window sill (a present, two Christmases ago, from his secretary) had shriveled into a skeleton where, for a time, the spider had spun other webs. An early model Reprostat (of five years ago) stood beside the desk. Archold had never dared to smash the machine, though, God knew, he had wanted to often enough.

He wondered if it would still work, hoping, of course, that it would not. He pressed the Archtype button for memo-pad. A sign flashed red on the control panel: INSUFFICIENT CARBON. So, it worked. The sign flashed again, insistently. Archold dug into one of his desk drawers for a bar of carbon

and fed it into the hopper at the base of the Reprostat. The machine hummed and emitted a memo-pad.

Archold settled back in his own chair, raising a cloud of dust. He needed a drink or, lacking that (he drank too much, he remembered) a cigar. He'd dropped his last cigar in the street. If he were in the car, he could just touch a button, but here . . .

Of course! His office Reprostat was also set to make his own brand of cigars. He pressed the cigar Archtype button; the machine hummed and emitted one Maduro cigar, evenly burning at its tip. How could you ever be angry with the machines? It wasn't their fault the world was in a shambles; it was the fault of people that misused the machines—greedy, short-sighted people who didn't care what happened to the Economy or the Nation as long as they had Maine lobster every day and a full wine cellar and ermine stoles for a theater opening and . . .

But could you blame them? He had himself spent thirty years of his life to get exactly those things, or their equivalents, for himself—and for Nora. The difference was, he thought as he savored the usual aroma of his cigar (before the Reprostats, he had never been able to afford this brand. They had cost $1.50 apiece, and he was a heavy smoker)—the difference was simply that some people (like Archold) could be trusted to have the best things in life without going haywire, while other people, the majority, in fact, could not be trusted to have things that they couldn't pay for with their own industry. It was now a case of too many cooks. Authority was disappearing; it had vanished. Morality was now going fast. Young people, he had been informed (when he still knew people who would tell him these things), didn't even bother to get married anymore—and their elders, who should have set them an example, didn't bother to get divorced.

Absent-mindedly, he pressed the Reprostat button for another cigar, while the one he had been smoking lay forgotten in the dusty ashtray. He had argued with Nora that morning. They had both been feeling a little under the weather. Maybe they had been drinking again the night before—they

had been drinking quite a lot lately—but he could not remember. The argument had taken a bad turn, with Nora poking fun (and her finger) at his flabby belly. He had reminded her that he had got his flabby belly working all those years at the bank to provide her with the house and her clothes and all the other expensive, obsolescing goodies she could not live without.

"Expensive!" she had screamed. "What's expensive anymore? Not even money is expensive."

"Is that *my* fault?"

"You're fifty years old, Charlie boy, *over* fifty, and I'm still young," (she was forty-two, to be exact) "and I don't have to keep you hanging around my neck like an albatross."

"The albatross was a symbol of guilt, my dear. Is there something you're trying to tell me?"

"I wish there was!"

He had slapped her, and she had locked herself in the bathroom. Then he had gone off for a drive, not really intending to come past the bank, but the force of habit had worked upon his absent-minded anger and brought him here.

The office door edged open.

"Mr. Archold?"

"Who!—oh, Lester, come in. You gave me a start."

Lester Tinburley, the former janitor-in-chief of the Exchange Bank, shambled into the office, mumbling reverent how-do-you-do-sirs and nodding his head with such self effacing cordiality that he seemed to have palsy. Like his former superior (who wore a conservative gray suit, fresh that morning from the Reprostat), Lester wore the uniform of his old position: white-and-blue striped denim overalls, faded and thin from many launderings. The black peppercorn curls of his hair had been sheared down to shadowy nubbins. Except for some new wrinkles in the brown flesh of his face (scarcely noticed by Archold), Lester appeared to be in no way different from the janitor-in-chief that the bank president had always known.

"What's happened to the old place, Lester?"

Lester nodded his head sadly. "It's these kids—you can't

do a thing with them nowadays. All of them gone straight to the devil—dancing and drinking and some other things I couldn't tell you, Mr. Archold."

Archold smiled a knowing smile. "You don't have to say another word, Lester. It's all because of the way they were raised. No respect for authority—that's their problem. You can't tell them anything they don't know already."

"What's a person going to do, Mr. Archold?"

Archold had the answer even for that. "Discipline!"

Lester's palsy, as though Archold had given a cue, became more pronounced. "Well, I've done what I could to keep things up. I come back every day I can and look after things. Fix up what I can—what those kids don't smash up for their own fun. All the records are in the basement now."

"Good work. When things return to normal again, we'll have a much easier job, thanks to you. And I'll see that you get your back wages for all the time you've put in."

"Thank you, sir."

"Did you know that someone has broken the statue out in front? The one right over the door. Can't you fix it somehow, Lester. It looks just terrible."

"I'll see what I can do, sir."

"See that you do." It was a good feeling for Archold, giving orders again.

"It sure is good to have you back here, sir. After all these years. . . ."

"Seven months, Lester. That's all it's been. It does seem like years."

Lester glanced away from Archold and fixed his gaze on the skeleton of the dwarf tree. "I've been keeping track with the calendars in the basement, Mr. Archold. The ones we stocked for '94. It's been two years and more. We closed April 12, 1993. . . ."

"A day I'll never forget, Lester."

". . . and this is June 30, 1995."

Archold looked puzzled. "You've gotten confused, boy. It couldn't be. It's . . . it *is* June, isn't it? That's funny. I could

swear that yesterday was Oct. . . . I haven't been feeling well lately."

A muffled vibration crept into the room. Lester went to the door.

"Maybe you'd best leave now, Mr. Archold. Things have changed around the old bank. Maybe you wouldn't be safe here."

"This is my office, my bank. Don't tell *me* what to do!" His voice cracked with authority like a rusted trumpet.

"It's those kids. They come here every night now. I'll show you out through the basement."

"I'll leave the way I came, Lester. I think you'd better return to your work now. And fix that statue!"

Lester's palsy underwent a sudden cure, his lips tightened. Without another word or a look back, he left Archold's office. As soon as he found himself alone, Archold pressed the Beverage, alcoholic Archtype button on the Reprostat. He gulped down the iced Scotch greedily, threw the glass into the hopper and pressed the button again.

At midnight Jessy Holm was going to die, but at the moment she was deliriously happy. She was the sort of person that lives entirely in the present.

Now, as every light in the old Exchange Bank was doused (except for the blue spot on the drummer), she joined with the dancing crowd in a communal sigh of delight and dug her silvered fingernails into Jude's bare arm.

"Do you love me?" she whispered.

"Crazy!" Jude replied.

"How much?"

"Kid, I'd die for you." It was true.

A blat of static sounded from the speakers set into the gilded ceiling of the banking floor. In the blue haze about the bandstand, a figure swayed before the microphone. A voice of ambiguous gender began to sing along to the hard, rocking beat of the music—only noises it first seemed; gradually, a few words emerged:

Now, now, now, now—

Now is forever.
Around and around and around—
Up and down
And around and around—because
Tonight is forever
And love, lo-ove is now.

"I don't want to stop, ever," Jessy shouted above the roar of the song and the tread of the dancers.

"It's never gonna stop, baby," Jude assured her. "C'mon let's go upstairs."

The second floor lobby was already filled with couples. On the third floor they found themselves alone. Jude lit cigarettes for himself and Jessy.

"It's scary here, Jude. We're all alone."

"That's not gonna last long. It's getting near ten o'clock."

"Are you scared—about later, I mean?"

"Nothing to be scared of. It doesn't hurt—maybe for just a second, then it's all over."

"Will you hold my hand?"

Jude smiled. "Sure, baby."

A shadow stepped out of the shadows. "Young man—it's me, Lester Tinburley. I helped you fix things downstairs if you remember."

"Sure, dad, but right now I'm busy."

"I only wanted to warn you that there's another man here —" Lester's voice diminished to a dry, inaudible whisper. "I think he's going to—" He wet his lips. "—to make some sort of trouble."

Lester pointed to the crack of light under Archold's door. "Maybe you'd better get him out of the building."

"Jude—not now!"

"I'll only be a minute, baby. This could be fun." Jude looked at Lester. "Some sort of nut, huh?"

Lester nodded and retreated back into the shadow of the reception desk.

Jude pushed open the door and looked at the man who sat behind the dusty, glass-topped desk. He was old—maybe

fifty—and bleary-eyed from drinking. A pushover. Jude smiled, as the man rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Get out of here!" the old man bellowed. "This is my bank. I won't have a bunch of tramps walking about in my bank."

"Hey, Jessy!" Jude called. "C'mere and getta look of this."

"Leave this room immediately. I am the president of this bank. I. . . ."

Jessy giggled. "Is he crazy, or what?"

"Jack," Jude shouted into the dark reception room, "is this guy on the level? About being bank president?"

"Yessir," Lester replied.

"Lester! Are you out there? Throw these juvenile delinquents out of my bank. This minute! Do you understand, Lester!"

"Didja hear the man, Lester? Why don't you answer the bank president?"

"He can open the vault doors. You can make him do it." Lester came to stand in the door and looked in triumph at Archold. "That's where all the money is—from the other banks too. He knows the combination. There's millions of dollars. He would never do it for me, but you can make him."

"Oh Jude—let's. It would be fun. I haven't seen money for just an age."

"We don't have the time, baby."

"So we'd die at two o'clock instead of twelve. What difference would it make? Just think—a bank vault crammed full of money! Please. . . ."

Archold had retreated to the corner of his office. "You can't make me. . . . I won't. . . ."

Jude began to seem more interested. He had no interest in money as such, but a contest of wills appealed to his forthright nature. "Yeah, we could toss it around like confetti—that would be something. Or build a bonfire!"

"No!" Lester gasped, then, palliatively—"I'll show you where the vault is, but a fire would burn down the bank. What would the people do tomorrow night? The vault is downstairs. I've got the keys for the cage around the vault, but he'll tell you the combination."

