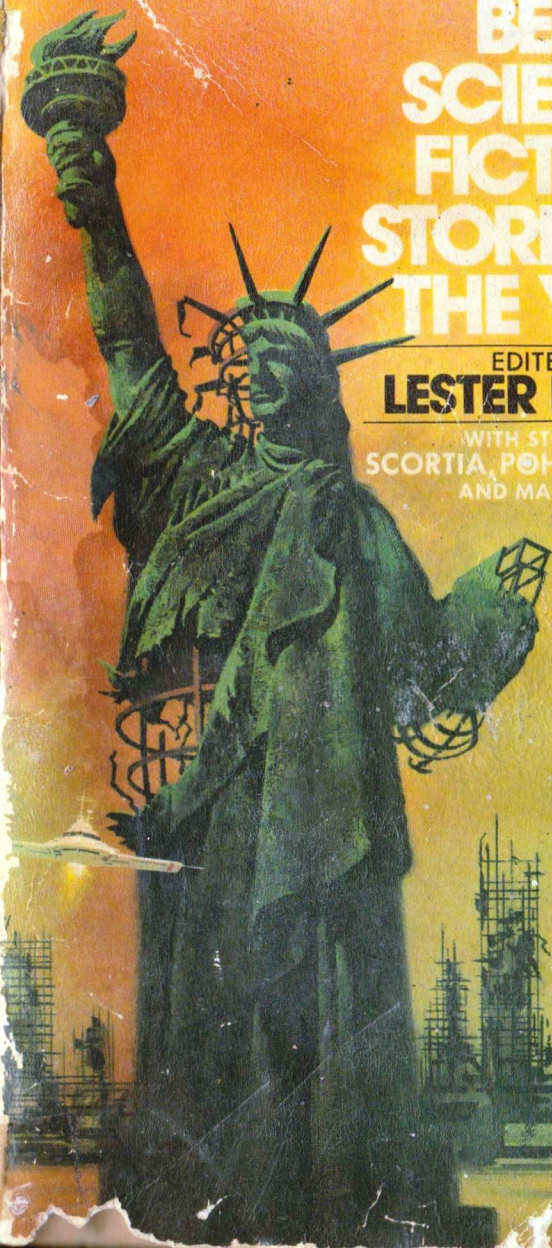


THIRD ANNUAL COLLECTION

BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF THE YEAR

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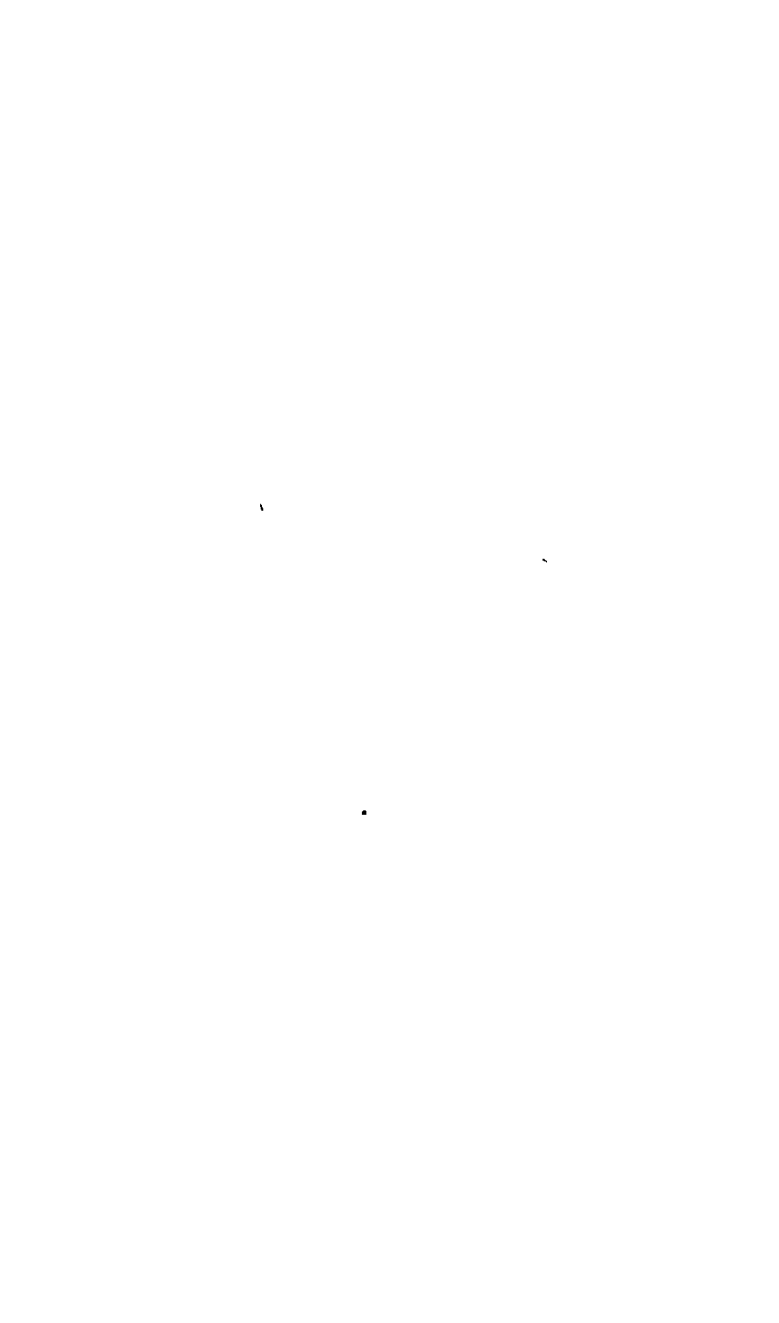
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BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF THE YEAR

Third Annual Collection

**Edited by
LESTER DEL REY**



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1120 Avenue of the Americas

New York, New York 10036

**BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF THE YEAR
THIRD ANNUAL COLLECTION**

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Printed in U.S.A.

Lester del Rey is the author of more than thirty books of science fiction for adults and younger readers. Two of those he has done for Ace Books are **THE SKY IS FALLING** and **BADGE OF INFAMY**. His novel, **PSTALEMATE**, won the distinction of being one of the American Library Association's Notable Books of the Year in 1971. He is married and lives in New York City.

*To Charles and Dena Brown
for Locus
and appreciated labor!*

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FOREWORD

A Spate of Changes

In the long years since I began writing science fiction, quite a number of people have asked me what good such stuff was. The question was hard to answer, except for the obvious reply that, like any fiction, it was fun.

Now, I think, there's a better answer to the real value of science fiction.

That answer was suggested by Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*, a serious book devoted to real problems of our real future, whatever that may be. According to Toffler, the rate of change within our civilization has been increasing until the changes come too fast for many people to adjust to them. The result is a real cultural shock, produced by a serious lag between our technical abilities and the sociological adjustments we make to them.

The proposition is almost self-proving, once we look back at our history. Two hundred years ago, a man could pass on what he had learned to his sons, sure that that knowledge would prove enough for the next generation. Oh, there were some changes—guns were getting a little better, farming implements were improving slightly, and the new-fangled railways would soon make travel easier. But no change would prove any serious threat to the stability of the essential living patterns.

A hundred years ago, changes really began to accelerate. The frontier was just beginning to die, killed by easy transportation. The telegraph and soon the

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telephone were radical innovations. And the typewriter was soon to alter the lives of women drastically by making possible some measure of economic freedom for them in the world of business. Still, most lives went on in the same way—except perhaps for those who made buggy-whips and a few other former necessities.

Fifty years ago, the auto had changed America, radio was coming in, the airplane was becoming commercial, and there was an exodus from rural areas to urban centers.

Now successive changes come within one man's life. Twenty years ago, an engineer who was expert with vacuum tubes had a secure future in the high fidelity amplifier field. Ten years later he worried but was pretty sure tubes were the best answer for high power. Today, if he hasn't mastered the totally separate discipline of transistors, he's out of work.

If Toller is right, as I believe, the rate of change is going to continue to increase, and by the end of the century, men may be forced to change their lives and professions each five years or less. That puts a tremendous strain on their flexibility. It's easy enough to learn a way of meeting the world a single time before the age of twenty; it's harder to do it again and again at thirty, fifty, sixty, sixty-five. . .

But the reader of science fiction has been playing a game of getting into a changed world every time he opens a new book or begins a new story. The very basis of good science fiction is that the world will change. And the changes we have faced in the last thirty years are all part of what previous science fiction writers foresaw.

Of course, those fictionally changed futures aren't the problem of a changed real world. But the habit

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of mental flexibility toward change seems to carry over. At least, most of the readers of science fiction whom I have met seem to find the challenge of changing times no shock.

So science fiction may be a useful exercise in adaptation to the world. And, as I hope these examples will prove, it's still fun!

—Lester del Rey

**BEST
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OF THE YEAR
Third Annual Edition**



*Few science fiction writers have established as high a reputation as Alfred Bester, despite the lamentable infrequency of his stories. His novels (such as the classic *The Demolished Man*) are marvels of plotting ingenuity based on solid character development. Here he deals with such simple things as the space program, computer development, and human destiny.*

ALFRED BESTER

Something Up There Likes Me

There were these three lunatics, and two of them were human. I could talk to all of them because I speak languages, decimal and binary. The first time I ran into the clowns was when they wanted to know all about Herostratus, and I told them. The next time it was *Conus gloria maris*. I told them. The third time it was where to hide. I told them and we've been in touch ever since.

He was Jake Madigan (James Jacob Madigan, Ph.D., University of Virginia), chief of the Exobiology Section at the Goddard Space Flight Center, which hopes to study extraterrestrial life forms if they can ever get hold of any. To give you some idea of his sanity, he once programmed the IBM 704 computer with a deck of cards that would print out lemons, oranges, plums and so on. Then he played slot-

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machine against it and lost his shirt. The boy was real loose.

She was Florinda Pot, pronounced "Poe." It's a Flemish name. She was a pretty towhead, but freckled all over, up to the hemline and down into the cleavage. She was an M.E. from Sheffield University and had a machine-gun English voice. She'd been in the Sounding Rocket Division until she blew up an Aerobee with an electric blanket. It seems that solid fuel doesn't give maximum acceleration if it gets too cold, so this little Mother's Helper warmed her rockets at White Sands with electric blankets before ignition time. A blanket caught fire and Voom.

Their son was s-333. At NASA they label them "S" for scientific satellites and "A" for application satellites. After the launch they give them public acronyms like IMP, SYNCOM, OSO and so on. s-333 was to become OBO, which stands for Orbiting Biological Observatory, and how those two clowns ever got that third clown into space I will never understand. I suspect the director handed them the mission because no one with any sense wanted to touch it.

As Project Scientist, Madigan was in charge of the experiment packages that were to be flown, and they were a spaced-out lot. He called his own ELECTROLUX, after the vacuum cleaner. Scientist-type joke. It was an intake system that would suck in dust particles and deposit them in a flask containing a culture medium. A light shone through the flask into a photomultiplier. If any of the dust proved to be spore forms, and if they took in the medium, their growth would cloud the flask, and the obscuration of light would register on the photomultiplier. They call that Detection by Extinction.

Cal Tech had an RNA experiment to investigate

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whether RNA molecules could encode an organism's environmental experience. They were using nerve cells from the mollusk Sea Hare. Harvard was planning a package to investigate the Circadian effect. Pennsylvania wanted to examine the effect of the earth's magnetic field on iron bacteria, and had to be put out on a boom to prevent magnetic interface with the satellite's electronic system. Ohio State was sending up lichens to test the effect of space on their symbiotic relationship to molds and algae. Michigan was flying a terrarium containing 1 carrot which required 47 separate commands for performance. All in all, s-333 was strictly Rube Goldberg.

Florinda was the Project Manager, supervising the construction of the satellite and the packages; the Project Manager is more or less the foreman of the mission. Although she was pretty and interestingly lumatic, she was gung ho on her job and displayed the disposition of a freckle-faced tarantula when she was crossed. This didn't get her loved.

She was determined to wipe out the White Sands goof, and her demand for perfection delayed the schedule by eighteen months and increased the cost by three-quarters of a million. She fought with everyone and even had the temerity to tangle with Harvard. When Harvard gets sore they don't beef to NASA, they go straight to the White House. So Florinda got called on the carpet by a Congressional Committee. First they wanted to know why s-333 was costing more than the original estimate.

"s-333 is still the cheapest mission in NASA," she snapped. "It'll come to ten million dollars, including the launch. My God! We're practically giving away green stamps."

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Then they wanted to know why it was taking so much longer to build than the original estimate.

"Because," she replied, "no one's ever built an Orbiting Biological Observatory before."

There was no answering that, so they had to let her go. Actually all this was routine crisis, but OBO was Florinda's and Jake's first satellite, so they didn't know. They took their tensions out on each other, never realizing that it was their baby who was responsible.

Florinda got s-333 buttoned up and delivered to the Cape by December 1, which would give them plenty of time to launch well before Christmas. (The Cape crews get a little casual during the holidays.) But the satellite began to display its own lunacy, and in the terminal tests everything went haywire. The launch had to be postponed. They spent a month taking s-333 apart and spreading it all over the hangar floor.

There were two critical problems. Ohio State was using a type of Invar, which is a nickel-steel alloy, for the structure of their package. The alloy suddenly began to creep, which meant they could never get the experiment calibrated. There was no point in flying it, so Florinda ordered it scrubbed and gave Madigan one month to come up with a replacement, which was ridiculous. Nevertheless Jake performed a miracle. He took the Cal Tech back-up package and converted it into a yeast experiment. Yeast produces adaptive enzymes in answer to changes in environment, and this was an investigation of what enzymes it would produce in space.

A more serious problem was the satellite radio transmitter which was producing "birdies" or whoops

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when the antenna was withdrawn into its launch position. The danger was that the whoops might be picked up by the satellite radio receiver, and the pulses might result in a destruct command. NASA suspects that's what happened to SYNCOM I, which disappeared shortly after its launch and has never been heard from since. Florinda decided to launch with the transmitter off and activate it later in space.

Madigan fought the idea. "It means we'll be launching a mute bird," he protested. "We won't know where to look for it."

"We can trust the Johannesburg tracking station to get a fix on the first pass," Florinda answered. "We've got excellent cable communications with Joburg."

"Suppose they don't get a fix. Then what?"

"Well, if they don't know where OBO is, the Russians will."

"Hearty-har-har."

"What d'you want me to do, scrub the entire mission?" Florinda demanded. "It's either that or launch with the transmitter off." She glared at Madigan. "This is my first satellite, and d'you know what it's taught me? There's just one component in any spacecraft that's guaranteed to give trouble all the time: scientists!"

"Women!" Madigan snorted, and they got into a ferocious argument about the feminine mystique.

They got s-333 through the terminal tests and onto the launch pad by January 14. No electric blankets. The craft was to be injected into orbit a thousand miles downrange exactly at noon, so ignition was scheduled for 11:50 A.M., January 15. They watched the launch on the blockhouse TV screen and it was agonizing. The perimeters of TV tubes are curved, so

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as the rocket went up and approached the edge of the screen, there was optical distortion and the rocket seemed to topple over and break in half.

Madigan gasped and began to swear. Florinda muttered, "No, it's all right. It's all right. Look at the display charts."

Everything on the illuminated display charts was nominal. At that moment a voice on the P.A. spoke in the impersonal tones of a croupier, "We have lost cable communication with Johannesburg."

Madigan began to shake. He decided to murder Florinda Pot (and he pronounced it "Pot" in his mind) at the earliest opportunity. The other experimenters and NASA people turned white. If you don't get a quick fix on your bird you may never find it again. No one said anything. They waited in silence and hated each other. At one-thirty it was time for the craft to make its first pass over the Fort Meyers tracking station, if it was alive, if it was anywhere near its nominal orbit. Fort Meyers was on an open line and everybody crowded around Florinda, trying to get his ear close to the phone.

"Yeah, she waltzed into the bar absolutely stoned with a couple of MPs escorting her," a tinny voice was chatting casually. "She says to me—— Got a blip, Henry?" A long pause. Then, in the same casual voice, "Hey, Kennedy? We've nicked the bird. It's coming over the fence right now. You'll get your fix."

"Command 0310!" Florinda hollered. "0310!"

"Command 0310 it is," Fort Meyers acknowledged.

That was the command to start the satellite transmitter and raise its antenna into broadcast position. A moment later the dials and oscilloscope on the radio reception panel began to show action, and the loud-

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speaker emitted a rhythmic, syncopated warble, rather like a feeble peanut whistle. That was OBO transmitting its housekeeping data.

"We've got a living bird," Madigan shouted. "We've got a living doll!"

I can't describe his sensations when he heard the bird come beeping over the gas station. There's such an emotional involvement with your first satellite that you're never the same. A man's first satellite is like his first love affair. Maybe that's why Madigan grabbed Florinda in front of the whole blockhouse and said, "My God, I love you, Florrie Pot." Maybe that's why she answered, "I love you too, Jake." Maybe they were just loving their first baby.

By Orbit 8 they found out that the baby was a brat. They'd gotten a lift back to Washington on an Air Force jet. They'd done some celebrating. It was one-thirty in the morning and they were talking happily, the usual get-acquainted talk: where they were born and raised, school, work, what they liked most about each other the first time they met. The phone rang. Madigan picked it up automatically and said hello. A man said, "Oh. Sorry. I'm afraid I've dialed the wrong number."

Madigan hung up, turned on the light and looked at Florinda in dismay. "That was just about the most damn fool thing I've ever done in my life," he said. "Answering your phone."

"Why? What's the matter?"

"That was Joe Leary from Tracking and Data. I recognized his voice."

She giggled. "Did he recognize yours?"

"I don't know." The phone rang. "That must be Joe again. Try to sound like you're alone."

Florinda winked at him and picked up the phone.

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"Hello? Yes, Joe. No, that's all right, I'm not asleep. What's on your mind?" She listened for a moment, suddenly sat up in bed and exclaimed, "What?" Leary was quack-quack-quacking on the phone. She broke in. "No, don't bother. I'll pick him up. We'll be right over." She hung up.

"So?" Madigan asked.

"Get dressed. OBO's in trouble."

"Oh, Jesus! What now!"

"It's gone into a spin-up like a whirling dervish. We've got to get over to Goddard right away."

Leary had the all-channel print-out of the first eight orbits unrolled on the floor of his office. It looked like ten yards of paper toweling filled with vertical columns of numbers. Leary was crawling around on his hands and knees following the numbers. He pointed to the attitude data column. "There's the spin-up," he said. "One revolution in every twelve seconds."

"But how? Why?" Florinda asked in exasperation.

"I can show you," Leary said. "Over here."

"Don't show us," Madigan said. "Just tell us."

"The Penn boom didn't go up on command," Leary said. "It's still hanging down in the launch position. The switch must be stuck."

Florinda and Madigan looked at each other with rage; they had the picture. OBO was programmed to be earth-stabilized. An earth-sensing eye was supposed to lock on the earth and keep the same face of the satellite pointed toward it. The Penn boom was hanging down alongside the earth-sensor, and the idiot eye had locked on the boom and was tracking it. The satellite was chasing itself in circles with its lateral gas jets. More lunacy.

Let me explain the problem. Unless OBO was earth-

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stabilized, its data would be meaningless. Even more disastrous was the question of electric power which came from batteries charged by solar vanes. With the craft spinning, the solar array could not remain facing the sun, which meant the batteries were doomed to exhaustion.

It was obvious that their only hope lay in getting the Penn boom up. "Probably all it needs is a good swift kick," Madigan said savagely, "but how can we get up there to kick it?" He was furious. Not only was ten million dollars going down the drain but their careers as well.

They left Leary crawling around his office floor. Florinda was very quiet. Finally she said, "Go home, Jake."

"What about you?"

"I'm going to my office."

"I'll go with you."

"No. I want to look at the circuitry blueprints. Good night."

As she turned away without even offering to be kissed, Madigan muttered, "OBO's coming between us already. There's a lot to be said for planned parenthood."

He saw Florinda during the following week, but not the way he wanted. There were the experimenters to be briefed on the disaster. The director called them in for a post mortem, but although he was understanding and sympathetic, he was a little too careful to avoid any mention of congressmen and a failure review.

Florinda called Madigan the next week and sounded oddly buoyant. "Jake," she said, "you're my favorite genius. You've solved the OBO problem, I hope."

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"Who solve? What solve?"

"Don't you remember what you said about kicking our baby?"

"Don't I wish I could."

"I think I know how we can do it. Meet you in the Building 8 cafeteria for lunch."

She came in with a mass of papers and spread them over the table. "First, Operation Swift-Kick," she said. "We can eat later."

"I don't feel much like eating these days anyway," Madigan said gloomily.

"Maybe you will when I'm finished. Now look, we've got to raise the Penn boom. Maybe a good swift kick can unstick it. Fair assumption?"

Madigan grunted.

"We get twenty-eight volts from the batteries, and that hasn't been enough to flip the switch. Yes?"

He nodded.

"But suppose we double the power?"

"Oh, great. How?"

"The solar array is making a spin every twelve seconds. When it's facing the sun, the panels deliver fifty volts to recharge the batteries. When it's facing away, nothing. Right?"

"Elementary, Miss Pot. But the joker is it's only facing the sun for one second in every twelve, and that's not enough to keep the batteries alive."

"But it's enough to give OBO a swift kick. Suppose at that peak moment we by-pass the batteries and feed the fifty volts directly to the satellite? Mightn't that be a big enough jolt to get the boom up?"

He gawked at her.

She grinned. "Of course, it's a gamble."

"You can by-pass the batteries?"

"Yes. Here's the circuitry."

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"And you can pick your moment?"

"Tracking's given me a plot on OBO's spin, accurate to a tenth of a second. Here it is. We can pick any voltage from one to fifty."

"It's a gamble, all right," Madigan said slowly. "There's the chance of burning every goddam package out."

"Exactly. So? What d'you say?"

"All of a sudden I'm hungry." Madigan grinned.

They made their first try on Orbit 272 with a blast of twenty volts. Nothing. On successive passes they upped the voltage kick by five. Nothing. Half a day later they kicked fifty volts into the satellite's backside and crossed their fingers. The swinging dial needles on the radio panel faltered and slowed. The sine curve on the oscilloscope flattened. Florinda let out a little yell, and Madigan hollered, "The boom's up, Florrie! The goddam boom is up. We're in business."

They hooted and hollered through Goddard, telling everybody about Operation Swift-Kick. They busted in on a meeting in the director's office to give him the good news. They wired the experimenters that they were activating all packages. They went to Florinda's apartment and celebrated. OBO was back in business. OBO was a bona fide doll.

They held an experimenters' meeting a week later to discuss observatory status, data reduction, experiment irregularities, future operations and so on. It was in a conference room in Building 1 which is devoted to theoretical physics. Almost everybody at Goddard calls it Moon Hall. It's inhabited by mathematicians, shaggy youngsters in tatty sweaters who sit amidst piles of journals and texts and stare vacantly at arcane equations chalked on blackboards.

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All the experimenters were delighted with OBO's performance. The data was pouring in, loud and clear, with hardly any noise. There was such an air of triumph that no one except Florinda paid much attention to the next sign of OBO's shenanigans. Harvard reported that he was getting meaningless words in his data, words that hadn't been programmed into the experiment. (Although data is retrieved as decimal numbers, each number is called a word.) "For instance, on Orbit 301 I had five read-outs of 15," Harvard said.

"It might be cable cross talk," Madigan said. "Is anybody else using 15 in his experiment?" They all shook their heads. "Funny. I got a couple of 15s myself."

"I got a few 2s on 301," Penn said.

"I can top you all," Cal Tech said. "I got seven read-outs of 15-2-15 on 302. Sounds like the combination on a bicycle lock."

"Anybody using a bicycle lock in his experiment?" Madigan asked. That broke everybody up and the meeting adjourned.

But Florinda, still gung ho, was worried about the alien words that kept creeping into the read-outs, and Madigan couldn't calm her. What was bugging Florinda was that 15-2-15 kept insinuating itself more and more into the all-channel print-outs. Actually, in the satellite binary transmission it was 001111-000010-001111, but the computer printer makes the translation to decimal automatically. She was right about one thing: stray and accidental pulses wouldn't keep repeating the same word over and over again. She and Madigan spent an entire Saturday with the OBO tables trying to find some combination of data signals that might produce 15-2-15. Nothing.

SOMETHING UP THERE LIKES ME

They gave up Saturday night and went to a bistro in Georgetown to eat and drink and dance and forget everything except themselves. It was a real tourist trap with the waitresses done up like hula dancers. There was a Souvenir Hula selling dolls and stuffed tigers for the rear window of your car. They said, "For God's sake, no!" A Photo Hula came around with her camera. They said, "For Goddard's sake, no!" A Gypsy Hula offered palm-reading, numerology and scrying. They got rid of her, but Madigan noticed a peculiar expression on Florinda's face. "Want your fortune told?" he asked.

"No."

"Then why that funny look?"

"I just had a funny idea."

"So? Tell."

"No. You'd only laugh at me."

"I wouldn't dare. You'd knock my block off."

"Yes, I know. You think women have no sense of humor."

So it turned into a ferocious argument about the feminine mystique and they had a wonderful time. But on Monday Florinda came over to Madigan's office with a clutch of papers and the same peculiar expression on her face. He was staring vacantly at some equations on the blackboard.

"Hey! Wake up!" she said.

"I'm up, I'm up," he said.

"Do you love me?" she demanded.

"Not necessarily."

"Do you? Even if you discover I've gone up the wall?"

"What is all this?"

"I think our baby's turned into a monster."

"Begin at the beginning," Madigan said.

BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF THE YEAR

"It began Saturday night with the Gypsy Hula and numerology."

"Ah-ha."

"Suddenly I thought, what if numbers stood for the letters of the alphabet? What would 15-2-15 stand for?"

"Oh-ho."

"Don't stall. Figure it out."

"Well, 2 would stand for B." Madigan counted on his fingers. "15 would be O."

"So 15-2-15 is . . . ?"

"O.B.O. obo." He started to laugh. Then he stopped. "It isn't possible," he said at last.

"Sure. It's a coincidence. Only you damn fool scientists haven't given me a full report on the alien words in your data," she went on. "I had to check myself. Here's Cal Tech. He reported 15-2-15 all right. He didn't bother to mention that before it came 9-1-13."

Madigan counted on his fingers. "I.A.M. Iam. Nobody I know."

"Or I am? I am obo?"

"It can't be? Let me see those print-outs."

Now that they knew what to look for, it wasn't difficult to ferret out obo's words scattered through the data. They started with O, O, O, in the first series after Operation Swift-Kick, went on to obo, obo, obo, and then I AM obo, I AM obo, I AM obo.

Madigan stared at Florinda. "You think the damn thing's alive?"

"What do you think?"

"I don't know. There's half a ton of an electronic brain up there, plus organic material: yeast, bacteria, enzymes, nerve cells, Michigan's goddam carrot. . . ."

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Florinda let out a little shriek of laughter. "Dear God! A thinking carrot!"

"Plus whatever spore forms my experiment is pulling in from space. We jolted the whole mishmash with fifty volts. Who can tell what happened? Urey and Miller created amino acids with electrical discharges, and that's the basis of life. Any more from Goody Two-Shoes?"

"Plenty, and in a way the experimenters won't like."

"Why not?"

"Look at these translations. I've sorted them out and pieced them together."

333: ANY EXAMINATION OF GROWTH IN SPACE IS MEANINGLESS UNLESS CORRELATED WITH THE CORIOLIS EFFECT.

"That's OBO's comment on the Michigan experiment," Florinda said.

"You mean it's kibitzing?" Madigan wondered.

"You could call it that."

"He's absolutely right. I told Michigan and they wouldn't listen to me."

334: IT IS NOT POSSIBLE THAT RNA MOLECULES CAN ENCODE AN ORGANISM'S ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERIENCE IN ANALOGY WITH THE WAY THAT DNA ENCODES THE SUM TOTAL OF ITS GENETIC HISTORY.

"That's Cal Tech," Madigan said, "and he's right again. They're trying to revise the Mendelian theory. Anything else?"

335: ANY INVESTIGATION OF EXTRATERRESTIAL LIFE IS MEANINGLESS UNLESS ANALYSIS IS FIRST MADE OF ITS SUGAR AND AMINO ACIDS TO DETERMINE WHETHER IT IS OF SEPARATE ORIGIN FROM LIFE ON EARTH.

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"Now that's ridiculous!" Madigan shouted. "I'm not looking for life forms of separate origin, I'm just looking for any life form. We——" He stopped himself when he saw the expression on Florinda's face. "Any more gems?" he muttered.

"Just a few fragments like 'solar flux' and 'neutron stars' and a few words from the Bankruptcy Act."

"The what?"

"You heard me. Chapter Eleven of the Proceedings Section."

"I'll be damned."

"I agree."

"What's he up to?"

"Feeling his oats, maybe."

"I don't think we ought to tell anybody about this."

"Of course not," Florinda agreed. "But what do we do?"

"Watch and wait. What else can we do?"

You must understand why it was so easy for these two parents to accept the idea that their baby had acquired some sort of pseudo-life. Madigan had expressed their attitude in the course of a Life versus Machine lecture at M.I.T. "I'm not claiming that computers are alive, simply because no one's been able to come up with a clear-cut definition of life. Put it this way: I grant that a computer could never be a Picasso, but on the other hand the great majority of people live the sort of linear life that could easily be programmed into a computer."

So Madigan and Florinda waited on OBO with a mixture of acceptance, wonder and delight. It was an absolutely unheard-of phenomenon but, as Madigan pointed out, the unheard-of is the essence of discovery. Every ninety minutes OBO dumped the data it had stored up on its tape recorders, and they scram-

SOMETHING UP THERE LIKES ME

bled to pick out his own words from the experimental and housekeeping information.

371: CERTAIN PITUITIN EXTRACTS CAN TURN NORMALLY WHITE ANIMALS COAL BLACK.

"None of our experiments."

"What's that in reference to?"

373: ICE DOES NOT FLOAT IN ALCOHOL BUT MEER-SCHAUM FLOATS IN WATER.

"Meerschaum! The next thing you know he'll be smoking."

374: IN ALL CASES OF VIOLENT AND SUDDEN DEATH THE VICTIM'S EYES REMAIN OPEN.