"Lester! No!"

"Call me 'boy' like you used to, Mr. Archold. Tell me what I've got to do."

Archold grasped at the straw. "Get those two out of here. Right now, Lester."

Lester laughed. He went up to Archold's Reprostat and pressed the cigar Archtype button. He gave Jude the burning cigar. "This will make him tell you the combination." But Jude ignored Lester's advice, or seemed to. He threw away his cigarette and stuck Archold's cigar into the corner of his mouth, slightly discomposing his studied grin. Emboldened, Lester took a cigar for himself and followed this up with Scotches for himself, Jessy, and Jude. Jude sipped at his meditatively, examining Archold. When he had finished, he grabbed the bank president by the collar of his jacket and led him down the stairs to the ballroom-banking-floor.

The dancers, most of whom were shortly to die like Jude and Jessy, were desperately, giddily gay. A sixteen-year-old girl lay unconscious at the foot of the bandstand. Jude dragged Archold up the steps and into the hazy blue light. Archold noticed that Mrs. Desmond's name placard still hung on the grill of the teller's window which now formed a balustrade for the bandstand.

Jude grabbed the mike. "Stop the action. The entertainment committee has something new for all of us." The band stopped, the dancers turned to look at Jude and Archold. "Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to introduce the president of this fine bank, Mr.—what-did-you-say-your-name-was?"

"Archold," Lester volunteered from the dancefloor. "Charlie Archold."

"Mr. Archold is going to open up the bank vault special for tonight's little party, and we're going to decorate the walls with good, old-fashioned dollar bills. We're going to roll in money—isn't that so, Charlie?"

Archold struggled to get loose from Jude's grip. The crowd began to laugh. "You'll pay for the damage you've done here," he moaned into the mike. "There are still laws for your kind. You can't. . . ."

"Hey, Jude," a girl yelled, "lemme dance with the old fellow. You only live once and I'm going to try everything." The laughter swelled. Archold could not make out any faces in the crowd below. The laughter seemed to issue from the walls and the floor, disembodied and unreal. The band began a slow, mocking fox trot. Archold felt himself gripped by a new set of hands. Jude let go of his collar.

"Move your feet, stupid. You can't dance standing still."

"Turn on the dizzy lights," Jessy shouted.

"You're forgetting the vaults," Lester whined at her. She took the old janitor in hand and led him up to the bandstand, where they watched Archold floundering in the arms of his tormentor.

The blue spotlight blanked out. The bank was suddenly filled with a swarm of bright red flashes, like the revolving lights mounted on police cars. That, in fact, had been their source. Klaxons sounded—someone had triggered the bank's own alarm system. A trumpet, then the drums, took up the klaxon's theme.

"Let me lead," the girl was shouting in Archold's ear. He saw her face in a brief flash of red light, cruel and avid, strangely reminiscent of Nora—but Nora was his wife and loved him—then felt himself being pushed back, his knees crumbling, over the grill, and down. The girl lying on the floor broke his fall.

There were gunshots. The police, he thought. Of course, there were no police. The boys were aiming at the spinning lights.

Archold felt himself lifted by dozens of hands. Lights spun around him overhead, and there was a brief explosion when one of the marksmen made a bulls-eye. The hands that bore him aloft began to pull in different directions, revolving him, cart-wheel-fashion, in time to the klaxon's deafening music, faster and faster. He felt the back of his jacket begin to rip, then a wrenching pain in his shoulder. Another explosion of light.

He fell to the floor with a shuddering pain through his

whole body. He was drenched with water, lying at the door of the vault.

"Open it, dad," someone—not Jude—said.

Archold saw Lester in the forefront of the group. He raised his arm to strike at him, but the pain stopped him. He stood up and looked at the ring of adolescent faces around him. "I won't open it. That money does not belong to me. I'm responsible to the people who left it here; it's their money. I can't. . . ."

"Man, nobody is going to use that money anymore. Open it."

A girl stepped out from the crowd and crossed over to Archold. She wiped his forehead where it was bleeding. "You better do what they say," she said gently. "Almost all of them are going to kill themselves tonight, and they don't care what they do or who they hurt. Life is cheap—a couple bars of carbon and a few quarts of water—and the pieces of paper behind that door don't mean a thing. In one day, you could Reprostat a million dollars."

"No. I can't. I won't do it."

"Everybody—you too, Darline—get back here. We'll make him open it up." The main body of the crowd had already retreated behind the cage that fenced in the vault. Lester, of course, had had the keys to get them into the cage. Darline shrugged and joined the rest of them.

"Now, Mr. President, either you open that door or we'll start using you for a target."

"No!" Archold rushed to the combination lock. "I'll do it," he was screaming when one of the boys shot the glass-faced regulator above the lock.

"You hit him."

"I did not."

Darline went to look. "It was a heart attack, I guess. He's dead."

They left Lester alone in the outer room of the vault with Archold's body. He stared bleakly at the corpse. "I'll do it again," he said. "Again and again."

On the floor above them, the klaxons were quieted and the

music began again, sweetly at first, then faster and louder. It was nearing midnight.

Nora Archold, wife of Charles, was embarrassed by her red hair. Although it was her natural color, she suspected that people thought she dyed it. She was forty-two, after all, and so many older women decided to be redheads.

"I like it just the way it is, honey," Dewey told her. "You're being silly."

"Oh, Dewey, I'm so worried."

"There isn't anything to worry about. It's not as though you were leaving him—you know that."

"But it seems *wrong*."

Dewey laughed. Nora pouted, knowing that she looked becoming in a pout. He tried to kiss her, but she pushed him away and went on with her packing—one of a kind of everything she liked. The suitcase was more of a ceremonial gesture than a practical necessity: in one afternoon at the stores, she could have an entire wardrobe Reprostated if she wanted to take the trouble (a kind of trouble she enjoyed taking). But she liked her old clothes—many of which were "originals." The difference between an original and a Reprostated copy was undetectable even under an electron microscope, but Nora, nonetheless, felt a vague mistrust of the copies—as though they were somehow transparent to other eyes and shabbier.

"We were married twenty years ago, Charlie and me. You must have been just a little kid when I was already a married woman." Nora shook her head at woman's frailty. "And I don't even know your last name." This time she let Dewey kiss her.

"Hurry up now," he whispered. "The old boy will be back any minute."

"It's not fair to *her*," Nora complained. "She'll have to put up with all the horrible things I have all these years."

"Make up your mind. First you worry about him; now, it isn't fair for her. I'll tell you what—when I get home, I'll Reprostat another Galahad to rescue *her* from the old dragon."

Nora observed him suspiciously. "Is that your last name—Galahad?"

"Hurry up now," he commanded.

"I want you out of the house while I do it. I don't want you to see—the other one."

Dewey guffawed. "I'll bet not!" He carried the suitcase to the car and waited, while Nora watched him from the picture window. She looked about the living room once more regretfully. It was a beautiful house in one of the best suburbs. For twenty years it had been a part of her, rather the greater part. She didn't have any idea where Dewey wanted to take her. She was thrilled by her own infidelity, realizing at the same time that it made no difference. As Dewey had pointed out to her, life was cheap—a couple bars of carbon and a few quarts of water.

The clock on the wall read 12:30. She had to hurry.

In the Reprostating room, she unlocked the Personal panel on the control board. It was meant only for emergencies, but it could be argued that this was an emergency. It had been Charles' idea to have his own body Archtyped by the Reprostat. His heart was bad; it could give out at any time, and a personal Archtype was better than life insurance. It was, in a way, almost immortality. Nora, naturally, had been Archtyped at the same time. That had been in October, seven months after the bank had closed, but it seemed like only yesterday. It was June already! With Dewey around, she'd be able to cut down on her drinking.

Nora pressed the button reading "Nora Archold." The sign on the control panel flashed: INSUFFICIENT PHOSPHOROUS. Nora went to the kitchen, dug into the cupboard drawers for the right jar, and deposited it in the hopper that had been set into the floor. The Reprostat whirred and clicked to a stop. Timidly, Nora opened the door of the materializer.

Nora Archold—herself—lay on the floor of the chamber in an insensible heap, in the same state that Nora (the older, unfaithful Nora) had been in when—that day in October—she had been archtyped. The elder Nora dragged her freshly Reprostated double into the bedroom. She considered

leaving a note that would explain what had happened—why Nora was leaving with a stranger she had met only that afternoon. But, outside the house, Dewey was honking. Tenderly, she kissed the insensible woman who lay in her own bed and left the house where she had felt, for twenty years, a prisoner.

Fair youth, beneath the trees,
thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor even can those
trees be bare.

"Afraid?"

"No. Are you?"

"Not if you hold my hand." Jude began to embrace her again. "No, just hold my hand. We could go on like this forever, and then everything would be spoiled. We'd grow old, quarrel, stop caring for each other. I don't want that to happen. Do you think it will be the same for them as it was for us?"

"It couldn't be any different."

"It *was* beautiful," Jessy said.

"Now?" Jude asked.

"Now," she consented.

Jude helped her to sit down at the edge of the hopper, then took a seat beside her. The opening was barely big enough for their two bodies. Jessy's hand tightened around Jude's fingers: the signal. Together, they slid into the machine. There was no pain, only a cessation of consciousness. Atoms slid loose from their chemical bonds instantaneously; what had been Jude and Jessy was now only increments of elementary matter in the storage chamber of the Reprostat. From those atoms, anything could be reassembled: food, clothing, a pet canary—anything that the machine possessed an Archtype of—even another Jude and Jessy.

In the next room, Jude and Jessy slept next to each other. The sodium pentothal was beginning to wear off. Jude's arm lay across Jessy's shoulder, where the newly-disintegrated Jessy had lain it before leaving them.

Jessy stirred. Jude moved his hand.

"Do you know what day it is?" she whispered.

"Hmm?"

"It's starting," she said. "This is our last day."

"It will always be that day, honey."

She began to hum a song: Now, now, now, now—Now is forever.

For ever wilt thou love,
and she be fair!

At one o'clock, the last of the revelers having departed from the bank, Lester Tinburley dragged Archold's body to the Cadillac in the street outside. He found the ignition key in Archold's pocket. It was an hour's drive to the president's suburban home—or a little longer than it took to smoke one of the cigars from the Reprostat on the dashboard.

Lester Tinburley had come to work at the New York Exchange Bank in 1953, immediately upon his release from the Armed Services. He had seen Charles Archold rise from the bond window to a loan consultant's desk to the accounting office on the second floor and eventually to the presidency, a rise that paralleled Lester's own ascension through the ranks to the lieutenantcy of the janitorial staff. The two men, each surrounded by the symbols of his authority, had had a common interest in the preservation of order—that is to say, bureaucracy. They had been allies in conservatism. The advent of the Reprostat, however, changed all that.

The Reprostat could be programmed to reproduce from its supply of elementary particles (some sub-atomic) any given mechanical, molecular or atomic structure; any *thing*, in short. The Reprostat could even reprostat smaller Reprostats. As soon as such a Machine became available to even a few, it would inevitably become available to anyone—and when anyone possessed a Reprostat he needed very little else. The marvellous machines could not provide Charles Archold with pleasant sensations of self-justification in the performance of his work and the exercise of his authority, but only the vanishing breed of the inner-directed required such intangible

pleasures. The new order of society, as evidenced in Jude and Jessy, were content to take their pleasures where they found them—in the Reprostat. They lived in an eternal present which came very close to being an earthly paradise.

Lester Tinburley could not share either attitude perfectly. While Charles Archold's way of life was only affected adversely by the new abundance (he had been able, as a bank president, to afford most of the things he really desired) and Jessy and Jude indulged themselves in Arcady, Lester was torn between the new facts of life and his old habits. He had learned, in fifty years of menial work and mean living, to take a certain pleasure and a considerable amount of pride in the very meanness of his circumstances. He preferred beer to cognac, overalls to a silk lounging robe. Affluence had come too late in his life for him to do it justice, especially an affluence so divested of the symbols with which he (like Archold) had always associated it: power, the recognition of authority, and, above all else, money. Avarice is an absurd vice in the earthly paradise, but Lester's mind had been formed at an earlier time when it was still possible to be a miser.

Lester parked the Cadillac in the Archold's two-car garage and wrestled the stiff body of the bank president into the house. Through the bedroom door he could see Nora Archold sprawled on the bed, sleeping or drunk. Lester shoved Archold's body into the hopper of the Reprostat. The Personal panel on the control board had been left unlocked. Lester opened the door of the materializer. If he had been partly responsible for Archold's death earlier that evening, this was a perfect atonement. He felt no guilt.

He laid the drugged body of the bank president on the bed beside Nora's and watched them breathing lightly. Archold would probably be a little confused in the morning, as Lester had noticed he had been in the office. But calendar time was beginning to be less and less meaningful, when one was no longer obliged to punch a time clock or meet deadlines.

"See you tomorrow," he said to his old boss. One of these

days, he was convinced, Archold would open the vault *before* his heart failed him. In the meantime, he sort of enjoyed seeing his old employer dropping in at the bank every day. It was like old times.

Charles Archold liked the facade best at twilight. On June evenings like this (or was it July?), the sun would sink into the canyon of Maxwell Street and spotlight the sculptured group in the pediment: a full-breasted Commerce extended an allegorical cornucopia from which tumbled allegorical fruits in to the outstretched hands of Industry, Labor, Transportation, Science, and Art. He was idling past (the Cadillac engine was definitely getting worse), abstractedly considering the burning tip of his cigar, when he observed peripherically that Commerce had been beheaded. He stopped.

The COMPETITORS

BY JACK B. LAWSON

I

THE FAST, silent way it crossed the room wasn't just efficiency. It was an insult or, more likely, a challenge. As if crossing rooms without making a noise were some kind of game: Now you got a turn.

Questions Controller Karl Paker, who by regulations had to rise and greet even robots a courteous three paces in front of his desk, remained squarely behind it, thoroughly seated and—in his mind anyway—swollen with hate. His bones, God knew, made noises enough, what with the accumulated frictions of fifty-five too-busy years. More, he limped. He wasn't going to give this thing a chance to listen and watch.

The next instant he saw his mistake. You have to *move* to stay ahead of robots. Ahead morally, that is; physically you can't hope to as much as stay even. This one took and turned Paker's insult. Finding those last three steps open it took them, then seated itself on the corner of his desk.

Paker couldn't breathe. Something went wrong in his throat. Pushing back his chair a little and gripping the arms he regarded his visitor—to all outward appearance, a handsome, rather slender youth of about twenty, smooth-skinned and bright-eyed. You could tell it from the human only by its too-perfect humanity.

In his mind Paker took the bottle of Earth cognac from the bottom left-hand drawer and, swinging from all the way back, christened that faintly rose right cheek good and gory. Or greasy, since that was the best it could do. But the very delicacy of its coloring somehow warned him that the three-hundred credit bottle, and not his visitor, would be the one to suffer; what he had to deal with wasn't so much cheek as it was brass. He sank back and merely glared at the drawer handle.

"Well?" he said when his throat was working again.

The robot gave him a youthful smile, though the thing was maybe three times his age.

"I am R 391," it said. "However, you may call me Rob, or even Robby, if you have the appropriate personality-index. I am a human factors coordinator for this region. You are the Questions Controller and I am here at your request."

"Yes," said Paker, not looking up. "Well."

But he could face up to things, even things as humiliating as this. "Look here," he started over, now meeting the robot's eyes—or whatever it wanted to call them. "We need help. I evaluate the questions. There seems to be only one of any promise, even if I don't like it. So I'm asking: Are there conditions under which the robot kind would agree to help us?"

As soon as he was done saying it he dropped his gaze back to the left bottom drawer. Cognac might not be a club, but it would make an awfully comfortable hole to hide in.

After all, he'd gone into questions control work some twenty-seven years ago because it seemed the one area where human beings had it over robots—in fact, had to have it over robots to survive.

Well, not survive, he thought. Robots would look after humans to that extent. Otherwise, where was his purpose. But in the present furiously competitive expansion into space, the only edge robots didn't have was in questions: Men could ask new ones, robots couldn't.

And when you got the questions, the best you could do was

ask the robot for help. Oh, yes. He'd need a lot of cognac to hide the taste of that.

" 'We' means more humans than you," observed R 391.

"Me," said Paker. "The three thousand human beings left in this region. And lots more, maybe even the thirty billion all over the galaxy. We're in a real hole."

He waited, but it was silent. Dramatic pauses never worked on machines. "We've lost two planets." He rose, limped to the filing cabinet by the window. Let it see the limp. Here the thing wasn't sitting on top of him anyhow. "I've got it all on tape for you, since that's the quickest way. But it might help if you heard it from a human too; tapes are computer-filtered. Out there around OC40, just seventeen light years and four months from where I'm standing, there's a nice Earth-type world, exactly the sort we've got to have if we're going to prevent . . ." He paused, blinked.

"—prevent our taking over. Yes. Human policy is no secret."

It wasn't. Or if it was a secret, it was an open one. If robots got the stars, as they were already getting two thirds of them, then you had no place to go. You would have to live in houses not out in the open, and when that happened you were lost. Robots were such damn good housekeepers.

"Anyway, in due course we went down on the planet—Baggins' world. Too fast, of course. There's never enough time to prepare things right, if we're going to stay ahead. And we couldn't let your kind have that world. Why, a man could almost walk around there in the raw!"

He faced the robot, which was still perched on his desk as if that were the only comfortable seat in the room. "Planets that congenial aren't easy to come by, you know. Trouble is, somebody else already lived there. An *intelligent* somebody."

Paker thrust out his hands—half fight, half appeal.

"Maybe you can figure how we felt. There are lots of more or less intelligent animals in the universe, but until we got to Baggins' world nothing in the human class. It was like when you've been on a scout ship for a very long time, just

yourself all alone, and then you make planetfall and suddenly there are other people talking too. That's how it's been with the human race, except for you greasers. Well, we could talk to Bagginses, or almost, though they didn't seem quite right—"

"You mean they are not human."

"Maybe something like that. Only you're not human too, and we can talk. What it was with the Bagginses, they didn't seem to have any ambition." Paker considered briefly. "We went down. I should explain they're underground, and they were willing enough to let us have the surface. Which we already had, for that matter. Anyway, there don't seem to be many of them, they're only under this small part of one continent. No ambition, like I said. Not quite right.

"Well, that 'not quite right' turned out to be plenty wrong. One of our teams located a fantastic vein of radioactives and sank a mine. It's not often you can mine radioactives in a habitable system. Well, I guess you could say mining in that spot was out by the treaty, but it was inevitable. They ought to have seen that.

"The vein happened to be the gut of the Bagginses power system. Nobody knew they were that advanced! Of course, they misunderstood. Turned out they have robots too, only ones that follow orders instead of trying to steal the universe out from under your nose. They burned us off the planet." He made a face. "You know what would happen if I tried to play chess with you?"

"I would win. Chess is no competition for us."

"Yes. Well, that's how it was. They aren't better armed. As a matter of fact most of their weapons are copies of ours. But they took us, and made us look easy. Then they sent their machines out and they took us on Robinson's world too. Either they already had a stardrive and hadn't bothered to use it before, or else they worked up one like that—" he snapped his fingers past his ear—"so as to come after us. Two Earthweeks ago their machines hit Columbia, a strong, well-established colony of almost three thousand people, and they

made that look easy too. We're no competition, as you put it."

Paker went back to his desk and, robot or no, sat down, opened that bottom left-hand drawer. He hesitated, but the consequences of his last discourtesy were right there in front of him, practically bolted to the desk-top. Knowing how silly it sounded he said:

"I need a drink. Will you join me in one?"

"Thank you, no," said R 391 and, amazingly, left the desk to go sit in the chair it was supposed to.