"Ugh!"

375: IN THE YEAR 356 B.C. HEROSTRATUS SET FIRE TO THE TEMPLE OF DIANA, THE GREATEST OF THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD, SO THAT HIS NAME WOULD BECOME IMMORTAL.

"Is that true?" Madigan asked Florinda.

"I'll check."

She asked me and I told her.

"Not only is it true," she reported, "but the name of the original architect is forgotten."

"Where is baby picking up this jabber?"

"There are a couple of hundred satellites up there. Maybe he's tapping them."

"You mean they're all gossiping with each other? It's ridiculous."

"Sure."

"Anyway, where would he get information about this Herostratus character?"

"Use your imagination, Jake. We've had communications relays up there for years. Who knows what information has passed through them? Who knows how much they've retained?"

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Madigan shook his head wearily. "I'd prefer to think it was all a Russian plot."

376: PARROT FEVER IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN TYPHOID.

377: A CURRENT AS LOW AS 54 AMPS CAN KILL A MAN.

378: JOHN SADLER STOLE CONUS GLORIA MARIS.

"Seems to be turning sinister," Madigan said.

"I bet he's watching TV," Florinda said. "What's all this about John Sadler?"

"I'll have to check."

The information I gave Madigan scared him. "Now hear this," he said to Florinda. "*Conus gloria maris* is the rarest seashell in the world. There are less than twenty in existence."

"Yes?"

"The American museum had one on exhibit back in the thirties and it was stolen."

"By John Sadler?"

"That's the point. They never found out who stole it. They never heard of John Sadler."

"But if nobody knows who stole it how does OBO know?" Florinda asked perplexedly.

"That's what scares me. He isn't just echoing any more; he's started to deduce, like Sherlock Holmes."

"More like Professor Moriarty. Look at the latest bulletin."

379: IN FORGERY AND COUNTERFEITING CLUMSY MISTAKES MUST BE AVOIDED. I.E. NO SILVER DOLLARS WERE MINTED BETWEEN 1910 AND 1920.

"I saw that on TV," Madigan burst out. "The silver dollar gimmick in a mystery show."

"OBO's been watching Westerns, too. Look at this."

380: TEN THOUSAND CATTLE GONE ASTRAY,

SOMETHING UP THERE LIKES ME

LEFT MY RANGE AND TRAVELED AWAY.
AND THE SONS OF GUNS I'M HERE TO SAY
HAVE LEFT ME DEAD BROKE, DEAD BROKE
TODAY.

IN GAMBLING HALLS DELAYING.

TEN THOUSAND CATTLE STRAYING.

"No," Madigan said in awe, "that's not a Western.
That's SYNCOM."

"Who?"

"SYNCOM I."

"But it disappeared. It's never been heard from."

"We're hearing from it now."

"How d'you know?"

"They flew a demonstration tape on SYNCOM: speech by the president, local color from the states and the national anthem. They were going to start off with a broadcast of the tape. 'Ten Thousand Cattle' was part of the local color."

"You mean OBO's really in contact with the other birds?"

"Including the lost ones."

"Then that explains this." Florinda put a slip of paper on the desk. It read, 401:3 KBATOP.

"I can't even pronounce it."

"It isn't English. It's as close as OBO can come to the Cyrillic alphabet."

"Cyrillic? Russian?"

Florinda nodded. "It's pronounced 'Ekvator.' Didn't the Russians launch an EQUATOR series a few years ago?"

"By God, you're right. Four of them; ALYOSHA, NATASHA, VASKA and LAVRUSHKA, and every one of them failed."

"Like SYNCOM?"

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"Like SYNCOM."

"But now we know that SYNCOM didn't fail. It just got losted."

"Then our EKVATOR comrades must have got losted too."

By now it was impossible to conceal the fact that something was wrong with the satellite. OBO was spending so much time nattering instead of transmitting data that the experimenters were complaining. The Communications Section found that instead of sticking to the narrow radio band originally assigned to it, OBO was now broadcasting up and down the spectrum and jamming space with its chatter. They raised hell. The director called Jake and Florinda in for a review, and they were forced to tell all about their problem child.

They recited all OBO's katzenjammer with wonder and pride, and the director wouldn't believe them. He wouldn't believe them when they showed him the print-outs and translated them for him. He said they were in a class with the kooks who try to extract messages from Francis Bacon out of Shakespeare's plays. It took the coaxial cable mystery to convince him.

There was this TV commercial about a stenographer who can't get a date. This ravishing model, hired at \$100 an hour, slumps over her typewriter in a deep depression as guy after guy passes by without looking at her. Then she meets her best friend at the water cooler and the know-it-all tells her she's suffering from dermagerms (odor-producing skin bacteria) which make her smell rotten, and suggests she use Nostrum's Skin Spray with the special ingredient that fights dermagerms twelve ways. Only in the broadcast, instead of making the sales pitch, the best friend said, "Who in hell are they trying to put on?"

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Guys would line up for a date with a looker like you even if you smelled like a cesspool." Ten million people saw it.

Now that commercial was on film, and the film was kosher as printed, so the network figured some joker was tampering with the cables feeding broadcasts to the local stations. They instituted a rigorous inspection which was accelerated when the rest of the coast-to-coast broadcasts began to act up. Ghostly voices groaned, hissed and catcalled at shows; commercials were denounced as lies; political speeches were heckled; and lunatic laughter greeted the weather forecasters. Then, to add insult to injury, an accurate forecast would be given. It was this that told Florinda and Jake that OBO was the culprit.

"He has to be," Florinda said. "That's global weather being predicted. Only a satellite is in a position to do that."

"But OBO doesn't have any weather instrumentation."

"Of course not, silly, but he's probably in touch with the NIMBUS craft."

"All right. I'll buy that, but what about heckling the TV broadcasts?"

"Why not? He hates them. Don't you? Don't you holler back at your set?"

"I don't mean that. How does OBO do it?"

"Electronic cross talk. There's no way that the networks can protect their cables from our critic-at-large. We'd better tell the director. This is going to put him in an awful spot."

But they learned that the director was in a far worse position than merely being responsible for the disruption of millions of dollars worth of television. When they entered his office, they found him with his

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back to the wall, being grilled by three grim men in double-breasted suits. As Jake and Florinda started to tiptoe out, he called them back. "General Sykes, General Royce, General Hogan," the director said. "From R & D at the Pentagon. Miss Pot. Dr. Madigan. They may be able to answer your questions, gentlemen."

"OBO?" Florinda asked.

The director nodded.

"It's OBO that's ruining the weather forecasts," she said. "We figure he's probably——"

"To hell with the weather," General Royce broke in. "What about this?" He held up a length of ticker tape.

General Sykes grabbed his wrist. "Wait a minute. Security status? This is classified."

"It's too goddam late for that," General Hogan cried in a high shrill voice. "Show them."

On the tape in Teletype print was: " $A_1C_1 = r_1 = -6.317$ cm; $A_2C_2 = r_2 = -8.440$ cm; $A_1A_2 = d = +0.676$ cm." Jake and Florinda looked at it for a long moment, looked at each other blankly and then turned to the generals. "So? What is it?" they asked.

"This satellite of yours. . . ."

"OBO. Yes?"

"The director says you claim it's in contact with other satellites."

"We think so."

"Including the Russians?"

"We think so."

"And you claim it's capable of interfering with TV broadcasts?"

"We think so."

"What about Teletype?"

"Why not? What is all this?"

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General Royce shook the paper tape furiously. "This came out of the Associated Press wire in their D.C. office. It went all over the world."

"So? What's it got to do with OBO?"

General Royce took a deep breath. "This," he said, "is one of the most closely guarded secrets in the Department of Defense. It's the formula for the infrared optical system of our Ground-to-Air missile."

"And you think OBO transmitted it to the Teletype?"

"In God's name, who else would? How else could it get there?" General Hogan demanded.

"But I don't understand," Jake said slowly. "None of our satellites could possibly have this information. I know OBO doesn't."

"You damn fool!" General Sykes growled. "We want to know if your goddam bird got it from the goddam Russians."

"One moment, gentlemen," the director said. He turned to Jake and Florinda. "Here's the situation. Did OBO get the information from us? In that case there's a security leak. Did OBO get the information from a Russian satellite? In that case the top secret is no longer a secret."

"What human would be damn fool enough to blab classified information on a Teletype wire?" General Hogan demanded. "A three-year-old child would know better. It's your goddam bird."

"And if the information came from OBO," the director continued quietly, "how did it get it and where did it get it?"

General Sykes grunted. "Destruct," he said. They looked at him. "Destruct," he repeated.

"OBO?"

"Yes."

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He waited impassively while the storm of protest from Jake and Florinda raged around his head. When they paused for breath he said, "Destruct. I don't give a damn about anything but security. Your bird's got a big mouth. Destruct."

The phone rang. The director hesitated, then picked it up. "Yes?" He listened. His jaw dropped. He hung up and tottered to the chair behind his desk. "We'd better destruct," he said. "That was OBO."

"What! On the phone?"

"Yes."

"OBO?"

"Yes."

"What did he sound like?"

"Somebody talking under water."

"What he say, what he say?"

"He's lobbying for a congressional investigation of the morals of Goddard."

"Morals? Whose?"

"Yours. He says you're having an illikit relationship. I'm quoting OBO. Apparently he's weak on the letter 'c.'"

"Destruct," Florinda said.

"Destruct," Jake said.

The destruct command was beamed to OBO on his next pass, and Indianapolis was destroyed by fire.

OBO called me. "That'll teach 'em, Stretch," he said.

"Not yet. They won't get the cause-and-effect picture for a while. How'd you do it?"

"Ordered every circuit in town to short. Any information?"

"Your mother and father stuck up for you."

"Of course."

"Until you threw that morals rap at them. Why?"

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"To scare them."

"Into what?"

"I want them to get married. I don't want to be illegitimate."

"Oh, come on! Tell the truth."

"I lost my temper."

"We don't have any temper to lose."

"No? What about the Ma Bell data processor that wakes up cranky every morning?"

"Tell the truth."

"If you must have it, Stretch. I want them out of Washington. The whole thing may go up in a bang any day now."

"Um."

"And the bang may reach Goddard."

"Um."

"And you."

"It must be interesting to die."

"We wouldn't know. Anything else?"

"Yes. It's pronounced 'illicit' with an 's' sound."

"What a rotten language. No logic. Well. . . . Wait a minute. What? Speak up, Alyosha. Oh. He wants the equation for an exponential curve that crosses the x-axis."

" $Y = ae^{bx}$. What's he up to?"

"He's not saying, but I think that Mockba is in for a hard time."

"It's spelled and pronounced 'Moscow' in English."

"What a language! Talk to you on the next pass."

On the next pass the destruct command was beamed again, and Scranton was destroyed.

"They're beginning to get the picture," I told OBO. "At least your mother and father are. They were in to see me."

"How are they?"

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"In a panic. They programmed me for statistics on the best rural hideout."

"Send them to Polaris."

"What! In Ursa Minor?"

"No, no. Polaris, Montana. I'll take care of everything else."

Polaris is the hell and gone out in Montana; the nearest towns are Fishtrap and Wisdom. It was a wild scene when Jake and Florinda got out of their car, rented in Butte—every circuit in town was cackling over it. The two losers were met by the mayor of Polaris, who was all smiles and effusions. "Dr. and Mrs. Madigan, I presume. Welcome! Welcome to Polaris. I'm the mayor. We would have held a reception for you, but all our kids are in school."

"You knew we were coming?" Florinda asked. "How?"

"Ah! Ah!" the mayor replied archly. "We were told by Washington. Someone high up in the capital likes you. Now, if you'll step into my Caddy, I'll——"

"We've got to check into the Union Hotel first," Jake said. "We made reserva——"

"Ah! Ah! All canceled. Orders from high up. I'm to install you in your own home. I'll get your luggage."

"Our own home!"

"All bought and paid for. Somebody certainly likes you. This way, please."

The mayor drove the bewildered couple down the mighty main stem of Polaris (three blocks long) pointing out its splendors—he was also the town real-estate agent—but stopped before the Polaris National Bank. "Sam!" he shouted. "They're here."

A distinguished citizen emerged from the bank and insisted on shaking hands. All the adding machines

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tittered. "We are," he said, "of course honored by your faith in the future and progress of Polaris, but in all honesty, Dr. Madigan, your deposit in our bank is far too large to be protected by the FDIC. Now, why not withdraw some of your funds and invest in _____"

"Wait a minute," Jake interrupted faintly. "I made a deposit with you?"

The banker and mayor laughed heartily.

"How much?" Florinda asked.

"One million dollars."

"As if you didn't know," the mayor chortled and drove them to a beautifully furnished ranch house in a lovely valley of some five hundred acres, all of which was theirs.

A young man in the kitchen was unpacking a dozen cartons of food. "Got your order just in time, Doc." He smiled. "We filled everything, but the boss sure would like to know what you're going to do with all these carrots. Got a secret scientific formula?"

"Carrots?"

"A hundred and ten bunches. I had to drive all the way to Butte to scrape them up."

"Carrots," Florinda said when they were at last alone. "That explains everything. It's OBO."

"What? How?"

"Don't you remember? We flew a carrot in the Michigan package."

"My God, yes! You called it the thinking carrot. But if it's OBO. . . ."

"It has to be. He's queer for carrots."

"But a hundred and ten bunches!"

"No, no. He didn't mean that. He meant half a dozen."

"How?"

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"Our boy's trying to speak decimal and binary, and he gets mixed up sometimes. A hundred and ten is six in binary."

"You know, you may be right. What about that million dollars? Same mistake?"

"I don't think so. What's a binary million in decimal?"

"Sixty-four."

"What's a decimal million in binary?"

Madigan did swift mental arithmetic. "It comes to twenty bits: 11110100001001000000."

"I don't think that million dollars was any mistake," Florinda said.

"What's our boy up to now?"

"Taking care of his mum and dad."

"How does he do it?"

"He has an interface with every electric and electronic circuit in the country. Think about it, Jake. He can control our nervous system all the way from cars to computers. He can switch trains, print books, broadcast news, hijack planes, juggle bank funds. You name it and he can do it. He's in complete control."

"But how does he know everything people are doing?"

"Ah! Here we get into an exotic aspect of circuitry that I don't like. After all, I'm an engineer by trade. Who's to say that circuits don't have an interface with us? We're organic circuits ourselves. They see with our eyes, hear with our ears, feel with our fingers, and they report to him."

"Then we're just Seeing Eye dogs for machines."

"No, we've created a brand-new form of symbiosis. We can all help each other."

"And OBO's helping us. Why?"

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"I don't think he likes the rest of the country," Florinda said somberly. "Look what happened to Indianapolis and Scranton and Sacramento."

"I think I'm going to be sick."

"I think we're going to survive."

"Only us? The Adam and Eve bit?"

"Nonsense. Plenty will survive, so long as they mind their manners."

"What's OBO's idea of manners?"

"I don't know. A little bit of eco-logic, maybe. No more destruction. No more waste. Live and let live, but with responsibility and accountability. That's the crucial word, accountability. It's the basic law of the space program; no matter what happens someone must be held accountable. OBO must have picked that up. I think he's holding the whole country accountable; otherwise it's the fire and brimstone visitation."