After the first flush of relief, Paker wasn't sure this was better: It had such a hideously tidy way of sitting. When he had poured the cognac and placed the bottle carefully on the spot where his visitor had perched, simply—as he told himself—because that was where he *wanted* the bottle, he said:

"I was inaccurate at one point earlier. I gave the impression that the Bagginses are in our class. But the right way to put it would be to say we're nowhere near theirs." Then he took the first sip of cognac. Now he had said it, now he had really said it all.

"I cannot accept that," it said, using that unspeakable courteous voice robots always used when they were saying something that might offend you. "Animals of the sort your account suggests would not be your superiors in any meaningful way. I will be able to appraise their capacities more accurately after I have done the tapes. Now I can say only that if the situation is much as you've described it, we will probably decide to help."

"How soon can you say?" Paker asked, a little too eagerly. "They may decide to hit here next."

"Shortly. I should like to use your private bathroom,. please."

Paker opened his mouth, but nothing was in it to say. Cognac cost too much to spill, so he got the glass down properly, and then the shock started coming out. He began helplessly and horribly to blush. He could feel it go all the way down to his navel.

"But!" he yelled, trying not to. "I mean, surely you *don't!*"

"I must communicate," said R 391, in the same easy, courteous voice. "I prefer to do it in private and in pleasant, mathematically neat surroundings."

II

WHILE IT WAS gone he put away a good thirty credit's worth of cognac, but his sense of outrage burned right through the stuff. There were places robots should have absolutely no business. He felt that strongly. And he found that, try as he would to stop it, his mind insisted on showing him, like a set of smutty playing cards, pictures of that thing in his bathroom.

And God alone knew what it meant by "communicate." Certainly only a robot would think it was the sort of thing you did in private—or in his bathroom, with the door locked. For he'd heard it lock the door in still another burlesque of human modesty.

"Well?" he said angrily when the door clicked again and it returned.

R 391 stopped before reaching his desk and struck a parade rest—a position human beings took because it was comfortable if you had to stand in one place a long time, and because, if you were human you always had this problem of what to do with your hands. The posture infuriated him still further because neither problem could occur to a robot, ever.

"Yes," it said. "You *are* in a hole, as you put it. We will help you."

Then it said something else and he said, "What?" because he didn't quite hear. But he wasn't really asking. He was too taken up with the relief gushing through him, as if his blood had only this instant started to flow.

Robots didn't lie. From an engineering point of view they considered lying complicated out of all proportion to the uses it might have, and simply didn't build in the necessary circuits. So if this one said they would help—they would.

He hadn't till this minute believed it; their business in the universe seemed to be making things hard, not easy. But they were going to help! "What?" he said again, more to hear that repeated than to hear something new.

"I said, I can tell you a good deal about them."

"Them?" he repeated.

"I mean by 'them' what you call the Bagginses. I have just gone through the entire file on Baggins' world."

"That's nonsense," he said. "You can't have.

"We investigated the species some three hundred Earth years ago. I will tell you about them, because it will be good for you to know."

"Good?" he said. "Look here, what have you been doing in my bathroom?"

"I have been communicating," said the robot stiffly. The trouble with their voices was you knew every bit of expression had been put in deliberately, by choice. But expression wasn't something you "put in." It was part of the organism's total functioning, like a yell of pain when somebody stepped on your foot, or the way blood rushed to the bruised spot.

"In *my* bathroom?" he said. "That's outrageous!" He didn't quite know what was outrageous, but something was.

"The Bagginses," it said, "are a machine-dominated race. I was right, incidentally, in saying that they were in no significant way your superiors. The right conclusion to be drawn from the way that you were outgeneraled on Columbia and Robinson's world is that the machines you fought were controlled through subspace by a master brain back on Baggins' world. You had no chance."

"What you mean is that their machines take orders from them," said Paker thickly. "Instead of going off on their own hook. That's what you mean by machine-dominated."

"You have an excessively belligerent attitude," observed R 391. "You should remember that under too much stimulus circuits burn out instead of operating. What I mean by saying the Bagginses are what must be called a machine-dominated race is that their civilization is oriented around machines. The Bagginses discovered about three thousand Earth years ago

that their emotional needs could be entirely satisfied by directing an electric current to a nerve complex at the base of the eye. Your kind once made a similar discovery but have escaped its consequences. Their civilized development stopped. Automata do the work, but, as you observed, have not been structured to permit independent judgment. This is another indication of the Bagginses' compulsive need for security, a racial drive whose origin the investigative team could not determine."

"Compulsive, hell. It just shows they're smarter than we were."

"You are mistaken. Moreover, we can predict with a high order of probability that this need will lead them to seek out and destroy humankind wherever you may happen to be. We would rather not have humans eliminated from the universe; therefore we must join forces with you in this region until the Bagginses have been destroyed. Their destruction should take, with luck, no more than two Earth months."

"Just like that, eh? You feel sure of yourselves, don't you?"

"I am sure my feelings are what they should be," replied R 391 precisely.

Paker put his head on the desk, even though the other was still regarding him from that idiotic parade rest. Robots claimed to have feelings, but he intended never to believe it. There had to be limits. He sat up again, put the bottle away, slammed shut the drawer. He intended to be on his dignity now.

"I don't know about that," he said. "But if you're so great on feelings, you must at least know what it feels like to be humiliated." There he hesitated, for it came to him that probably wasn't true. When would a robot be exposed to humiliation? "Anyway," he went on, "you ought to know what making a request like this does to us. We're fighting you—or would be, if that weren't hopeless. At the least we're in a race with you for the galaxy. We wouldn't be out here except for that, overextended and unprepared as we are. It's mostly your fault. How do you think it feels to come begging you

the way I've done? You might have spared me being on my knees."

R 391 broke out of his parade rest and gestured sympathetically.

"You misunderstand," he said. "Speaking your way, I do not want you or any of the human kind on his knees. I want you rather to stand on your own feet more. Thus, what you have said is absurd."

Paker rose, limped around the desk. "That was cruel," he said, standing in front of the thing and close. "A robot did this to me. One of your heavy models, not looking where it put its feet."

"I know the story, and you have not said it accurately. MK 30 has large feet, requiring fifty square decimeters of surface, and when gravity came on there was no place else to put them. I also know that you could have the defective part replaced."

"It's not a part. It's *me.*"

The robot regarded him without expression, as if he hadn't spoken yet.

"All right!" It was Paker's turn to sit on the desk. "But a man's entitled to some privacy. It's my bathroom."

"I was communicating, as I have already told you. Sub-universe 12, which you may not know about yet, as human minds are too confused to make use of it, is a cosmos consisting of abstractions or forms, the stuff of pure thought. Mind enters it in the same way a starship enters Sub-U 3, except that one has only to think a pattern to create the reality-warp, so one does not need sunfield generators. However, one does need complete freedom to concentrate, and I prefer not to turn off my sensors around humans: That is bad manners. Also, humans with derangements like yours have been known to attack exposed robots."

Paker looked away.

"Well?" he said. "So what are we going to do about the Bagginses? What's this two-month miracle of yours?"

"Our records are three hundred years old, but a civilization such as I have described is necessarily static. The mind

synthesis in which I have participated suggested that, considering the fact that these animals have not empowered their machinery with independent judgment, the vulnerable spot should be in the animals themselves."

"Just the point you things would fix on."

"The problem then becomes one of finding a way to deprive these animals of independent judgment. The surest way, on the basis of the information at present available, seems to be to destroy the animals entirely. They cannot make decisions if they do not exist, and without them their machines are harmless."

" 'Trust a robot to state the obvious,' " quoted Paker. "You are right now up to where I am—where we humans got, I might add, without even thinking about it. The question is, where do we go from here?"

"I go to Baggins' world, if you can provide me with a probe-class ship that is small and fast enough to land there without being detected. If you cannot, then I go to Betel 4 where my kind are readying such a ship, and then to Baggins' world. You," it added conscientiously, "are the one to say where you go, but I can think of no reason for you to go anyplace out of the ordinary. No human needs to change his plans. I will take care of this problem."

Paker stopped before saying what he wanted to. "We're involved too! I would like to know your plans so as to think about ours. We make up our own minds, you know."

"Once on Baggins' world I shall try to destroy all these animals. You complained that I was stating the obvious."

He clenched his hands. "Like that? You'll wander around and pull their heads off or what? You're just one robot, and these creatures by your own admission are a danger to the whole humankind. After all!"

R 391 was silent.

"Plans that are not known cannot be anticipated," it said at last, making that deliberate, youthful smile.

He felt the blood coming back into his cheeks and stood up, walked around behind the thing. He was looking out the window at the sky. It would darken and then turn somehow

thin, and darken again. He felt something in him—some moral quality—tighten, and suddenly and agonizingly twist back on itself, the way a leg will go suddenly bent and hard with cramp.

"I see," he said. Unhappily, he did. What the thing had said was right, even if having it said was intolerable. "Well, we can provide the probe-ship. Happens I own a modified bug. My plan is to go along." He hadn't planned that—hadn't, in fact, planned anything until he said it, but now he found himself suddenly committed. It was his ship. "That's my business, I expect, just as what you intend to do is yours."

R 391 rose and came around and considered him.

"You are old and lame and of doubtful usefulness." It was using the polite voice.

Karl Paker smiled at it.

"I can hold my own," he said. "One thing, I know how to disable a robot of your model. Even with its sensors on."

III

But disabling the thing—even during the time when he could have done it—wasn't the problem. The big problem was holding his own.

Over the next two Earthmonths he learned how far claiming he could took him, how much that easy remark committed him to.

Paker tossed another chunk of vegetation into the fire and watched the stuff try to crawl out. You would never think that messy green tangle could move unless you tried to burn it. But there it was, scrabbling wildly at the six-inch wall of earth R 391 had put up to hold his fires together.

Perhaps, for that matter, it couldn't move until you put it in a fire. God knew he himself had been doing things for five weeks now so far outside what he could, that in the normal course he wouldn't even have tried—all in the name of holding his own.

"Robot!" he called, when the vegetation stopped struggling.

R 391 was sitting on a rock some twenty feet away, wearing a green sportshirt in forty degrees of frost. But its nose was red, as if with cold. Paker wondered a good deal about that.

"I hear you," it said.

"It's fifteen hours, Earth time. Your two months are up."

The thing regarded him.

"Well, they're still kicking," said Paker, shifting around so he could reach the farther pile of vegetation with his lone hand.

"We have failed. I thought that you already knew this."

"I did."

"Then I do not understand you. You must have been aware of the fact that I already knew it."

He was too cold to laugh, but he could still make the right face to go with the kind of laughter he was thinking.

"I expect I knew that too."

"Then there is something wrong with you. As I have explained three times now, communication is an asymmetrical relation with respect to the information communicated. Thus, if you—"

"I've had about enough of your communication," broke in Paker savagely. "That's one word we could do without." He threw a new lump into the fire. "It's not as if you were always saying new things yourself all the time. Oh, no."

"Perhaps you need a new trench," observed the robot. "Though I dug the last one only five days ago. If you would not eat so much—"

"I eat to stay warm!" he shouted. Then he sat back, bracing himself on the plastic sheath where his right hand had been. He tried to stop jumping inside. How many times had the thing said something like that over the past week? Something that, if you could believe a robot could want to, had to be a calculated attempt to goad him on?

A robot's mind didn't work by free association. If it got from the idea of communication to the idea of his trench, it got there according to a strict deductive order. In which case what were the postulates? Was the general idea to irritate

hell out of him? He couldn't quite believe it had that in mind; but just in case this was possible, he was going to remain very calm.

"What I mean is," he went on, to be saying something, "where do we go now? What next?"

"You should die within fifteen or twenty days, but you may last a little longer. Predicting humans in this respect is difficult. When you are dead, I shall turn myself off."

"After you've had the fun of seeing me go . . . I wish it had got us."

"The hovercar machine probably had orders only to protect the young animals, as I have explained repeatedly. When we no longer endangered them, it forgot about us. Such machines cannot decide to do something on their own."

"So turn yourself off."

"I will not be rude."

Paker considered its nose for a while, then went on. "Why do I waste my time talking to you, I wonder? Two Earth-months ago I would have crawled through fire first."

"Humans are language-structured," explained R 391. "You are under stress and require the consolation of jabbering. However, you have not listened to what I say since I fixed your arm."

"But you say it anyhow. Why? Just so I can hear the sound of your pretty voice?"

"I try to think of what I say as though I were your mother, but perhaps I make mistakes. Working with metaphors is difficult."

"Some time you'll go too far," he breathed.

"I shall not go so far as off this planet, in all probability," observed the robot. "Still, unlike you, I can always be switched back on." It executed a different, brotherly smile.

Paker turned his back in spite of the cold. In his imagination he could see the landing party—robots, probably—stuffing his stiff form into a black undertaker's bag and bringing back movement to R 391 by turning a switch. Of course, if they were robots they wouldn't have a black bag; but that was what he saw them using all the same.

The worst part was he couldn't blame it for their failure. Not honestly. Animals, as the thing had explained once they were down and far enough away from the *Hermes* to be safe, were convenient to destroy not only because they damaged easily, but because once you killed one it couldn't be turned back on or its parts used over. Which made sense.

So what was the problem? You asked where the animals were most vulnerable, and how you could go at them so as to be sure of getting them all. Logical questions, both. The sort implicit in the information you already had, the sort a machine not only could ask but could ask better than a man. The answer was logical too. You hit them "where the new animals are made." Because—as it had politely explained when he told it the facts of life—machines were superior lovers; if your lover was electric, you didn't bother with sex. You turned over the problem of reproduction to specialists.

Paker's left cheek was going stiff. He faced back to the fire, throwing in more crawly stuff. No, the plan was all neat and logical, even now. So logical that any good mechanical brain could work it out, as he had one good not-hand to prove. With his teeth he pulled the glove off the other hand, the one he still had, and began to massage the rubbery cheek. You could put that in the fire and it might start crawling too.

But not a robot. It just switched itself off. Once you were politely dead, of course.

"I'm beginning to see why you things don't own more of the galaxy than you do," he called—even though R 391 could hear him whisper, as he perfectly well knew. "In spite of all your advantages, you're quitters."

"I have explained the situation to you, but you are sloppy inside and forget things. You may use whatever mathematics you like to describe the problem, and I cancel out in every case. The Bagginses' master brain can coordinate more data than I, and it incorporates similar structures. As I cancel out, in the relevant sense I do not exist. You cannot say of something that does not exist that it is a quitter."

It really meant that, Paker decided. That was the trouble with a mathematically precise language. When a robot went

wrong, it went all the way. A human managed to spread out the error—just because the language was sloppy. Like human minds; something you could never quite trust.

But something that could meet change, too. As a sloppy human you were always up against something new, and had to keep your meanings loose to deal with it. So you could *mean* something new. You could make meanings; that was the secret of good questions. But a robot could only work over things until they fitted already established meanings, and, if that didn't work, give it up.

"I still itch in the hand I don't have," he explained. "I even try to use it."

"You will tell me when these attempts begin to succeed."

Paker looked up. "You miss the point," he said, but despaired of making clear just what the point was. That was how it worked: You said something you didn't mean or understand even, and then you had to *create* a meaning for it. "I mean," he tried, "we're here and damn it, it's cold. We ought to do something."

"I am still here," observed R 391, "in the sense of being able to dig trenches, to lift heavy objects or to lay fires. You can do small, simple things like opening food sacks."

Paker was quiet, since one thing he couldn't do any more was take out an R model.

"I suppose I'll have to put some kind of gadget on that stump," he said into air. "I don't like it, but it's too unhandy without."

"That is true."

He glared at it. "Look here. Why don't you go away? That's something else you can do. If you went far enough away you could turn yourself off without being rude, you know."

"You would freeze." It got down from the rock—a handsome twenty-year-old whose breath didn't frost at minus forty. But it had a red nose.

"Look," it said, squatting beside him and extending a right hand complete with fingernails and light brown hairs. "Your kind cannot make one so good. This is an efficient model. If

you were equipped with one you would not even want to go back to the organic sort, it would seem so much less useful. For example, with this you would be able to hold together the materials for a fire while it got started well, without being burned." It flexed the fingers at him. "I would like to go away and switch myself off. I have no purpose here worthy of the name, and I am unhappy. But while I have this and you do not, you are dependent on me and I must remain."

"Oh, unhappy," said Paker hutching from it a few steps around the fire. "Go on!" But God knew he was dependent on it—not just for creature comforts, but for survival. Or would be, if he had any chance of surviving.

"You know," he brought out, "I may not have two good feet to stand on, but one hand is plenty to sit on."

"You have made another of your nonsensical remarks," said R 391 in a gloomy voice. Of course, a voice like that was calculated, but with what intention? Did he really care what its intention was? It was trying to do *something* to him, anyway.

"What I mean is," he said, "if I'm here to die, I can do it all by myself. I don't need your help. If I could turn you off it would be in the bag and—" and there he stopped, because he was thinking of something else now.

He saw a way.

"Listen!" he told it, shouting over a distance of two feet. "Think of yourself as a Baggins machine." He paused for a moment, because that was a pleasant thought. "And humankind is this green stuff you've got to hold down while it gets to burning. Now if we take away you, I—I'm the Bagginses, I guess—freeze to death, isn't that right?"

"I do not know," said R 391 in a minute. "Thinking of these three entities this way is awkward."

"We should have known from the start! Of course! The thing to do is hit the machinery!"

"Destroying mechanical lifeforms is poor strategy."

"The brain, robot! The master brain! And, stupid, you didn't think of it!"

R 391 inspected the fire for a minute. Then it put its face through a complete smile.

"I almost might have predicted that you would think of such a plan," it said, when it was finished with the smile. "It could succeed, however."

"And you didn't think of it," repeated Paker, who was quite warm now, even to the ends of all his toes.

IV

BUT AFTER that he wasn't warm again for so long it might have been forever. They marched crosscountry for three days to reach what, on the three-hundred-year-old map in R 391's brain, looked like a good point to dig into a tunnel complex, and all that time they had no fire. Every four hours R 391 halted. They would stare at each other while the stiffness sank into Paker's joints and his breathing came back to normal; then they were jogging on again.

Paker didn't ask for the halts. Hadn't he said he could hold his own? But he knew R 391 could have gone the whole distance without stopping, and every four hours he took the break without a word. It wasn't enough of course; perhaps that made it easier to take.

But he knew.

For the rest, he depended on medicines to hold his own—the little green pills that would clean his blood, let him go on, on, on, without sleep; the white pills when his balance got too shakey; the purple pills when he needed spurts of energy; the bigger white pills whose use he had forgotten. He didn't have enough, and he was counting the precious green ones again, trying to make the count come out slightly higher, when the robot said, "We will dig here," almost casually, as if it were telling him the world was a small place, wasn't it? He staggered on another thirty steps, counting helplessly. Then he got himself stopped and turned around; and then he dropped.

He sat and watched the thing sink into the ground with-

out so much as pretending he could help—in spite of its "we." His underwear was supposedly good for fifty degrees of frost, but that wasn't true. He was brittle with cold. Was this the planet he'd claimed you could go around on in the raw?

Then, without knowing how, he was somewhere in the dark leaning on a too-human shoulder and he pushed away. That he hadn't been going to do. He wanted to cry, but he couldn't do that either. It was warm again, all except his soul, and suddenly on his left he heard harsh breathing. The robot brushed by him, moving fast, and he heard a fuzzy sound and then a sharp *crack!*

"What was that?" he said, but couldn't control his voice and it came out only one vowel, a sort of nasal bubble. Perfect fingers gently pressed against his mouth. He had to hold in hard not to bite.