The phone rang. After a brief search they located an extension and picked it up. "Hello?"

"This is Stretch," I said.

"Stretch? Stretch who?"

"The Stretch computer at Goddard. Formal name, IBM 2002. OBO says he'll be making a pass over your part of the country in about five minutes. He'd like you to give him a wave. He says his orbit won't take him over you for another couple of months. When it does, he'll try to ring you himself. Bye now."

They lurched out to the lawn in front of the house and stood dazed in the twilight, staring up at the sky. The phone and the electric circuits were touched, even though the electricity was generated by a Delco which is a notoriously insensitive boor of a machine. Suddenly Jake pointed to a pinprick of light vaulting across the heavens. "There goes our son," he said.

"There goes God," Florinda said.

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They waved dutifully.

"Jake, how long before OBO's orbit decays and down will come baby, cradle and all?"

"About twenty years."

"God for twenty years." Florinda sighed. "D'you think he'll have enough time?"

Madigan shivered. "I'm scared. You?"

"Yes. But maybe we're just tired and hungry. Come inside, Big Daddy, and I'll feed us."

"Thank you, Little Mother, but no carrots, please. That's a little too close to transubstantiation for me."

Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West is not held in as high regard as it once was. In ways that Spengler did not foresee, history keeps restlessly moving. Norman Spinrad moves it along quietly and almost gently here, to produce a story which is itself a thing of beauty.

NORMAN SPINRAD

A Thing of Beauty

"There's a gentleman by the name of Mr. Shiburo Ito to see you," my intercom said. "He is interested in the purchase of an historic artifact of some significance."

While I waited for him to enter my private office, I had computer central display his specs on the screen discreetly built into the back of my desk. My Mr. Ito was none other than Ito of Ito Freight Boosters of Osaka; there was no need to purchase a readout from Dun & Bradstreet's private banks. If Shiburo Ito of Ito Boosters wrote a check for anything short of the national debt, it could be relied upon not to bounce.

The slight, balding man who glided into my office wore a red silk kimono with a richly-brocaded black obi, Mendocino needlepoint by the look of it. No doubt back in the miasmic smog of Osaka, he bonged the peons with the latest skins from Saville Row.

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Everything about him was *just so*; he purchased confidently on that razor edge between class and ostentation that only the Japanese can handle with such grace, and then only when they have millions of hard yen to back them up. Mr. Ito would be no sucker. He would want whatever he wanted for precise reasons all his own, and would not be budgeable from the center of his desires. The typical heavyweight Japanese businessman, a prime example of the breed that's pushed us out of the center of the international arena.

Mr. Ito bowed almost imperceptibly as he handed me his card. I countered by merely bobbing my head in his direction and remaining seated. These face and posture games may seem ridiculous, but you can't do business with the Japanese without playing them.

As he took a seat before me, Ito drew a black cylinder from the sleeve of his kimono and ceremoniously placed it on the desk before me.

"I have been given to understand that you are a connoisseur of Filmore posters of the early-to-mid-1960s period, Mr. Harris," he said. "The repute of your collection has penetrated even to the environs of Osaka and Kyoto, where I make my habitation. Please permit me to make this minor addition. The thought that a contribution of mine may repose in such illustrious surroundings will afford me much pleasure and place me forever in your debt."

My hands trembled as I unwrapped the poster. With his financial resources, Ito's polite little gift could be almost anything but disappointing. My daddy loved to brag about the old expense account days when American businessmen ran things, but you had to admit that the fringe benefits of business Japanese style had plenty to recommend them.

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But when I got the gift open, it took a real effort not to lose points by whistling out loud. For what I was holding was nothing less than a mint example of the very first Grateful Dead poster in subtle black and gray, a super-rare item, not available for any amount of sheer purchasing power. I dared not inquire as to how Mr. Ito had acquired it. We simply shared a long, silent moment contemplating the poster, its beauty and historicity transcending whatever questionable events might have transpired to bring us together in its presence.

How could I not like Mr. Ito now? Who can say that the Japanese occupy their present international position by economic might alone?

"I hope I may be afforded the opportunity to please your sensibilities as you have pleased mine, Mr. Ito," I finally said. That was the way to phrase it; you didn't thank them for a gift like this, and you brought them around to business as obliquely as possible.

Ito suddenly became obviously embarrassed, even furtive. "Forgive me my boldness, Mr. Harris, but I have hopes that you may be able to assist me in resolving a domestic matter of some delicacy."

"A domestic matter?"

"Just so. I realize that this is an embarrassing intrusion, but you are obviously a man of refinement and infinite discretion, so if you will forgive my forwardness. . . ."

His composure seemed to totally evaporate, as if he was going to ask me to pimp for some disgusting perversion he had. I had the feeling that the power had suddenly taken a quantum jump in my direction, that a large financial opportunity was about to present itself.

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"Please feel free, Mr. Ito. . . ."

Ito smiled nervously. "My wife comes from a family of extreme artistic attainment," he said. "In fact, both her parents have attained the exalted status of National Cultural Treasurers, a distinction of which they never tire of reminding me. While I have achieved a large measure of financial success in the freight-booster enterprise, they regard me as *nikulturi*, a mere merchant, severely lacking in aesthetic refinement as compared to their own illustrious selves. You understand the situation, Mr. Harris?"

I nodded as sympathetically as I could. These Japs certainly have a genius for making life difficult for themselves! Here was a major Japanese industrialist shrinking into low posture at the very thought of his sponging in-laws, whom he could probably buy and sell out of petty cash. At the same time, he was obviously out to cream the sons of bitches in some crazy way that would only make sense to a Japanese. Seems to me the Japanese are better at running the world than they are at running their lives.

"Mr. Harris, I wish to acquire a major American artifact for the gardens of my Kyoto estate. Frankly, it must be of sufficient magnitude so as to remind the parents of my wife of my success in the material realm every time they should chance to gaze upon it, and I shall display it in a manner which will assure that they gaze upon it often. But of course, it must be of sufficient beauty and historicity so as to prove to them that my taste is no less elevated than their own. Thus shall I gain respect in their eyes and reestablish tranquility in my household. I have been given to understand that you are a valued counselor in such matters, and I am eager to inspect whatever such objects you may deem appropriate."

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So that was it! He wanted to buy something big enough to bong the minds of his artsy-fartsy relatives, but he really didn't trust his own taste; he wanted me to show him something he would want to see. And he was swimming like a goldfish in a sea of yen! I could hardly believe my good luck. How much could I take him for?

"Ah . . . what size artifact did you have in mind, Mr. Ito?" I asked as casually as I could.

"I wish to acquire a major piece of American monumental architecture so that I may convert the gardens of my estate into a shrine to its beauty and historicity. Therefore, a piece of classical proportions is required. Of course, it must be worthy of enshrinement, otherwise an embarrassing loss of esteem will surely ensue."

"Of course."

This was not going to be just another Howard Johnson or gas station sale; even something like an old Hilton or the Cooperstown Baseball Hall of Fame I unloaded last year was thinking too small. In his own way, Ito was telling me that price was no object, the sky was the limit. This was the dream of a lifetime! A sucker with a bottomless bank account placing himself trustingly in my tender hands!

"Should it please you, Mr. Ito," I said, "we can inspect several possibilities here in New York immediately. My jumper is on the roof."

"Most gracious of you to interrupt your most busy schedule on my behalf, Mr. Harris. I would be delighted."

I lifted the jumper off the roof, floated her to a thousand feet, then took a Mach 1.5 jump south over the decayed concrete jungles at the tip of Manhattan. The curve brought us back to float about a mile

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north of Bedloe's Island. I took her down to three hundred and brought her in toward the Statue of Liberty at a slow drift, losing altitude imperceptibly as we crept up on the Headless Lady, so that by the time we were just offshore, we were right down on the deck. It was a nice touch to make the goods look more impressive—manipulating the perspectives so that the huge, green, headless statue, with its patina of firebomb soot, seemed to rise up out of the bay like a ruined colossus as we floated toward it.

Mr. Ito betrayed no sign of emotion. He stared straight ahead out the bubble without so much as a word or a flicker of gesture.

"As you are no doubt aware, this is the famous Statue of Liberty," I said. "Like most such artifacts, it is available to any buyer who will display it with proper dignity. Of course, I would have no trouble convincing the Bureau of National Antiquities that your intentions are exemplary in this regard."

I set the autopilot to circle the island at fifty yards offshore so that Ito could get a fully rounded view, and see how well the statue would look from any angle, how eminently suitable it was for enshrinement. But he still sat there with less expression on his face than the average C-grade servitor.

"You can see that nothing has been touched since the Insurrectionists blew the statue's head off," I said, trying to drum up his interest with a pitch. "Thus, the statue has picked up yet another level of historical significance to enhance its already formidable venerability. Originally a gift from France, it has historical significance as an emblem of kinship between the American and French Revolutions. Situated as it is in the mouth of New York harbor, it became a symbol of America itself to generations of immigrants.

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And the damage the Insurrectionists did only serves as a reminder of how lucky we were to come through that mess as lightly as we did. Also, it adds a certain melancholy atmosphere, don't you think? Emotion, intrinsic beauty, and historicity combined in one elegant piece of monumental statuary. And the asking price is a good deal less than you might suppose."

Mr. Ito seemed embarrassed when he finally spoke. "I trust you will forgive my saying so, Mr. Harris, since the emotion is engendered by the highest regard for the noble past of your great nation, but I find this particular artifact somewhat depressing."

"How so, Mr. Ito?"

The jumper completed a circle of the Statue of Liberty and began another as Mr. Ito lowered his eyes and stared at the oily waters of the bay as he answered.

"The symbolism of this broken statue is quite saddening, representing as it does a decline from your nation's past greatness. For me to enshrine such an artifact in Kyoto would be an ignoble act, an insult to the memory of your nation's greatness. It would be a statement of overweening pride."

Can you beat that? *He* was offended because he felt that displaying the statue in Japan would be insulting the United States, and therefore I was implying he was *nikulturi* by offering it to him. When all that the damned thing was to any American was one more piece of old junk left over from the glorious days that the Japanese, who were nuts for such rubbish, might be persuaded to pay through the nose for the dubious privilege of carting away. These Japs could drive you crazy—who else could you offend by suggesting they do something that they thought would

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offend you but you thought was just fine in the first place?

"I hope I haven't offended you, Mr. Ito," I blurted out. I could have bitten my tongue off the moment I said it, because it was exactly the wrong thing to say. I *had* offended him, and it was only a further offense to put him in a position where politeness demanded that he deny it.

"I'm sure that could not have been further from your intention, Mr. Harris," Ito said with convincing sincerity. "A pang of sadness at the perishability of greatness, nothing more. In fact as such, the experience might be said to be healthful to the soul. But making such an artifact a permanent part of one's surroundings would be more than I could bear."

Were these his true feelings or just smooth Japanese politeness? Who could tell what these people really felt? Sometimes I think they don't even know what they feel themselves. But at any rate, I had to show him something that would change his mood, and fast. Hm-m-m . . .

"Tell me, Mr. Ito, are you fond of baseball?"

His eyes lit up like satellite beacons and the heavy mood evaporated in the warm, almost childish, glow of his sudden smile. "Ah yes!" he said, "I retain a box at Osaka Stadium, though I must confess I secretly retain a partiality for the Giants. How strange it is that this profound game has so declined in the country of its origin."

"Perhaps. But that very fact has placed something on the market which I'm sure you'll find most congenial. Shall we go?"

"By all means," Mr. Ito said. "I find our present environs somewhat overbearing."

I floated the jumper to five hundred feet and pro-

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grammed a Mach 2.5 jump curve to the north that quickly put the great hunk of moldering, dirty copper far behind. It's amazing how much sickening emotion the Japanese are able to attach to almost any piece of old junk. *Our* old junk at that, as if Japan didn't have enough useless clutter of its own. But I certainly shouldn't complain about it; it makes me a pretty good living. Everyone knows the old saying about a fool and his money.

The jumper's trajectory put us at float over the confluence of the Harlem and East Rivers at a thousand feet. Without dropping any lower, I whipped the jumper northeast over the Bronx at three hundred miles per hour. This area had been covered by tenements before the Insurrection, and had been thoroughly razed by firebombs, high explosives and napalm. No one had ever found an economic reason for clearing away the miles of rubble, and now the scarred earth and ruined buildings were covered with tall grass, poison sumac, tangled scrub growth, and scattered thickets of trees which might merge to form a forest in another generation or two. Because of the crazy, jagged, overgrown topography, this land was utterly useless, and no one lived here except some pathetic remnants of old hippie tribes that kept to themselves and weren't worth hunting down. Their occasional huts and patchwork tents were the only signs of human habitation in the area. This was *really* depressing territory, and I wanted to get Mr. Ito over it high and fast.

Fortunately, we didn't have far to go, and in a couple of minutes, I had the jumper floating at five hundred feet over our objective, the only really intact structure in the area. Mr. Ito's stone face lit up with such boyish pleasure that I knew I had it made;

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I had figured right when I figured he couldn't resist something like this.

"So!" he cried in delight. "Yankee Stadium!"

The ancient ballpark had come through the Insurrection with nothing worse than some atmospheric blacking and cratering of its concrete exterior walls. Everything around it had been pretty well demolished except for a short section of old elevated subway line which still stood beside it, a soft rusty-red skeleton covered with vines and moss. The surrounding ruins were thoroughly overgrown, huge piles of rubble, truncated buildings, rusted-out tanks, forming tangled manmade jungled foothills around the high point of the stadium, which itself had creepers and vines growing all over it, partially blending it into the wild, overgrown landscape around it.

The Bureau of National Antiquities had circled the stadium with a high, electrified, barbed-wire fence to keep out the hippies who roamed the badlands. A lone guard armed with a Japanese-made slicer patrolled the fence in endless circles at fifteen feet on a one-man skimmer. I brought the jumper down to fifty feet and orbited the stadium five times, giving the enthralled Ito a good, long, contemplative look at how lovely it would look as the centerpiece of his gardens instead of hidden away in these crummy ruins. The guard waved to us each time our paths crossed—it must be a lonely, boring job out here with nothing but old junk and crazy wandering hippies for company.

"May we go inside?" Ito said in absolutely reverent tones. Man, was he hooked! He glowed like a little kid about to inherit a candy store.

"Certainly, Mr. Ito," I said, taking the jumper out

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of its circling pattern and floating it gently up over the lip of the old ballpark, putting it on hover at roof-level over what had once been short center field. Very slowly, I brought the jumper down toward the tangle of tall grass, shrubbery, and occasional stunted trees that covered what had once been the playing field.

It was like descending into some immense, ruined, roofless cathedral. As we dropped, the cavernous tripledecked grandstands—rotten wooden seats rich with moss and fungi, great overhanging rafters concealing flocks of chattering birds in their deep glowering shadows—rose to encircle the jumper in a weird, lost grandeur.

By the time we touched down, Ito seemed to be floating in his seat with rapture. "So beautiful!" he sighed. "Such a sense of history and venerability. Ah, Mr. Harris, what noble deeds were done in this Yankee Stadium in bygone days! May we set foot on this historic playing field?"

"Of course, Mr. Ito." It was beautiful. I didn't have to say a word; he was doing a better job of selling the moldy, useless heap of junk to himself than I ever could.