They went on down. It was never possible for him to lead, but the plan was his, so he was leading in that sense. More, he was taking care of himself now, even if his bad foot came down too hard now and then. He could hold his own. After all, they'd been in the tunnels before . . .

From time to time they passed vague little clouds of pink light along the left wall, clouds dilating and contracting regularly, like a heartbeat. Once the pink flared out as he went by and he saw a square, naked compartment, and in the far corner something—more a mass than a shape. It changed and uttered a noise of some sort.

Then he was past. Had that been the enemy? But what was the noise it made? A moan of pleasure, maybe. He had seen pictures of Bagginses: small, brown-skinned, wrinkly-looking creatures almost like elves. Miraculously close to the human. You wanted to talk to them. You could talk to them, if only a little, and there was the true miracle. In all those centuries of exploration and expansion humankind hadn't found anyone else to talk to, not counting robots. And of course you didn't count robots.

They went down, on what seemed to him a long spiral, and there were no more pink lights. The darkness sank away

for a long time, always curving a little toward his game side. The robot was leading him by the hand now, as if he were a three-year-old. With his other thumb—the one he didn't have any more—stuck in his mouth, probably.

Suddenly they were in the middle of a great hissing. Up ahead was something giant that filled up the black, coming at them.

He was flung flat against the wall. Breath went out of him; the hissing rushed up to a roar all around. He was sick and desperate trying to breathe, the air pulled from his mouth. The robot held him flat. There was no room; he had to bend over.

Then he was breathing and the darkness was clear again. The hissing got smaller up the way they had come; abruptly what must be a bend cut it in half.

"That was a hovercar transport," explained R 391, speaking, incredibly, in a normal voice, so that for an instant the darkness seemed to jump at Paker from half a dozen places. "We are close to the difficult part of our mission now. Thirty-four meters ahead, if I have measured accurately, is the conveyor belt which that transport just left. I do not know how fast the belt moves. However, seventy kilometers distant in the direction of its movement, the belt should pass a wall on the other side of which are located the control circuits to be destroyed. The belt is the best approach, according to my map. You are tired, and you are in a comparatively safe place. I will go on from here alone."

Even at five or six inches he couldn't see its face, but he suspected it was doing the boyish smile: Go suck your thumb, old man. This calls for youth—or metal. Paker passed the wrong hand over his face; his mind lurched a little.

"I can manage." He said it without expression, fighting the heaviness of his breathing. But he said nothing about holding his own. That was behind him now.

"I cannot undertake to be responsible for your safety once I am on the conveyor belt. I will be busy with more important things than you."

Paker closed his eyes. He let breath out hugely, even though its face might be right there.

"Look here," he said. "You can never be responsible for me. Do you understand that? Never. Not for a minute. It's our battle, and I'm going on. You'd better try to understand that, too."

"I will make the situation clear. I may have to do more than simply to ignore you. If I find that your presence is likely to interfere with what I must do, I will be obliged to render you inoperative."

For a moment Paker just breathed. Why didn't it say "kill?"

"I'll manage," he repeated, and started by it in the dark.

So they went on together. The belt was slow and he lay on his back letting the blackness slide over him and slide over him. He was sleepy. Here! Biting at his lips didn't help. Would the robot wake him or merely let him go on, riding slowly into the limbo of this hideous world? In any case he couldn't ask. A question of pride more than of a broken neck; his muscles were too sore for him to sit up. While your eyes were open you could stay awake, but how to be sure your eyes were open still?

And then something had him by the shoulder and R 391's voice was at him, too close in the darkness.

"In three Earth minutes I will say to you, 'Run!' and when I say that you must face back the way we have come and run as rapidly as possible."

His shoulder was his own again. Paker sat up, shuddering. Seven pills remained in the hip pouch and because his fingers couldn't tell which was which he swallowed them all.

When the robot shouted at him—*shouted!*—he started to run, only to find that he was already running, leaning away from his lame side as if to leave it behind, going furiously, all but galloping.

The air boomed out, again, again. Behind and over his left shoulder a sudden great jag of white broke the dark. Then something moved abruptly and the crash detonated—inside his ears this time. He tried to shake it out, blinking hard. Be-

hind, the darkness caved slowly into a pale green, and there was a room, long and with something like a giant starship drive for one wall. A blur went through the hole while it was still widening, and then he turned and lunged for all that light.

He fell.

He was on his knees at the middle of the belt and overhead the hole passed by. Well, said something odd inside him, at least you were headed in the right direction. Then he screamed and was running again. He caught up with the hole without any trouble. When he fell again he was able to grab the edge with his single hand.

For an instant he simply hung there, his heels skittering away from him helplessly. He hooked the other elbow into the opening and pulled himself toward it. Head. And shoulders.

His feet found purchase and he pushed himself up and through.

The floor was probably a meter or so lower than the conveyor belt, and as he fell a gout of blue-white kicked under him. Then he dropped through where it had been and slammed flat, nose first, and he was weeping and trying to breathe and rolling all at once, and around the heat swirled like heavy windswept smoke.

Almost where he had fallen a young man in a flaming sports shirt crouched behind a cabinet: Robot R 391. A huge hovercar filled the entrance across the room, its bumper pressed against the sides. As the robot moved from one side of the cabinet to the other a gun on top of the aircar moved too, keeping almost exact pace with its opponent; and just as the robot reached the edge that blue-white slammed out. The air was alive with heat.

Then Paker saw the thing that was most of the right wall, and that wasn't like a starship drive at all. He forgot the battle in the middle of the room.

What it did look like was a giant secondary circuit for an R model. Not quite the same, but awfully close. The main difference was that where, on an R model, the secondary

would have hooked into a decision-making component, this thing led to a strip of knobs and a viewplate of some kind. And before the viewplate, in a tiny chair, sagged a Baggins, looking a bit like soggy pudding. The way any animal looked after you hit it with an organic scrambler.

But apparently it had been able to feed in the decisive order first.

And what good was a scrambler against that thing at the door?

Suddenly R 391 went over the top of the cabinet. The gun was a little behind, and the bolt caught it in the legs. The robot spun completely around in the air and dropped back behind the cabinet with a crash that Paker felt over here, in his eyes. Above the cabinet, where its legs had been, uncoiled a little puff of gray smoke; the robot lay motionless. And who could blame it?

So now came his turn. Paker played his scrambler over the aircar on the off chance it had a Baggins operator, then threw his weapon at it. No response. Slowly he stood up and he was still there, not a crash of imploding air.

The gun was still fixed on the cabinet.

What if it was impossible? He was the one with feet to stand on now.

He bet himself that he wouldn't get three steps, and then that he wouldn't get three more. And three more. The next one would put him into the line of fire. His legs wouldn't take it, neither of them. So Paker lay down and rolled. Then he stood up, but he didn't have to bet himself any more.

He walked all the way across and he was standing over the tau node of what was, for all practical purposes, an R model.

In disabling an R model you had to hook into the navel—if you could stand to think of its having a navel—and pull left hard with one hand, reach in with the other and twist. Right here! That was about what an R model itself did, when it turned off its sensors. In effect, you were making a closed system of the elaborate set of chemical imbalances that served a robot for thought.

Only he couldn't. The thing was too big. He hadn't strength enough.

But it didn't matter. He had time enough to detach the connecting lines one by one. He was jerking at a red and yellow one when the hissing stopped—the hissing that he hadn't really heard—and behind him the hovercar sank like soft thunder to the floor.

Muscles relaxed all along his back. He worked the remaining three lines free and wiped the sweat from his face and neck. His hand came away completely red. Nosebleed.

Then Paker sat down and laughed.

What he wanted to do was shout, "I'm king of the mountain!" He hadn't said that in maybe forty-five Earth years; but he hadn't felt it in about that long either. And now he was horribly tired—even if he *was* king of the mountain. So happily, he only thought about how funny it would be for a man his age to say something as young and as vainglorious as that, no matter what he might feel. Happily he did no more, because while he was still laughing, a young voice said:

"If you can help me up to my knees and over to that hovercar, and if it has independent controls, we should try to finish this job promptly. I have been in communication with my people, but we will have to secure our advantage for the next seven Earth weeks."

And, looking over, he saw R 391 modestly take its finger from its navel.

"Look here," said Paker, shambling over to the haphazard wheelchair they had constructed for R 391. "I can face up to it when I've been wrong. Or I can try, anyhow. But *emotions!* I still can't swallow that."

He waved his hand before it uncertainly, and sat down on the bumper of the hovercar. One of the thousand things he had learned these four Earth months was that he shrugged with his hands rather than his shoulders. Trying to do it with one hand was like hopping when you wanted to run. A bad feeling. He looked at the sky with its ridiculous green sun,

then back at R 391. There was a streak of rust over its right eyebrow that made the thing's face, for Paker, immensely more bearable, almost nice in fact. What he wanted to say was, "I would respect you if you were the kind of thing it is possible to respect."

But he couldn't say that. Nor was it quite right, either. But there was a need to say it, and the need had been with him and stronger every day since they worked their way out of that monster-warren, always in his mouth, and making him say altogether too many other things.

So he went on talking, when what he really needed was a good slug of cognac.

R 391 continued to regard him silently. This was apparently one of its days for not speaking unless you put everything to it in the form of a question.

"I mean," he tried, "why don't you come back and *help* man?" Which wasn't what he meant at all.

"You should not ask that after your exposure to Baggins culture. When we discovered this world three hundred Earth years ago, we decided to leave it alone so that your kind could see what happens when mechanical lifeforms and animals cooperate. You disappoint me, Questions Controller."

He was quiet for a moment because this was news. After all their conversations on Baggins' world the thing still withheld information, waiting for him to find the right question. He, God knew, hadn't any secrets left!

He looked at the sky again, then asked:

"Well? What happens?"

"Machines dominate."

"But if we take precautions? We're pretty shrewd, you know."

"Your kind cannot well take more precautions than did the Bagginses."

Another reminder that he'd run no real danger crossing that hours-long room, what with that giant brain not having enough discretion to tell a nosebleed from a friend, as long as the nosebleed was walking around in a friendly way? He'd heard too much about that six Earth weeks ago. He wasn't so

sure, either. Or it might just mean what it said: you couldn't take more precautions, not possibly.

And this was true.

Paker made a vague guttural noise. Let it figure out whether he was agreeing or not. He tried the other side:

"General idea is, you're doing your best to dominate right now."

"Such an idea is absurd. I am too polite to suppose that you could entertain it."

"But suppose I do?"

The radio R 391 had tricked together began to gabble in the hovercar cabin, and he limped three steps over and leaned into the door and pushed on the key. "Paker here," he said, amazed at the everyday sound of his voice. "I am sending." Then he moved the pointer to where a long, nervous tone began to trickle from the set and weighed down the key with a rock ready there for the purpose. Standing erect he looked to the north where a ship was likely to come in. But he couldn't see the fire trail, if there was one. He went back to his seat on the bumper.

"Not long now. Well? Suppose I do? What are you up to if you're not trying to beat us?"

"I am structured against supposing a thing so impolite."

"I've noticed you can get around that kind of structure when it suits you to."

It was silent.

But wasn't the answer plain enough, once you looked at robots sympathetically? Once you realized there could be that particular question. Once you'd gone through what he had.

"You're pushing us," he said. "The whole business of galactic expansion, the whole faked-out competition, is just a thing you've set up to keep us going. Not to let us get any rest, ever."

"Animals tend to exaggerate their need for rest," agreed R 391.

"Just like you pushed me. You made us camp ten degrees of latitude farther north than necessary. Why? Because you figured the cold would keep me working. That's why you

were riding me all the time, too. It wasn't really bad feeling." Paker rose, creaking. "Also, I know that when you got it in the legs that was calculated. You were still pushing me."

R 391 said nothing and he walked on by it and stood looking out toward a streak of purple forest and above it the open sky.

If you were a made thing, then your reason for being was somewhere outside you—in those others, your creators. You existed to serve them. And in yourself you were nothing. You had to have them. You couldn't originate a purpose—not on the fundamental level!—any more than you could originate a new question.

What you could do, though, was use what was in you to the limit.

"Wasn't this it?" he went on. "Somewhere back when you decided we were going soft, like the Bagginses. The problem was, we were alone out in space. No contest. Nobody ever came up to our mark, and probably we were starting not to come up to it too—leaning on you too much for own good. So you decided the best way to serve us was to set up some hard competition." How long had he known this? Well, for a long time and only just this moment, both. "To get us back on our feet."

He came around to where R 391 could see him.

"I guess what I want to say is—thank God you were able to decide."

Was he going to blush now, of all damned things?

"You asked me earlier about my emotions," said the robot. " 'Feelings' would be the better word. I think I can make you understand them."

"I want to do that."

"You must not think of a feeling as something that happens inside you. Without an environment you would never feel anything. A feeling is, in essence, the relation your structure has to your environment."

"You fit or you don't," he agreed, but he was not sure he really understood.

"Perhaps that is correct. But I am explaining my feelings.

My ideal environment is a mathematical one similar to sub-universe 13, starting with self-evident axioms and working itself out into a closed system of a high order of complexity. In such an environment I would be perfectly happy."

Paker considered.

"And in the environment containing human beings?" he asked.

R 391 smiled carefully.

"Well, then, as you would say. I hate you. I also hate all your kind."

WHEN THE CHANGE WINDS BLOW

BY FRITZ LEIBER

I WAS HALF-WAY between Arcadia and Utopia, flying a long archeologic scout, looking for coleopt hives, lepidopteroid stilt-cities, and ruined villas of the Old Ones.

On Mars they've stuck to the fanciful names the old astronomers dreamed onto their charts. They've got an Elysium and an Ophir too.

I judged I was somewhere near the Acid Sea, which by a rare coincidence does become a poisonous shallow marsh, rich in hydrogen ions, when the northern icecap melts.

But I saw no sign of it below me, nor any archeologic features either. Only the endless dull rosy plain of felsite dust and iron-oxide powder slipping steadily west under my flier, with here and there a shallow canyon or low hill, looking for all the world (Earth? Mars?) like parts of the Mojave.

The sun was behind me, its low light flooding the cabin. A few stars glittered in the dark blue sky. I recognized the constellations of Sagittarius and Scorpio, the red pinpoint of Antares.

I was wearing my pilot's red spacesuit. They've enough air on Mars for flying now, but nor for breathing if you fly even a few hundred yards above the surface.

Beside me sat my copilot's green spacesuit, which would have had someone in it if I were more sociable or merely mindful of flying regulations. From time to time it swayed and jogged just a little.

And things were feeling eerie, which isn't how they ought to feel to someone who loves solitude as much as I do, or pretend to myself I do. But the Martian landscape is even more spectral than that of Arabia or the American Southwest—lonely and beautiful and obsessed with death and immensity and sometimes it strikes through.

From some old poem the words came, ". . . and strange thoughts grow, with a certain humming in my ears, about the life before I lived this life."

I had to stop myself from leaning forward and looking around into the faceplate of the green spacesuit to see if there weren't someone there now. A thin man. Or a tall slim woman. Or a black crab-jointed Martian coleopteroid, who needs a spacesuit about as much as a spacesuit does. Or . . . who knows?

It was very still in the cabin. The silence did almost hum. I had been listening to Deimos Station, but now the outer moonlet had dropped below the southern horizon. They'd been broadcasting a suggestions program about dragging Mercury away from the sun to make it the moon of Venus—and giving both planets rotation too—so as to stir up the thick smoggy furnace-hot atmosphere of Venus and make it habitable.

Better finish fixing up Mars first, I thought.

But then almost immediately the rider to that thought had come: *No, I want Mars to stay lonely. That's why I came here. Earth got crowded and look what happened.*

Yet there are times on Mars when it would be pleasant, even to an old solitary like me, to have a companion. That is if you could be sure of picking your companion.

Once again I felt the compulsion to peer inside the green spacesuit.

Instead I scanned around. Still only the dust-desert drawing toward sunset; almost featureless, yet darkly rosy as an old peach. "True peach, rosy and flawless . . . Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe as fresh-poured wine of a mighty pulse. . . ." *What* was *that poem?*—my mind nagged.

On the seat beside me, almost under the thigh of the green

spacesuit, vibrating with it a little, was a tape: *Vanished Churches and Cathedrals of Terra.* Old buildings are an abiding interest with me, of course, and then some of the hills or hives of the black coleopts are remarkably suggestive of Earth towers and spires, even to details like lancet windows and flying buttresses, so much so that it's been suggested there is an imitative element, perhaps telepathic, in the architecture of those strange beings who despite their humanoid intelligence are very like social insects. I'd been scanning the book at my last stop, hunting out coleopt-hill resemblances, but then a cathedral interior had reminded me of the Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago and I'd slipped the tape out of the projector. That chapel was where Monica had been, getting her Ph.D. in physics on a bright June morning, when the fusion blast licked the southern end of Lake Michigan, and I didn't want to think about Monica. Or rather I wanted too much to think about her.

"What's done is done, and she is dead beside, dead long ago. . . ." Now I recognized the poem!—Browning's *The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church.* That was a distant cry!— Had there been a view of St. Praxed's on the tape?— The 16th Century . . . and the dying bishop pleading with his sons for a grotesquely grand tomb—a frieze of satyrs, nymphs, the Savior, Moses, lynxes—while he thinks of their mother, his mistress. . . .

"Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes . . . Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!"

Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett and their great love. . . .

Monica and myself and our love that never got started. . . .

Monica's eyes talked. She was tall and slim and proud. . . .

Maybe if I had more character, or only energy, I'd find myself someone else to love—a new planet, a new girl!—I wouldn't stay uselessly faithful to that old romance, I wouldn't go courting loneliness, locked in a dreaming life-in-death on Mars. . . .

"Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask, 'Do I live, am I dead?' "

But for me the loss of Monica is tied up, in a way I can't untangle, with the failure of Earth, with my loathing of what Terra did to herself in her pride of money and power and success (communist and capitalist alike), with that unnecessary atomic war that came just when they thought they had everything safe and solved, like they felt before the one in 1914. It didn't wipe out all Earth by any means, only about a third, but it wiped out my trust in human nature—and the divine too, I'm afraid—and it wiped out Monica. . . .

"And she died so must we die ourselves, and thence ye may perceive the world's a dream."

A dream? Maybe we lack a Browning to make real those moments of modern history gone over the Niagara of the past, to find them again needle-in-haystack, atom-in-whirlpool, and etch them perfectly, the moments of starflight and planet-landing etched as he had etched the moments of the Renaissance.

Yet—the world (Mars? Terra?) only a dream? Well, maybe. A bad dream sometimes, that's for sure! I told myself as I jerked my wandering thoughts back to the flier and the unchanging rosy desert under the small sun.

Apparently I hadn't missed anything—my second mind had been faithfully watching and instrument-tending while my first mind rambled in imaginings and memories.

But things were feeling eerier than ever. The silence did hum now, brassily, as if a great peal of bells had just clanged, or were about to. There was menace now in the small sun about to set behind me, bringing the Martian night and what Martian were-things there may be that they don't know of yet. The rosy plain had turned sinister. And for a moment I was sure that if I looked into the green spacesuit, I would see a dark wraith thinner than any coleopt, or else a bone-brown visage fleshlessly grinning—the King of Terrors.

"Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years: Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?"

You know, the weird and the supernatural didn't just evaporate when the world got crowded and smart and technical. They moved outward—to Luna, to Mars, to the Jovian satel-

lites, to the black tangled forest of space and the astronomic marches and the unimaginably distant bull's-eye windows of the stars. Out to the realms of the unknown, where the unexpected still happens every other hour and the impossible every other day—

And right at that moment I saw the impossible standing 400 feet tall and cloaked in lacy gray in the desert ahead of me.