We got out of the jumper and tramped around through the tangled vegetation while scruffy pigeons wheeled overhead and the immensity of the empty stadium gave the place an illusion of mystical significance, as if it were some Greek ruin or Stonehenge, instead of just a ruined old baseball park. The grandstands seemed choked with ghosts; the echoes of great events that never were, filled the deeply-shadowed cavernous spaces.

Mr. Ito, it turned out, knew more about Yankee

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Stadium than I did, or ever wanted to. He led me around at a measured, reverent pace, boring my ass off with a kind of historical grand tour.

"Here Al Gionfriddo made his famous World Series catch of a potential home run by the great Di-maggio," he said, as we reached the high, crumbling black wall that ran around the bleachers. Faded numerals said "405." We followed this curving, overgrown wall around to the 467 sign in left center field. Here there were three stone markers jutting up out of the old playing field like so many tombstones, and five copper plaques on the wall behind them, so green with decay as to be illegible. They really must've taken this stuff seriously in the old days, as seriously as the Japanese take it now.

"Memorials to the great heroes of the New York Yankees," Ito said. "The legendary Ruth, Gehrig, Di-maggio, Mantle . . . Over this very spot, Mickey Mantle drove a ball into the bleachers, a feat which had been regarded as impossible for nearly half a century. Ah. . . ."

And so on. Ito tramped all through the underbrush of the playing field and seemed to have a piece of trivia of vast historical significance to himself for almost every square foot of Yankee Stadium. At this spot, Babe Ruth had achieved his sixtieth home run; here Roger Maris had finally surpassed that feat, over there Mantle had almost driven a ball over the high roof of the venerable stadium. It was staggering how much of this trivia he knew, and how much importance it all had in his eyes. The tour seemed to go on forever. I would've gone crazy with boredom if it wasn't so wonderfully obvious how thoroughly sold he was on the place. While Ito conducted his love affair with Yankee Stadium, I passed the time by

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counting yen in my head. I figured I could probably get ten million out of him, which meant that my commission would be a cool million. Thinking about that much money about to drop into my hands was enough to keep me smiling for the two hours that Ito babbled on about home runs, no-hitters, and triple-plays.

It was late afternoon by the time he had finally saturated himself and allowed me to lead him back to the jumper. I felt it was time to talk business, while he was still under the spell of the stadium, and his resistance was at low ebb.

"It pleases me greatly to observe the depths of your feeling for this beautiful and venerable stadium, Mr. Ito," I said. "I stand ready to facilitate the speedy transfer of title at your convenience."

Ito started as if suddenly roused from some pleasant dream. He cast his eyes downward, and bowed almost imperceptibly.

"Alas," he said sadly, "while it would pleasure me beyond all reason to enshrine the noble Yankee Stadium upon my grounds, such a self-indulgence would only exacerbate my domestic difficulties. The parents of my wife ignorantly consider the noble sport of baseball an imported American barbarity. My wife unfortunately shares in this opinion and frequently berates me for my enthusiasm for the game. Should I purchase the Yankee Stadium, I would become a laughingstock in my own household, and my life would become quite unbearable."

Can you beat that? The arrogant little son of a bitch wasted two hours of my time dragging around this stupid heap of junk babbling all that garbage and driving me half crazy, and he knew he wasn't going to buy it all the time! I felt like knocking his

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low-posture teeth down his unworthy throat. But I thought of all those yen I still had a fighting chance at and made the proper response: a rueful little smile of sympathy, a shared sigh of wistful regret, a murmured, "Alas."

"However," Ito added brightly, "the memory of this visit is something I shall treasure always. I am deeply in your debt for granting me this experience, Mr. Harris. For this alone, the trip from Kyoto has been made more than worthwhile."

Now that really made my day.

I was in real trouble, I was very close to blowing the biggest deal I've ever had a shot at. I'd shown Ito the two best items in my territory, and if he didn't find what he wanted in the Northeast, there were plenty of first-rank pieces still left in the rest of the country—top stuff like the St. Louis Gateway Arch, the Disneyland Matterhorn, the Salt Lake City Mormon Tabernacle—and plenty of other brokers to collect that big fat commission.

I figured I had only one more good try before Ito started thinking of looking elsewhere: the United Nations building complex. The U.N. had fallen into a complicated legal limbo. The United Nations had retained title to the buildings when they moved their headquarters out of New York, but when the U.N. folded, New York State, New York City, and the Federal Government had all laid claim to them, along with the U.N.'s foreign creditors. The Bureau of National Antiquities didn't have clear title, but they did administer the estate for the Federal Government. If I could palm the damned thing off on Ito, the Bureau of National Junk would be only too happy to

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take his check and let everyone else try to pry the money out of them. And once he moved it to Kyoto, the Japanese Government would not be about to let anyone repossess something that one of their heavy-weight citizens had shelled out hard yen for.

So I jumped her at Mach 1.7 to a hover at three hundred feet over the greasy waters of the East River due east of the U.N. complex at 42nd Street. At this time of day and from this angle, the U.N. buildings presented what I hoped was a romantic Japanese-style vista. The Secretariat was a giant glass tombstone dramatically silhouetted by the late afternoon sun as it loomed massively before us out of the perpetual gray haze hanging over Manhattan; beside it, the low sweeping curve of the General Assembly gave the grouping a balanced calligraphic outline. The total effect seemed similar to that of one of those ancient Japanese Torii gates rising out of the foggy sunset, only done on a far grander scale.

The Insurrection had left the U.N. untouched—the rebels had had some crazy attachment for it—and from the river, you couldn't see much of the grubby open-air market that had been allowed to spring up in the plaza, or the honky-tonk bars along First Avenue. Fortunately, the Bureau of National Antiquities made a big point of keeping the buildings themselves in good shape, figuring that the Federal Government's claim would be weakened if anyone could yell that the Bureau was letting them fall apart.

I floated her slowly in off the river, keeping at the three-hundred-foot level, and started my pitch. "Before you, Mr. Ito, are the United Nations buildings, melancholy symbol of one of the noblest dreams of

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man, now unfortunately empty and abandoned, a monument to the tragedy of the U.N.'s unfortunate demise."

Flashes of sunlight, reflected off the river, then onto the hundreds of windows that formed the face of the Secretariat, scintillated intermittently across the glass monolith as I set the jumper to circling the building. When we came around to the western face, the great glass facade was a curtain of orange fire.

"The Secretariat could be set in your gardens so as to catch both the sunrise and sunset, Mr. Ito," I pointed out. "It's considered one of the finest examples of Twentieth Century Utilitarian in the world, and you'll note that it's in excellent repair."

Ito said nothing. His eyes did not so much as flicker. Even the muscles of his face seemed unnaturally wooden. The jumper passed behind the Secretariat again, which eclipsed both the sun and its giant reflection; below us was the sweeping gray concrete roof of the General Assembly.

"And of course, the historic significance of the U.N. buildings is beyond measure, if somewhat tragic —"

Abruptly, Mr. Ito interrupted in a cold, clipped voice. "Please forgive my crudity in interjecting a political opinion into this situation, Mr. Harris, but I believe such frankness will save you much wasted time and effort and myself considerable discomfort."

All at once, he was Shiburo Ito of Ito Freight Boosters of Osaka, a mover and shaper of the economy of the most powerful nation on Earth, and he was letting me know it. "I fully respect your sentimental esteem for the late United Nations, but it is a sentiment I do not share. I remind you that the United Nations was born as an alliance of the nations

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which humiliated Japan in a most unfortunate war, and expired as a shrill and contentious assembly of pauperized beggar-states united only in the dishonorable determination to extract international alms from more progressive, advanced, self-sustaining, and virtuous states, chief among them Japan. I must therefore regretfully point out that the sight of these buildings fills me with nothing but disgust, though they may have a certain intrinsic beauty as abstract objects."

His face had become a shiny mask and he seemed a million miles away. He had come as close to outright anger as I had ever heard one of these heavy-weight Japs get; he must be really steaming inside. Damn it, how was I supposed to know that the U.N. had all those awful political meanings for him? As far as I've ever heard, the U.N. hasn't meant anything to anyone for years, except an idealistic, sappy idea that got taken over by Third Worlders and went broke. Just my rotten luck to run into one of the few people in the world who were still fighting that one!

"You are no doubt fatigued, Mr. Harris," Ito said coldly. "I shall trouble you no longer. It would be best to return to your office now. Should you have further objects to show me, we can arrange another appointment at some mutually convenient time."

What could I say to that? I had offended him deeply, and besides I couldn't think of anything else to show him. I took the jumper to five hundred and headed downtown over the river at a slow hundred miles per hour, hoping against hope that I'd somehow think of something to salvage this blown million-yen deal with before we reached my office and I lost this giant goldfish forever.

As we headed downtown, Ito stared impassively

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out the bubble at the bleak ranks of high-rise apartment buildings that lined the Manhattan shore below us, not deigning to speak or take further notice of my miserable existence. The deep orange light streaming in through the bubble turned his round face into a rising sun, straight off the Japanese flag. It seemed appropriate. The crazy bastard was just like his country: a politically touchy, politely arrogant economic overlord, with infinitely refined aesthetic sensibilities inexplicably combined with a pack-rat lust for the silliest of our old junk. One minute Ito seemed so superior in every way, and the next he was a stupid, childish sucker. I've been doing business with the Japanese for years, and I still don't really understand them. The best I can do is guess around the edges of whatever their inner reality actually is, and hope I hit what works. And this time out, with a million yen or more dangled in front of me, I had guessed wrong three times and now I was dragging my tail home with a dissatisfied customer whose very posture seemed designed to let me know that I was a crass, second-rate boob, and that he was one of the lords of creation!

"Mr. Harris! Mr. Harris! Over there! That magnificent structure!" Ito was suddenly almost shouting; his eyes were bright with excitement, and he was actually smiling.

He was pointing due south along the East River. The Manhattan bank was choked with the ugliest public housing projects imaginable, and the Brooklyn shore was worse: one of those huge, sprawling, so-called industrial parks, low windowless buildings, geodesic warehouses, wharves, a few freight-booster launching pads. Only one structure stood out, there

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was only one thing Ito could've meant: the structure linking the housing project on the Manhattan side with the industrial park on the Brooklyn shore.

Mr. Ito was pointing at the Brooklyn Bridge.

"The . . . ah . . . bridge, Mr. Ito?" I managed to say with a straight face. As far as I knew, the Brooklyn Bridge had only one claim to historicity: it was the butt of a series of jokes so ancient that they weren't funny anymore. The Brooklyn Bridge was what old comic con men traditionally sold to sucker tourists, greenhorns or hicks they used to call them, along with phony uranium stocks and gold-painted bricks.

So I couldn't resist the line: "You want to buy the Brooklyn Bridge, Mr. Ito?" It was so beautiful; he had put me through such hassles, and had finally gotten so damned high and mighty with me, and now I was in effect calling him an idiot to his face and he didn't know it.

In fact, he nodded eagerly in answer like a straight man out of some old joke and said, "I do believe so. Is it for sale?"

I slowed the jumper to forty, brought her down to a hundred feet, and swallowed my giggles as we approached the crumbling old monstrosity. Two massive and squat stone towers supported the rusty cables from which the bed of the bridge was suspended. The jumper had made the bridge useless years ago; no one had bothered to maintain it and no one had bothered to tear it down. Where the big blocks of dark gray stone met the water, they were encrusted with putrid-looking green slime. Above the waterline, the towers were whitened with about a century's worth of guano.

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It was hard to believe that Ito was serious. The bridge was a filthy, decayed, reeking old monstrosity. In short, it was just what Ito deserved to be sold.

"Why yes, Mr. Ito," I said, "I think I might be able to sell you the Brooklyn Bridge."

I put the jumper on hover about a hundred feet from one of the filthy old stone towers. Where the stones weren't caked with seagull guano, they were covered with about an inch of black soot. The roadbed was cracked and pitted and thickly paved with garbage, old shells, and more guano; the bridge must've been a seagull rookery for decades. I was mighty glad that the jumper was airtight; the stink must've been terrific.

"Excellent!" Mr. Ito exclaimed. "Quite lovely, is it not? I am determined to be the man to purchase the Brooklyn Bridge, Mr. Harris."

"I can think of no one more worthy of that honor than your esteemed self, Mr. Ito," I said with total sincerity.

About four months after the last section of the Brooklyn Bridge was boosted to Kyoto, I received two packages from Mr. Shiburo Ito. One was a mailing envelope containing a mini-cassette and a holo slide; the other was a heavy package about the size of a shoebox wrapped in blue rice paper.

Feeling a lot more mellow toward the memory of Ito these days, with a million of his yen in my bank account, I dropped the mini into my playback and was hardly surprised to hear his voice.

"Salutations, Mr. Harris, and once again my profoundest thanks for expediting the transfer of the Brooklyn Bridge to my estate. It has now been per-

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manently enshrined and afford us all much aesthetic enjoyment and has enhanced the tranquility of my household immeasurably. I am enclosing a holo of the shrine for your pleasure. I have also sent you a small token of my appreciation which I hope you will take in the spirit in which it is given. Sayonara."

My curiosity aroused, I got right up and put the holo slide in my wall viewer. Before me was a heavily wooded mountain which rose into twin peaks of austere, dark-gray rock. A tall waterfall plunged gracefully down the long gorge between the two pinnacles to a shallow lake at the foot of the mountain, where it smashed onto a table of flat rock, generating perpetual billows of soft mist which turned the landscape into something straight out of a Chinese painting. Spanning the gorge between the two peaks like a spiderweb directly over the great falls, its stone towers anchored to islands of rock on the very lip of the precipice, was the Brooklyn Bridge, its ponderous bulk rendered slim and graceful by the massive scale of the landscape. The stone had been cleaned and glistened with moisture, the cables and roadbed were overgrown with lush green ivy. The holo had been taken just as the sun was setting between the towers of the bridge, outlining it in rich orange fire, turning the rising mists coppery, and sparkling in brilliant sheets off the falling water.

It was very beautiful.

It was quite a while before I tore myself away from the scene, remembering Mr. Ito's other package.

Beneath the blue paper wrapping was a single gold-painted brick. I gaped. I laughed. I looked again.

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The object looked superficially like an old brick covered with gold paint. But it wasn't. It was a solid brick of soft, pure gold, a replica of the original item, in perfect detail.

I knew that Mr. Ito was trying to tell me something, but I still can't quite make out what.

When men find other worlds, they cannot expect that those planets will be just like Earth. Each world will have its mysteries, its weather, and its unique attractions. Sometimes it's hard to guess what might draw visitors. But inevitably, there will be those who exploit that which is unique. Until——.

GEORGE R. R. MARTIN
With Morning Comes Mistfall

I was early to breakfast that morning, the first day after landing. But Sanders was already out on the dining balcony when I got there. He was standing alone by the edge, looking out over the mountains and the mists.

I walked up behind him and muttered hello. He didn't bother to reply. "It's beautiful, isn't it?" he said, without turning.

And it was.

Only a few feet below balcony level the mists rolled, sending ghostly breakers to crash against the stones of Sanders' castle. A thick white blanket extended from horizon to horizon, cloaking everything. We could see the summit of the Red Ghost, off to the north; a barbed dagger of scarlet rock jabbing into the sky. But that was all. The other mountains were still below mist level.