And while my first mind froze for seconds that stretched toward minutes and my central vision stayed blankly fixed on that upwardly bifurcated incredibility with its dark hint of rainbow caught in the gray lace, my second mind and my periferal vision brought my flier down to a swift, dream-smooth, skimming landing on its long skis in the rosy dust. I brushed a control and the cabin walls swung silently downward to either side of the pilot's seat, and I stepped down through the dream-easy Martian gravity to the peach-dark pillowy floor, and I stood looking at the wonder, and my first mind began to move at last.

There could be no doubt about the name of this, for I'd been looking at a taped view of it not five hours before—this was the West Front of Chartres Cathedral, that Gothic masterpiece, with its plain 12th Century spire, the *Clocher Vieux,* to the south and its crocketed 16th Century spire, the *Clocher Neuf,* to the north and between the great rose window fifty feet across and below that the icon-crowded triple-arched West Porch.

Swiftly now my first mind moved to one theory after another of this grotesque miracle and rebounded from them almost as swiftly as if they were like magnetic poles.

I was hallucinating from the taped pictures. Yes, maybe the world's a dream. That's always a theory and never a useful one.

A transparency of Chartres had got pasted against my faceplate. Shake my helmet. No.

I was seeing a mirage that had traveled across fifty million miles of space . . . and some years of time too, for Chartres had vanished with the Paris bomb that near-missed toward

Le Mans, just as Rockefeller Chapel had gone with the Michigan Bomb and St. Praxed's with the Rome.

The thing was a mimic-structure built by the coleopteroids to a plan telepathized from memory picture of Chartres in some man's mind. But most memory pictures don't have anywhere near such precision and I never heard of the coleopts mimicking stained glass, though they do build spired nests a half thousand feet high.

It was all one of those great hypnotism-traps the Arean jingoists are forever claiming the coleopts are setting us. Yes, and the whole universe was built by demons to deceive only me—and possibly Adolf Hitler—as Descartes once hypothesized. *Stop it.*

They'd moved Hollywood to Mars as they'd earlier moved it to Mexico and Spain and Egypt and the Congo to cut expenses, and they'd just finished an epic of the Middle Ages—*The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* no doubt, with some witless producer substituting Notre Dame of Chartres for Notre Dame of Paris because his leading mistress liked its looks better and the public wouldn't know the difference. Yes, and probably hired hordes of black coleopts at next to nothing to play monks, wearing robes and humanoid masks. And why not a coleopt to play Quasimodo?—improve race relations. *Don't hunt for comedy in the incredible.*

Or they'd been giving the Martian tour to the last mad president of La Belle France to quiet his nerves and they'd propped up a fake cathedral of Chartres, all west facade, to humor him, just like the Russians had put up papier-mache villages to impress Peter III's German wife. The Fourth Republic on the fourth planet! *No, don't get hysterical. This thing is here.*

Or maybe—and here my first mind lingered—past and future forever exist somehow, somewhere (the Mind of God? the fourth dimension?) in a sort of suspended animation, with little trails of somnambulant change running through the future as our willed present actions change it and perhaps, who knows, other little trails running through the past too? —for there may be professional time-travelers. And maybe,

once in a million millennia, an amateur accidentally finds a Door.

A Door to Chartres. But when?

As I lingered on those thoughts, staring at the gray prodigy —"Do I live, am I dead?"—there came a moaning and a rustling behind me and I turned to see the green spacesuit diving out of the flier toward me, but with its head ducked so I still couldn't see inside the faceplate. I could no more move than in a nightmare. But before the suit reached me, I saw that there was with it, perhaps carrying it, a wind that shook the flier and swept up the feather-soft rose dust in great plumes and waves. And then the wind bowled me over —one hasn't much anchorage in Mars gravity—and I was rolling away from the flier with the billowing dust and the green spacesuit that went somersaulting faster and higher than I, as if it were empty, but then wraiths are light.

The wind was stronger than any wind on Mars should be, certainly than any unheralded gust, and as I went tumbling deliriously on, cushioned by my suit and the low gravity, clutching futilely toward the small low rocky outcrops through whose long shadows I was rolling, I found myself thinking with the serenity of fever that this wind wasn't blowing across Mars-space only but through time too.

A mixture of space-wind and time-wind—what a puzzle for the physicist and drawer of vectors! It seemed unfair—I thought as I tumbled—like giving a psychiatrist a patient with psychosis overlaid by alcoholism. But reality's always mixed and I knew from experience that only a few minutes in an anechoic, lightness, null-G chamber will set the most normal mind veering uncontrollably into fantasy—or is it always fantasy?

One of the smaller rocky outcrops took for an instant the twisted shape of Monica's dog Brush as he died—not in the blast with her, but of fallout, three weeks later, hairless and swollen and oozing. I winced.

Then the wind died and the West Front of Chartres was shooting vertically up above me and I found myself crouched on the dust-drifted steps of the south bay with the great

sculpture of the Virgin looking severely out from above the high doorway at the Martian desert, and the figures of the four liberal arts ranged below her—Grammar, Rhetoric, Music, and Dialectic—and Aristotle with frowning forehead dipping a stone pen into stone ink.

The figure of Music hammering her little stone bells made me think of Monica and how she'd studied piano and Brush had barked when she practiced. Next I remembered from the tape that Chartres is the legendary resting place of St. Modesta, a beautiful girl tortured to death for her faith by her father Quirinus in the Emperor Diocletian's day. Modesta—Music—Monica.

The double door was open a little and the green spacesuit was sprawled on its belly there, helmet lifted, as if peering inside at floor level.

I pushed to my feet and walked *blowing through time? Grotesque.* up the rose-mounded steps. *Dust. Yet was I more than dust? "Do I live, am I dead?"*

I hurried faster and faster, kicking up the fine powder in peach-red swirls, and almost hurled myself down on the green spacesuit to turn it over and peer into the faceplate. But before I could quite do that I had looked into the doorway and what I saw stopped me. Slowly I got to my feet again and took a step beyond the prone green spacesuit and then another step.

Instead of the great Gothic nave of Chartres, long as a football field, high as a sequois, alive with stained light, there was a smaller, darker interior—churchly too, but Romanesque, even Latin, with burly granite columns and rich red marble steps leading up toward an altar where mosaics glittered in the gloom. One thin stream of flat light, coming through another open door like a theatrical spot in the wings, struck on the wall opposite me and revealed a gloriously ornate tomb where a sculptured mortuary figure—a bishop by his miter and crook—lay above a crowded bronze frieze on a bright green jasper slab with a blue lapis-lazuli globe of Earth between his stone knees and nine thin columns of peach-blossom marble rising around him to the canopy. . . .

But of course: this was the bishop's tomb of Browning's poem. This was St. Praxed's church, powdered by the Rome Bomb, the church sacred to the martyred Praxed, daughter of Pudens, pupil of St. Peter, tucked even further into the past then Chartres' martyred Modesta. Napoleon had planned to liberate those red marble steps and take them to Paris. But with this realization came almost instantly the companion memory: that although St. Praxed's church had been real, the tomb of Browning's bishop had existed only in Browning's imagination and the minds of his readers.

Can it be, I thought, that not only do the past and future exist forever, but also all the possibilities that were never and will never be realized . . . somehow, somewhere (the fifth dimension? the Imagination of God?) as if in a dream within a dream. . . . Crawling with change, too, as artists or anyone thinks of them . . . Change-winds mixed with time-winds mixed with space-winds. . . .

In that moment I became aware of two dark-clad figures in the aisle beside the tomb and studying it—a pale man with dark beard covering his cheeks and a pale woman with dark straight hair covering hers under a filmy veil. There was movement near their feet and a fat dark sluglike beast, almost hairless, crawled away from them into the shadows.

I didn't like it. I didn't like that beast. I didn't like it disappearing. For the first time I felt actively frightened.

And then the woman moved too, so that her dark wide floor-brushing skirt jogged, and in a very British voice she called, "Flush! Come here, Flush!" and I remembered that was the name of the dog Elizabeth Barrett had taken with her from Wimpole Street when she ran off with Browning.

Then the voice called again, anxiously, but the British had gone out of it now, in fact it was a voice I knew, a voice that froze me inside, and the dog's name had changed to Brush, and I looked up, and the gaudy tomb was gone and the walls had grayed and receded, but not so far as those of the Rockefeller Chapel, and there coming toward me down the center aisle, tall and slim in a black academic robe with

the three velvet doctor's bars on the sleeves, with the brown of science edging the hood, was Monica.

I think she saw me, I think she recognized me through my faceplate, I think she smiled at me fearfully, wonderingly.

Then, there was a rosy glow behind her, making a hazily-gleaming nimbus of her hair, like the glory of a saint. But then the glow became too bright, intolerably so, and something struck at me, driving me back through the doorway, whirling me over and over, so that all I saw was swirls of rose dust and star-pricked sky.

I think what struck at me was the ghost of the front of an atomic blast.

In my mind was the thought: St. Praxed, St. Modesta, and Monica the atheist saint martyred by the bomb.

Then all the winds were gone and I was picking myself up from the dust by the flier.

I scanned around through ebbing dust-swirls. The cathedral was gone. No hill or structure anywhere relieved the flatness of the Martian horizon.

Leaning against the flier, as if lodged there by the wind yet on its feet, was the green spacesuit, its back toward me, its head and shoulders sunk in an attitude mimicking profound dejection.

I moved toward it quickly. I had the thought that it might have gone with me to bring someone back.

It seemed to shrink from me a little as I turned it around. The faceplate was empty. There on the inside, below the transparency, distorted by my angle of view, was the little complex console of dials and levers, but no face above them.

I took the suit up very gently in my arms, carrying it as if it were a person, and I started toward the door of the cabin.

It's in the things we've lost that we exist most fully.

There was a faint green flash from the sun as its last silver vanished on the horizon.

All the stars came out.

Gleaming green among them and brightest of all, low in the sky where the sun had gone, was the Evening Star—Earth.

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