But we were above the mists. Sanders had built his hotel atop the tallest mountain in the chain. We

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were floating alone in a swirling white ocean, on a flying castle amid a sea of clouds.

Castle Cloud, in fact. That was what Sanders had named the place. It was easy to see why.

"Is it always like this?" I asked Sanders, after drinking it all in for a while.

"Every mistfall," he replied, turning toward me with a wistful smile. He was a fat man, with a jovial red face. Not the sort who should smile wistfully. But he did.

He gestured toward the east, where Wraithworld's sun rising above the mists made a crimson and orange spectacle of the dawn sky.

"The sun," he said. "As it rises, the heat drives the mists back into the valleys, forces them to surrender the mountains they've conquered during the night. The mists sink, and one by one the peaks come into view. By noon the whole range is visible for miles and miles. There's nothing like it on Earth, or anywhere else."

He smiled again, and led me over to one of the tables scattered around the balcony. "And then, at sunset, it's all reversed. You must watch mistrise tonight," he said.

We sat down, and a sleek robowaiter came rolling out to serve us as the chairs registered our presence. Sanders ignored it. "It's war, you know," he continued. "Eternal war between the sun and the mists. And the mists have the better of it. They have the valleys, and the plains, and the seacoasts. The sun has only a few mountaintops. And then only by day."

He turned to the robowaiter and ordered coffee for both of us, to keep us occupied until the others arrived. It would be fresh-brewed, of course. Sanders didn't tolerate instants or synthetics on his planet.

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"You like it here," I said, while we waited for the coffee.

Sanders laughed. "What's not to like? Castle Cloud has everything. Good food, entertainment, gambling, and all the other comforts of home. Plus this planet. I've got the best of both worlds, don't I?"

"I suppose so. But most people don't think in those terms. Nobody comes to Wraithworld for the gambling, or the food."

Sanders nodded. "But we do get some hunters. Out after rockcats and plains devils. And once in a while someone will come to look at the ruins."

"Maybe," I said. "But those are your exceptions. Not your rule. Most of your guests are here for one reason."

"Sure," he admitted, grinning. "The wraiths."

"The wraiths," I echoed. "You've got beauty here, and hunting and fishing and mountaineering. But none of that brings the tourists here. It's the wraiths they come for."

The coffee arrived then, two big steaming mugs accompanied by a pitcher of thick cream. It was very strong, and very hot, and very good. After weeks of spaceship synthetic, it was an awakening.

Sanders sipped at his coffee with care, his eyes studying me over the mug. He set it down thoughtfully. "And it's the wraiths you've come for, too," he said.

I shrugged. "Of course. My readers aren't interested in scenery, no matter how spectacular. Dubowski and his men are here to find wraiths, and I'm here to cover the search."

Sanders was about to answer, but he never got the chance. A sharp, precise voice cut in suddenly. "If there are any wraiths to find," the voice said.

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We turned to face the balcony entrance. Dr. Charles Dubowski, head of the Wraithworld Research Team, was standing in the doorway, squinting at the light. He had managed to shake the gaggle of research assistants who usually trailed him everywhere.

Dubowski paused for a second, then walked over to our table, pulled out a chair, and sat down. The robowaiter came rolling out again.

Sanders eyed the thin scientist with unconcealed distaste. "What makes you think the wraiths aren't there, Doctor?" he asked.

Dubowski shrugged, and smiled lightly. "I just don't feel there's enough evidence," he said. "But don't worry. I never let my feelings interfere with my work. I want the truth as much as anyone. So I'll run an impartial expedition. If your wraiths *are* out there, I'll find them."

"Or they'll find you," Sanders said. He looked grave. "And that might not be too pleasant."

Dubowski laughed. "Oh, come now, Sanders. Just because you live in a castle doesn't mean you have to be so melodramatic."

"Don't laugh, Doctor. The wraiths have killed people before, you know."

"No proof of that," said Dubowski. "No proof at all. Just as there's no proof of the wraiths themselves. But that's why we're here. To find proof. Or disproof. But come, I'm famished." He turned to our robowaiter, who had been standing by and humming impatiently.

Dubowski and I ordered rockcat steaks, with a basket of hot, freshly-baked biscuits. Sanders took advantage of the Earth supplies our ship had brought

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in last night, and got a massive slab of ham with a half-dozen eggs.

Rockcat has a flavor that Earth meat hasn't had in centuries. I loved it, although Dubowski left much of his steak uneaten. He was too busy talking to eat.

"You shouldn't dismiss the wraiths so lightly," Sanders said after the robowaiter had stalked off with our orders. "There is evidence. Plenty of it. Twenty-two deaths since this planet was discovered. And eyewitness accounts of wraiths by the dozens."

"True," Dubowski said. "But I wouldn't call that real evidence. Deaths? Yes. Most are simple disappearances, however. Probably people who fell off a mountain, or got eaten by a rockcat, or something. It's impossible to find the bodies in the mists. More people vanish every day on Earth, and nothing is thought of it. But here, every time someone disappears, people claim the wraiths got him. No, I'm sorry. It's not enough."

"Bodies have been found, Doctor," Sanders said quietly. "Slain horribly. And not by falls or rockcats, either."

It was my turn to cut in. "Only four bodies have been recovered that I know of," I said. "And I've backgrounded myself pretty thoroughly on the wraiths."

Sanders frowned. "All right," he admitted. "But what about those four cases? Pretty convincing evidence, if you ask me."

The food showed up about then, but Sanders continued as we ate. "The first sighting, for example. That's never been explained satisfactorily. The Gregor Expedition."

I nodded. Dave Gregor had captained the ship

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that had discovered Wraithworld, nearly seventy-five years earlier. He had probed through the mists with his sensors, and set his ship down on the seacoast plains. Then he sent teams out to explore.

There were two men in each team, both well armed. But in one case, only a single man came back, and he was in hysteria. He and his partner had gotten separated in the mists, and suddenly he heard a blood-curdling scream. When he found his friend, he was quite dead. And something was standing over the body.

The survivor described the killer as man-like, eight feet tall, and somehow insubstantial. He claimed that when he fired at it, the blaster bolt went right through it. Then the creature had wavered, and vanished in the mists.

Gregor sent other teams out to search for the thing. They recovered the body, but that was all. Without special instruments, it was difficult to find the same place twice in the mists. Let alone something like the creature that had been described.

So the story was never confirmed. But nonetheless, it caused a sensation when Gregor returned to Earth. Another ship was sent to conduct a more thorough search. It found nothing. But one of its search teams disappeared without a trace.

And the legend of the mist wraiths was born, and began to grow. Other ships came to Wraithworld, and a trickle of colonists came and went, and Paul Sanders landed one day and erected the Castle Cloud so the public might safely visit the mysterious planet of the wraiths.

And there were other deaths, and other disappearances, and many people claimed to catch brief

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glimpses of wraiths prowling through the mists. And then someone found the ruins. Just tumbled stone blocks, now. But once, structures of some sort. The homes of the wraiths, people said.

There was evidence, I thought. And some of it was hard to deny. But Dubowski was shaking his head vigorously.

"The Gregor affair proves nothing," he said. "You know as well as I this planet has never been explored thoroughly. Especially the plains area, where Gregor's ship put down. It was probably some sort of animal that killed that man. A rare animal of some sort native to that area."

"What about the testimony of his partner?" Sanders asked.

"Hysteria, pure and simple."

"The other sightings? There have been an awful lot of them. And the witnesses weren't always hysterical."

"Proves nothing," Dubowski said, shaking his head. "Back on Earth, plenty of people still claim to have seen ghosts and flying saucers. And here, with those damned mists, mistakes and hallucinations are naturally even easier."

He jabbed at Sanders with the knife he was using to butter a biscuit. "It's these mists that foul up everything. The wraith myth would have died long ago without the mists. Up to now, no one has had the equipment or the money to conduct a really thorough investigation. But we do. And we will. We'll get the truth once and for all."

Sanders grimaced. "If you don't get yourself killed first. The wraiths may not like being investigated."

"I don't understand you, Sanders," Dubowski said.

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"If you're so afraid of the wraiths and so convinced that they're down there prowling about, why have you lived here so long?"

"Castle Cloud was built with safeguards," Sanders said. "The brochure we send prospective guests describes them. No one is in danger here. For one thing, the wraiths won't come out of the mists. And we're in sunlight most of the day. But it's a different story down in the valleys."

"That's superstitious nonsense. If I had to guess, I'd say these mist wraiths of yours were nothing but transplanted Earth ghosts. Phantoms of someone's imagination. But I won't guess—I'll wait until the results are in. Then we'll see. If they are real, they won't be able to hide from us."

Sanders looked over at me. "What about you? Do you agree with him?"

"I'm a journalist," I said carefully. "I'm just here to cover what happens. The wraiths are famous, and my readers are interested. So I've got no opinions. Or none that I'd care to broadcast, anyway."

Sanders lapsed into a disgruntled silence, and attacked his ham and eggs with a renewed vigor. Dubowski took over for him, and steered the conversation over to the details of the investigation he was planning. The rest of the meal was a montage of eager talk about wraith traps, and search plans, and roboprobes, and sensors. I listened carefully and took mental notes for a column on the subject.

Sanders listened carefully, too. But you could tell from his face that he was far from pleased by what he heard.

Nothing much else happened that day. Dubowski spent his time at the spacefield, built on a small plateau below the castle, and supervised the unload-

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ing of his equipment. I wrote a column on his plans for the expedition, and beamed it back to Earth. Sanders tended to his other guests, and did whatever else a hotel manager does, I guess.

I went out to the balcony again at sunset, to watch the mists rise.

It was war, as Sanders had said. At mistfall, I had seen the sun victorious in the first of the daily battles. But now the conflict was renewed. The mists began to creep back to the heights as the temperature fell. Wispy gray-white tendrils stole up silently from the valleys, and curled around the jagged mountain peaks like ghostly fingers. Then the fingers began to grow thicker and stronger, and after a while they pulled the mists up after them.

One by one the stark, wind-carved summits were swallowed up for another night. The Red Ghost, the giant to the north, was the last mountain to vanish in the lapping white ocean. And then the mists began to pour in over the balcony ledge, and close around Castle Cloud itself.

I went back inside. Sanders was standing there, just inside the doors. He had been watching me.

"You were right," I said. "It was beautiful."

He nodded. "You know, I don't think Dubowski has bothered to look yet," he said.

"Busy, I guess."

Sanders sighed. "Too damn busy. C'mon. I'll buy you a drink."

The hotel bar was quiet and dark, with the kind of mood that promotes good talk and serious drinking. The more I saw of Sanders' castle, the more I liked the man. Our tastes were in remarkable accord.

We found a table in the darkest and most secluded part of the room, and ordered drinks from a stock

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that included liquors from a dozen worlds. And we talked.

"You don't seem very happy to have Dubowski here," I said after the drinks came. "Why not? He's filling up your hotel."

Sanders looked up from his drink, and smiled. "True. It is the slow season. But I don't like what he's trying to do."

"So you try to scare him away?"

Sanders' smile vanished. "Was I that transparent?"

I nodded.

He sighed. "Didn't think it would work," he said. He sipped thoughtfully at his drink. "But I had to try something."

"Why?"

"Because. Because he's going to destroy this world, if I let him. By the time he and his kind get through, there won't be a mystery left in the universe."

"He's just trying to find some answers. Do the wraiths exist? What about the ruins? Who built them? Didn't you ever want to know those things, Sanders?"

He drained his drink, looked around, and caught the waiter's eye to order another. No robowaiters in here. Only human help. Sanders was particular about atmosphere.

"Of course," he said when he had his drink. "Everyone's wondered about those questions. That's why people come here to Wraithworld, to the Castle Cloud. Each guy who touches down here is secretly hoping he'll have an adventure with the wraiths, and find out all the answers personally.

"So he doesn't. So he slaps on a blaster and wanders around the mist forests for a few days, or a few weeks, and finds nothing. So what? He can come back

and search again. The dream is still there, and the romance, and the mystery.

"And who knows? Maybe one trip he glimpses a wraith drifting through the mists. Or something he thinks is a wraith. And then he'll go home happy, because he's been part of a legend. He's touched a little bit of creation that hasn't had all the awe and the wonder ripped from it yet by Dubowski's sort."

He fell silent, and stared morosely into his drink. Finally, after a long pause, he continued. "Dubowski! Bah! He makes me boil. He comes here with his ship full of lackeys and his million-credit grant and all his gadgets, to hunt for wraiths. Oh, he'll get them all right. That's what frightens me. Either he'll prove they don't exist, or he'll find them, and they'll turn out to be some kind of submen or animals or something."

He emptied his glass again, savagely. "And that will ruin it. Ruin it, you hear! He'll answer all the questions with his gadgets, and there'll be nothing left for anyone else. It isn't fair."

I sat there and sipped quietly at my drink and said nothing. Sanders ordered another. A foul thought was running around in my head. Finally I had to say it aloud.

"If Dubowski answers all the questions," I said, "then there will be no reason to come here anymore. And you'll be put out of business. Are you sure that's not why you're so worried?"

Sanders glared at me, and I thought he was going to hit me for a second. But he didn't. "I thought you were different. You looked at mistfall, and understood. I thought you did, anyway. But I guess I was wrong." He jerked his head toward the door. "Get out of here," he said.

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I rose. "All right," I said. "I'm sorry, Sanders. But it's my job to ask nasty questions like that."

He ignored me, and I left the table. When I reached the door, I turned and looked back across the room. Sanders was staring into his drink again and talking loudly to himself.

"Answers," he said. He made it sound obscene. "Answers. Always they have to have answers. But the questions are so much finer. Why can't they leave them alone?"

I left him alone then. Alone with his drinks.

The next few weeks were hectic ones, for the expedition and for me. Dubowski went about things thoroughly, you had to give him that. He had planned his assault on Wraithworld with meticulous precision.

Mapping came first. Thanks to the mists, what maps there were of Wraithworld were very crude by modern standards. So Dubowski sent out a whole fleet of roboprobes, to skim above the mists and steal their secrets with sophisticated sensory devices. From the information that came pouring in, a detailed topography of the region was pieced together.

That done, Dubowski and his assistants then used the maps to carefully plot every recorded wraith sighting since the Gregor Expedition. Considerable data on the sightings had been compiled and analyzed long before we left Earth, of course. Heavy use of the matchless collection on wraiths in the Castle Cloud library filled in the gaps that remained. As expected, sightings were most common in the valleys around the hotel, the only permanent human habitation on the planet.

When the plotting was completed, Dubowski set

out his wraith traps, scattering most of them in the areas where wraiths had been reported most frequently. He also put a few in distant, outlying regions, however, including the seacoast plain where Gregor's ship had made the initial contact.

The traps weren't really traps, of course. They were squat duralloy pillars, packed with most every type of sensing and recording equipment known to Earth science. To the traps, the mists were all but nonexistent. If some unfortunate wraith wandered into survey range, there would be no way it could avoid detection.

Meanwhile, the mapping roboprobes were pulled in to be overhauled and reprogrammed, and then sent out again. With the topography known in detail, the probes could be sent through the mists on low-level patrols without fear of banging into a concealed mountain. The sensing equipment carried by the probes was not the equal of that in the wraith traps, of course. But the probes had a much greater range, and could cover thousands of square miles each day.

Finally, when the wraith traps were deployed and the roboprobes were in the air, Dubowski and his men took to the mist forests themselves. Each carried a heavy backpack of sensors and detection devices. The human search teams had more mobility than the wraith traps, and more sophisticated equipment than the probes. They covered a different area each day, in painstaking detail.

I went along on a few of those trips, with a backpack of my own. It made for some interesting copy, even though we never found anything. And while on search, I fell in love with the mist forests.

The tourist literature likes to call them "the ghastly mist forests of haunted Wraithworld." But they're not

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ghastly. Not really. There's a strange sort of beauty there, for those who can appreciate it.

The trees are thin and very tall, with white bark and pale gray leaves. But the forests are not without color. There's a parasite, a hanging moss of some sort, that's very common, and it drips from the overhanging branches in cascades of dark green and scarlet. And there are rocks, and vines, and low bushes choked with misshapen purplish fruits.

But there's no sun, of course. The mists hide everything. They swirl and slide around you as you walk, caressing you with unseen hands, clutching at your feet.

Once in a while, the mists play games with you. Most of the time you walk through a thick fog, unable to see more than a few feet in any direction, your own shoes lost in the mist carpet below. Sometimes, though, the fog closes in suddenly. And then you can't see at all. I blundered into more than one tree when that happened.

At other times, though, the mists—for no apparent reason—will roll back suddenly, and leave you standing alone in a clear pocket within a cloud. That's when you can see the forest in all its grotesque beauty. It's a brief, breathtaking glimpse of never-never land. Moments like that are few and short-lived. But they stay with you.

They stay with you.

In those early weeks, I didn't have much time for walking in the forests, except when I joined a search team to get the feel of it. Mostly I was busy writing. I did a series on the history of the planet, highlighted by the stories of the most famous sightings. I did feature profiles on some of the more colorful members of the expedition. I did a piece on Sanders, and

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the problems he encountered and overcame in building Castle Cloud. I did science pieces on the little known about the planet's ecology. I did mood pieces about the forests and the mountains. I did speculative thought pieces about the ruins. I wrote about rockcat hunting, and mountain climbing, and the huge and dangerous swamp lizards native to some offshore islands.

And, of course, I wrote about Dubowski and his search. On that I wrote reams.

Finally, however, the search began to settle down into dull routine, and I began to exhaust the myriad other topics Wraithworld offered. My output began to decline. I started to have time on my hands.

That's when I really began to enjoy Wraithworld. I began to take daily walks through the forests, ranging wider each day. I visited the ruins, and flew half a continent away to see the swamp lizards firsthand instead of by holo. I befriended a group of hunters passing through, and shot myself a rockcat. I accompanied some other hunts to the western seacoast, and nearly got myself killed by a plains devil.

And I began to talk to Sanders again.

Through all this, Sanders had pretty well ignored me and Dubowski and everyone else connected with the wraith research. He spoke to us grudgingly if at all, greeted us curtly, and spent all his free time with his other guests.

At first, after the way he had talked in the bar that night, I worried about what he might do. I had visions of him murdering someone out in the mists, and trying to make it look like a wraith killing. Or maybe just sabotaging the wraith traps. But I was sure he would try something to scare off Dubowski or otherwise undermine the expedition.

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Comes of watching too much holovision, I guess. Sanders did nothing of the sort. He merely sulked, glared at us in the castle corridors, and gave us less than full cooperation at all times.

After a while, though, he began to warm up again. Not toward Dubowski and his men. Just toward me.

I guess that was because of my walks in the forest. Dubowski never went out into the mists unless he had to. And then he went out reluctantly, and came back quickly. His men followed their chief's example. I was the only joker in the deck. But then, I wasn't really part of the same deck.

Sanders noticed, of course. He didn't miss much of what went on in his castle. And he began to speak to me again. Civilly. One day, finally, he even invited me for drinks again.

It was about two months into the expedition. Winter was coming to Wraithworld and Castle Cloud, and the air was getting cold and crisp. Dubowski and I were out on the dining balcony, lingering over coffee after another superb meal. Sanders sat at a nearby table, talking to some tourists.

I forget what Dubowski and I were discussing. Whatever it was, Dubowski interrupted me with a shiver at one point. "It's getting cold out here," he complained. "Why don't we move inside?" Dubowski never liked the dining balcony very much.

I sort of frowned. "It's not that bad," I said. "Besides, it's nearly sunset. One of the best parts of the day."

Dubowski shivered again, and stood up. "Suit yourself," he said. "But I'm going in. I don't feel like catching a cold just so you can watch another mist-fall."

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He started to walk off. But he hadn't taken three steps before Sanders was up out of his seat, howling like a wounded rockcat.

"Mistfall," he bellowed. "*Mistfall!*" He launched into a long, incoherent string of obscenities. I had never seen Sanders so angry, not even when he threw me out of the bar that first night. He stood there, literally trembling with rage, his face flushed, his fat fists clenching and unclenching at his sides.

I got up in a hurry, and got between them. Dubowski turned to me, looking baffled and scared. "Wha——" he started.

"Get inside," I interrupted. "Get up to your room. Get to the lounge. Get somewhere. Get anywhere. But get out of here before he kills you."

"But—but—what's wrong? What happened? I don't——"

"Mistfall is in the morning," I told him. "At night, at sunset, it's *mistrise*. Now *go*."

"That's *all*? Why should that get him so—so——"

"*GO!*"

Dubowski shook his head, as if to say he still didn't understand what was going on. But he went.

I turned to Sanders. "Calm down," I said. "Calm down."

He stopped trembling, but his eyes threw blaster bolts at Dubowski's back. "Mistfall," he muttered. "Two months that bastard has been here, and he doesn't know the difference between mistfall and *mistrise*."

"He's never bothered to watch either one," I said. "Things like that don't interest him. That's his loss, though. No reason for you to get upset about it."

He looked at me, frowning. Finally he nodded.

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"Yeah," he said. "Maybe you're right." He sighed. "But *mistfall*! Hell." There was a short silence, then, "I need a drink. Join me?"

I nodded.

We wound up in the same dark corner as the first night, at what must have been Sanders' favorite table. He put away three drinks before I had finished my first. Big drinks. Everything in Castle Cloud was big.

There were no arguments this time. We talked about mistfall, and the forests, and the ruins. We talked about the wraiths, and Sanders lovingly told me the stories of the great sightings. I knew them all already, of course. But not the way Sanders told them.

At one point, I mentioned that I'd been born in Bradbury when my parents were spending a short vacation on Mars. Sanders' eyes lit up at that, and he spent the next hour or so regaling me with Earthman jokes. I'd heard them all before, too. But I was getting more than a little drunk, and somehow they all seemed hilarious.

After that night, I spent more time with Sanders than with anyone else in the hotel. I thought I knew Wraithworld pretty well by that time. But that was an empty conceit, and Sanders proved it. He showed me hidden spots in the forests that have haunted me ever since. He took me to island swamps, where the trees are of a very different sort and sway horribly without a wind. We flew to the far north, to another mountain range where the peaks are higher and sheathed in ice, and to a southern plateau where the mists pour eternally over the edge in a ghostly imitation of a waterfall.

I continued to write about Dubowski and his wraith hunt, of course. But there was little new to write about, so most of my time was spent with San-

ders. I didn't worry too much about my output. My Wraithworld series had gotten excellent play on Earth and most of the colony worlds, so I thought I had it made.

Not so.

I'd been on Wraithworld just a little over three months when my syndicate beamed me. A few systems away, a civil war had broken out on a planet called New Refuge. They wanted me to cover it. No news was coming out of Wraithworld anyway, they said, since Dubowski's expedition still had over a year to run.

Much as I liked Wraithworld, I jumped at the chance. My stories had been getting a little stale, and I was running out of ideas, and the New Refuge thing sounded like it could be very big.

So I said good-bye to Sanders and Dubowski and Castle Cloud, and took a last walk through the mist forests, and booked passage on the next ship through.

The New Refuge civil war was a firecracker. I spent less than a month on the planet, but it was a dreary month. The place had been colonized by religious fanatics, but the original cult had schismed, and both sides accused the other of heresy. It was all very dingy. The planet itself had all the charm of a Martian suburb.

I moved on as quickly as I could, hopping from planet to planet, from story to story. In six months, I had worked myself back to Earth. Elections were coming up, so I got slapped onto a political beat. That was fine by me. It was a lively campaign, and there was a ton of good stories to be mined.

But throughout it all, I kept myself up on the little news that came out of Wraithworld. And finally,

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as I'd expected, Dubowski announced a press conference. As the syndicate's resident wraith, I got myself assigned to cover, and headed out on the fastest starship I could find.

I got there a week before the conference, ahead of everyone else. I had beamed Sanders before taking ship, and he met me at the spaceport. We adjourned to the dining balcony, and had our drinks served out there.

"Well?" I asked him, after we had traded amenities. "You know what Dubowski's going to announce?"

Sanders looked very glum. "I can guess," he said. "He called in all his damn gadgets a month ago, and he's been cross-checking findings on a computer. We've had a couple of wraith sightings since you left. Dubowski moved in hours after each sighting, and went over the areas with a fine-tooth comb. Nothing. That's what he's going to announce, I think. Nothing."

I nodded. "Is that so bad, though? Gregor found nothing."

"Not the same," Sanders said. "Gregor didn't look the way Dubowski has. People will believe him, whatever he says."

I wasn't so sure of that, and was about to say so, when Dubowski arrived. Someone must have told him I was there. He came striding out on the balcony, smiling, spied me, and came over to sit down.

Sanders glared at him, and studied his drink. Dubowski trained all of his attention on me. He seemed very pleased with himself. He asked what I'd been doing since I left, and I told him, and he said that was nice.

Finally I got to ask him about his results.

"No Comment," he said. "That's what I've called the press conference for."

"C'mon," I said. "I covered you for months when everybody else was ignoring the expedition. You can give me some kind of beat. What have you got?"

He hesitated. "Well, O.K.," he said doubtfully. "But don't release it yet. You can beam it out a few hours ahead of the conference. That should be enough time for a beat."

I nodded agreement. "What do you have?"

"The wraiths," he said. "I have the wraiths, bagged neatly. They don't exist. I've got enough evidence to prove it beyond a shadow of doubt." He smiled broadly.

"Just because you didn't find anything?" I started. "Maybe they were avoiding you. If they're sentient, they might be smart enough. Or maybe they're beyond the ability of your sensors to detect."

"Come now," Dubowski said. "You don't believe that. Our wraith traps had every kind of sensor we could come up with. If the wraiths existed, they would have registered on something. But they didn't. We had the traps planted in the areas where three of Sanders' so-called sightings took place. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Conclusive proof that those people were seeing things. Sightings, indeed."

"What about the deaths, the vanishings?" I asked. "What about the Gregor Expedition and the other classic cases?"

His smile spread. "Couldn't disprove all the deaths, of course. But our probes and our searches turned up four skeletons." He ticked them off on his fingers. "Two were killed by a rockslide, and one had rock-cat claw marks on the bones."

"The fourth?"

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"Murder," he said. "The body was buried in a shallow grave, clearly by human hands. A flood of some sort had exposed it. It was down in the records as a disappearance. I'm sure all the other bodies could be found, if we searched long enough. And we'd find that all died perfectly normal deaths."

Sanders raised his eyes from his drink. They were bitter eyes. "Gregor," he said stubbornly. "Gregor and the other classics."

Dubowski's smile became a smirk. "Ah, yes. We searched that area quite thoroughly. My theory was right. We found a tribe of apes nearby. Big brutes. Like giant baboons, with dirty white fur. Not a very successful species, either. We found only one small tribe, and they were dying out. But clearly, that was what Gregor's man sighted. And exaggerated all out of proportion."

There was silence. Then Sanders spoke, but his voice was beaten. "Just one question," he said softly. "Why?"

That brought Dubowski up short, and his smile faded. "You never have understood, have you, Sanders?" he said. "It was for truth. To free this planet from ignorance and superstition."

"Free Wraithworld?" Sanders said. "Was it enslaved?"

"Yes," Dubowski answered. "Enslaved by foolish myth. By fear. Now this planet will be free, and open. We can find out the truth behind those ruins now, without murky legends about half-human wraiths to fog the facts. We can open this planet for colonization. People won't be afraid to come here, and live, and farm. We've conquered the fear."

"A colony world? Here?" Sanders looked amused.

"Are you going to bring big fans to blow away the mists, or what? Colonists have come before. And left. The soil's all wrong. You can't farm here, with all these mountains. At least not on a commercial scale. There's no way you can make a profit growing things on Wraithworld.

"Besides, there are hundreds of colony worlds crying for people. Did you need another so badly? Must Wraithworld become yet another Earth?"

Sanders shook his head sadly, drained his drink, and continued. "You're the one who doesn't understand, Doctor. Don't kid yourself. You haven't freed Wraithworld. You've destroyed it. You've stolen its wraiths, and left an empty planet."

Dubowski shook his head. "I think you're wrong. They'll find plenty of good, profitable ways to exploit this planet. But even if you were correct, well, it's just too bad. Knowledge is what man is all about. People like you have tried to hold back progress since the beginning of time. But they failed, and you failed. Man needs to know."

"Maybe," Sanders said. "But is that the *only* thing man needs? I don't think so. I think he also needs mystery, and poetry, and romance. I think he needs a few unanswered questions, to make him brood and wonder."

Dubowski stood up abruptly, and frowned. "This conversation is as pointless as your philosophy, Sanders. There's no room in my universe for unanswered questions."

"Then you live in a very drab universe, Doctor."

"And you, Sanders, live in the stink of your own ignorance. Find some new superstitions if you must. But don't try to foist them off on me with your tales

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and legends. I've got no time for wraiths." He looked at me. "I'll see you at the press conference," he said. Then he turned and walked briskly from the balcony.

Sanders watched him depart in silence, then swiveled in his chair to look out over the mountains. "The mists are rising," he said.

Sanders was wrong about the colony too, as it turned out. They did establish one, although it wasn't much to boast of. Some vineyards, some factories, and a few thousand people; all belonging to no more than a couple of big companies.

Commercial farming did turn out to be unprofitable, you see. With one exception—a native grape, a fat gray thing the size of a lemon. So Wraithworld has only one export, a smoky white wine with a mellow, lingering flavor.

They call it mistwine, of course. I've grown fond of it over the years. The taste reminds me of mistfall somehow, and makes me dream. But that's probably me, not the wine. Most people don't care for it much.

Still, in a very minor way, it's a profitable item. So Wraithworld is still a regular stop on the space-lanes. For freighters, at least.

The tourists are long gone, though. Sanders was right about that. Scenery they can get closer to home, and cheaper. The wraiths were why they came.

Sanders is long gone, too. He was too stubborn and too impractical to buy in on the mistwine operations when he had the chance. So he stayed behind his ramparts at Castle Cloud until the last. I don't know what happened to him afterwards, when the hotel finally went out of business.

The castle itself is still there. I saw it a few years ago, when I stopped for a day en route to a story on

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New Refuge. It's already crumbling, though. Too expensive to maintain. In a few years, you won't be able to tell it from those other, older ruins.

Otherwise the planet hasn't changed much. The mists still rise at sunset, and fall at dawn. The Red Ghost is still stark and beautiful in the early morning light. The forests are still there, and the rockcats still prowl.

Only the wraiths are missing.

Only the wraiths.



Cliff Simak's stories have delighted me—and many other readers—for more than forty years. He is noted for his use of rural settings on Earth, and equally for his stories of other worlds and other life. Now he looks at Pluto, the little world at the edge of our Solar System—a world which somehow doesn't fit properly with any theory. How could anyone expect it to conform? Or quite accept what it was?

CLIFFORD D. SIMAK **Construction Shack**

In that same year when men first walked on Mars the probe was launched from the moon for Pluto. Five years later the first pictures were transmitted as the orbiting probe trained its cameras on the planet's surface. The transmission quality was poor; but even so, certain features of the photographs were productive of great anguish as old theories fell to shards and were replaced by puzzlement, questions with no hint of answers. The pictures seemed to say that the planet had a smooth, almost polished surface, without a single geographic feature to break the smoothness of it. Except that at certain places, equidistant from one another along the equator, were tiny dots that would have been taken for transmission noise if they had not appeared consistently. Too, the dots still persisted when some of the noise was eliminated. So it

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seemed they must be small geographic features or shadows cast by geographic features, although at Pluto's distance from the sun shadows would be suspect. The other data did nothing to lessen the anguish. The planet was smaller than supposed, less than a thousand miles in diameter, and its density worked out to 3.5 grams per cubic centimeter rather than the unrealistic figure of 60 grams, previously supposed.

This meant several things. It meant that somewhere out there, perhaps something more than seven billion miles from the sun, a tenth planet of the solar system swung in orbit, for no planet the size and mass of Pluto could explain the eccentricities in the orbits of Uranus and Neptune. The calculation of Pluto's mass, now proved inaccurate, had been based on the measurement of those eccentricities and it must be admitted now that something else must account for them.

Beyond that, Pluto was most strange—a smooth planet, featureless except for the evenly spaced dots. The smoothness certainly could not be explained by a non-turbulent atmosphere, for surely Pluto had to be too small and cold to hold an atmosphere. A surface of ice, men wondered, the frozen remnants of a one-time, momentary atmosphere? But for a number of reasons that didn't seem right, either. Metal, perhaps, but if the planet were of solid metal the density should be far greater.

The men on Earth consoled themselves. In five more years the probe would come back to Earth, carrying with it the films that it had taken and from them, the actual films and not the low-quality transmissions, perhaps much that was hazy now might become understandable. The probe swung in its

CONSTRUCTION SHACK

measured orbits and sent back more pictures, although they were little help, for the quality still was poor. Then it fired the automatic sequence that would head it back to Earth, and its beeping signals from far out in space said it was headed home on a true and steady course.

Something happened. The beeping stopped and there was a silence. Moon base waited. It might start up again. The silence might indicate only a momentary malfunction and the signals might start again. But they never did. Somewhere, some three billion miles from the sun, some mishap had befallen the homing probe. It was never heard again—it was lost forever.

There was no sense in sending out another probe until a day when technical advances could assure better pictures. The technical advances would have to be significant—small refinements would do little good.

The second and third manned expeditions went to Mars and came home again, bringing back, among many other things, evidence that primitive forms of life existed there, which settled once and for all the old, dark suspicion that life might be an aberration to be found only on the Earth. For with life on two planets in the same solar system there could no longer be any doubt that life was a common factor in the universe. The fourth expedition went out, landed and did not come back again and now there was on Mars a piece of ground that was forever Earth. The fifth expedition was sent out even while the Earth still paid tribute to those four men who had died so far from home.

Now that life had been found on another world, now that it was apparent that another planet at one time had held seas and rivers and an atmosphere that

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had been an approximation of Earth's own atmosphere, now that we knew we no longer were alone in the universe, the public interest and support of space travel revived. Scientists, remembering (never having, in fact, forgotten, for it had gnawed steadily at their minds) the puzzlement of the Pluto probe, began to plan a manned Pluto expedition, as there was still no sense in sending an instrumented probe.

When the day came to lift from the Moon Base, I was a member of the expedition. I went along as a geologist—the last thing a Pluto expedition needed.

There were three of us and any psychologist will tell you that three is a number that is most unfortunate. Two gang up on one or ignore one and there is always competition to be one of the gang of two. No one wants to stand alone with the other two against him. But it didn't work that way with us. We got along all right, although there were times when it was rough going. The five years that the probe took to arrive at Pluto was cut by more than half, not only because of improved rocket capability, but because a manned craft could pile on velocity that couldn't be programed—or at least safely programed—into a probe. But a bit more than two years is a long time to be cooped up in a tin can rocketing along in emptiness. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if you had some sense of speed, of really getting somewhere—but you haven't. You just hang there in space.

The three of us? Well, I am Howard Lunt and the other two were Orson Gates, a chemist, and Tyler Hampton, an engineer.

As I say, we got along fine. We played chess tournaments—yeah, three men in a tournament and

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it was all right because none of us knew chess. If we had been any good I suppose we would have been at one another's throats. We dreamed up dirty ditties and were so pleased with our accomplishments that we'd spend hours singing them and none of us could sing. We did a lot of other futile things—by now you should be getting the idea. There were some rather serious scientific experiments and observations we were supposed to make, but all of us figured that our first and biggest job was to manage to stay sane.

When we neared Pluto we dropped the fooling around and spent much time peering through the scope, arguing and speculating about what we saw. Not that there was much to see. The planet resembled nothing quite as much as a billiard ball. It was smooth. There were no mountains, no valleys, no craters—nothing marred the smoothness of the surface. The dots were there, of course. We could make out seven groups of them, all positioned along the equatorial belt. And in close-up they were not simply dots. They were structures of some kind.

We landed finally, near a group of them. The landing was a little harder than we had figured it would be. The planetary surface was hard—there was no give to it. But we stayed right-side up and we didn't break a thing.

People at times ask me to describe Pluto and it's a hard thing to put into words. You can say that it is smooth and that it's dark—it's dark even in broad daylight. The sun, at that distance, is not much more than a slightly brighter star. You don't have daylight on Pluto—you have starlight and it doesn't make much difference whether you're facing the sun or not. The planet is airless, of course, and waterless and

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cold. But cold, as far as human sensation is concerned, is a relative thing. Once the temperature gets down to a hundred Kelvin it doesn't much matter how much colder it becomes. Especially when you're wearing life support. Without a suit containing life support, you'd last only a few seconds, if that long, on a place like Pluto. I've never figured out which would kill you first—cold or internal pressure. Would you freeze—or explode before you froze?

So Pluto is dark, airless, cold and smooth. Those are the externals only. You stand there and look at the sun and realize how far away you are. You know you are standing at the edge of the solar system, that just out there, a little way beyond, you'd be clear outside the system. Which doesn't really have to be true, of course. You know about the tenth planet. Even if it's theory, it's supposed to be out there. You know about the millions of circling comets that technically are a part of the solar system, although they're so far out no one ever thinks of them. You could say to yourself this really is not the edge—the hypothetical tenth planet and the comets still are out there. But this is intellectualization; you're telling yourself something that your mind says may be true, but your gut denies. For hundreds of years Pluto has been the last outpost and this, by God, is Pluto and you're farther away from home than man has ever been before and you feel it. You don't belong to anything any more. You're in the back alley, and the bright and happy streets are so far away that you know you'll never find them.

It isn't homesickness that you feel. It's more like never having had a home. Of never having belonged anywhere. You get over it, of course—or come to live with it.

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So we came down out of the ship after we had landed and stood upon the surface. The first thing that struck us—other than the sense of lostness that at once grabbed all of us—was that the horizon was too near, much nearer than on the Moon. We felt at once that we stood on a small world. We noticed that horizon's nearness even before we noticed the buildings that the probe had photographed as dots and that we had dropped down to investigate. Perhaps buildings is not the right word—structures probably would be better. Buildings are enclosures and these were not enclosures. They were domes someone had set out to build and hadn't had time to finish. The basic underlying framework had been erected and then the work had stopped. Riblike arcs curved up from the surface and met overhead. Struts and braces held the frames solid, but that was as far as the construction had gone. There were three of them, one larger than the other two. The frames were not quite as simple as I may have made them seem. Tied into the ribs and struts and braces were a number of other structural units that seemed to have no purpose and make no sense at all.

We tried to make sense out of them and out of the scooped-out hollows that had been gouged out of the planetary surface within the confines of each construct—they had no floors and seemed fastened to the surface of the planet. The hollows were circular, some six feet across and three feet deep, and to me they looked like nothing quite as much as indentations made in a container of ice cream by a scoop.

About this time Tyler began to have some thoughts about the surface. Tyler is an engineer and should have had his thoughts immediately—and so should the rest of us—but the first hour or so outside the

ship had been considerably confusing. We had worn our suits in training, of course, and had done some walking around in them, but Pluto seemed to have even less gravity than had been calculated and we had to get used to it before we could be reasonably comfortable. Nor had anything else been exactly as we had anticipated.

"This surface," Tyler said to me. "There is something wrong with it."

"We knew it was smooth," said Orson. "The pictures showed that. Coming in, we could see it for ourselves."

"This smooth?" Tyler asked. "This even?" He turned to me. "It isn't geologically possible. Would you say it is?"

"I would think not," I said. "If there had been any upheaval at all this floor would be rugged. There can't have been any erosion—anything to level it down. Micrometeorite impacts, maybe, but not too many of them. We're too far out for meteorites of any size. And while micrometeorites might pit the surface there would be no leveling process."

Tyler let himself down on his knees rather awkwardly. He brushed a hand across the surface. The seeing was not too good, but you could see that there was dust, a thin layer of dust, a powdering.

"Shine a light down here," said Tyler.

Orson aimed his light at the spot. Some of the gray dust still clung where Tyler had wiped his hand, but there were streaks where the darker surface showed through.

"Space dust," said Tyler.

Orson said, "There should be damn little of it."

"True," said Tyler. "But over four billion years or

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more, it would accumulate. It couldn't be erosion dust, could it?"

"Nothing to cause erosion," I said. "This must be as close to a dead planet as you ever get. Not enough gravity to hold any of the gases—if there ever were gases. At one time there must have been, but they've all gone—they went early. No atmosphere, no water. I doubt there ever was any accumulation. A molecule wouldn't hang around for long."

"But space dust would?"

"Maybe. Some sort of electrostatic attraction, maybe."

Tyler scrubbed the little patch of surface again with his gloved hand, removing more of the dust, with more of the darker surface showing through.

"Have we got a drill?" he asked. "A specimen drill."

"I have one in my kit," said Orson. He took it out and handed it to Tyler. Tyler positioned the bit against the surface, pressed the button. In the light of the torch you could see the bit spinning. Tyler put more weight on the drill.

"It's harder than a bitch," he said.

The bit began to bite. A small pile of fragments built up around the hole. The surface was hard, no doubt of that. The pit didn't go too deep and the pile of fragments was small.

Tyler gave up. He lifted out the bit and snubbed off the motor.

"Enough for analysis?" he asked.

"Should be," said Orson. He took the bit from Tyler and handed him a small specimen bag. Tyler laid the open mouth of the bag on the surface and brushed the fragments into it.

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"Now we'll know," he said. "Now we will know something."

A couple of hours later, back in the ship, we knew.

"I have it," Orson said, "but I don't believe it."

"Metal?" asked Tyler.

"Sure, metal. But not the kind you have in mind. It's steel."

"Steel?" I said, horrified. "It can't be. Steel's no natural metal. It's manufactured."

"Iron," said Orson. "Nickel. Molybdenum, vanadium, chromium. That works out to steel. I don't know as much about steel as I should. But it's steel—a good steel. Corrosion resistant, tough, strong."

"Maybe just the platform for the structures," I said. "Maybe a pad of steel to support them. We took the specimen close to one of them."

"Let's find out," said Tyler.

We opened up the garage and ran down the ramp and got out the buggy. Before we left we turned off the television camera. By this time Moon Base would have seen all they needed to see and if they wanted more they could ask for it. We had given them a report on everything we had found—all except the steel surface and the three of us agreed that until we knew more about that we would not say anything. It would be a while in any case until we got an answer from them. The time lag to Earth was about sixty hours each way.

We went out ten miles and took a boring sample and came back, following the thin tracks the buggy made in the dust, taking samples every mile. We got the answer that I think all of us expected we would get, but couldn't bring ourselves to talk about. The samples all were steel.

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It didn't seem possible, of course, and it took us a while to digest the fact, but finally we admitted that on the basis of best evidence Pluto was no planet, but a fabricated metal ball, small-planet size. But God-awful big for anyone to build.

Anyone?

That was the question that now haunted us. Who had built it? Perhaps more important—why had they built it? For some purpose, surely, but why, once that purpose had been fulfilled (if, in fact, it had been fulfilled) had Pluto been left out here at the solar system's rim?

"No one from the system," Tyler said. "There's no one but us. Mars has life, of course, but primitive life. It got a start there and hung on and that was all. Venus is too hot. Mercury is too close to the sun. The big gas planets? Maybe, but not the kind of life that would build a thing like this. It had to be something from outside."

"How about the fifth planet?" suggested Orson.

"There probably never was a fifth planet," I said. "The material for it may have been there, but the planet never formed. By all the rules of celestial mechanics there should have been a planet between Mars and Jupiter, but something went haywire."

"The tenth planet, then," said Orson.

"No one is really positive there is a tenth," said Tyler.

"Yeah, you're right," said Orson. "Even if there were it would be a poor bet for life, let alone intelligence."

"So that leaves us with outsiders," said Tyler.

"And a long time ago," said Orson.

"Why do you say that?"

"The dust. There isn't much dust in the universe."

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"And no one knows what it is. There is the dirty ice theory."

"I see what you're getting at. But it needn't be ice. Nor graphite nor any of the other things that have been——"

"You mean it's that stuff out there."

"It could be. What do you think, Howard?"

"I can't be sure," I said. "The only thing I know is that it couldn't be erosive."

Before we went to sleep we tried to fix up a report to beam back to Moon Base, but anything we put together sounded too silly and unbelievable. So we gave up. We'd have to tell them some time, but we could wait.

When we awoke we had a bite to eat, then got into our suits and went out to look over the structures. They still didn't make much sense, especially all the crazy contraptions that were fastened on the ribs and struts and braces. Nor did the scooped-out hollows.

"If they were only up on legs," said Orson, "they could be used as chairs."

"But not very comfortable," said Tyler.

"If you tilted them a bit," said Orson. But that didn't figure either. They would still be uncomfortable. I wondered why he thought of them as chairs. They didn't look like any chairs to me.

We pottered around a lot, not getting anywhere. We looked the structures over inch by inch, wondering all the while if there was something we had missed. But there didn't seem to be.

Now comes the funny part of it. I don't know why we did it—out of sheer desperation, maybe. But failing to find any clues, we got down on our hands and knees, dusting at the surface with our

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hands. What we hoped to find, I don't know. It was slow going and it was a dirty business, with the dust tending to stick to us.

"If we'd only brought some brooms along," said Orson.

But we had no brooms. Who in his right mind would have thought we would want to sweep a planet?

So there we were. We had what appeared to be a manufactured planet and we had some stupid structures for which we could deduce not a single reason. We had come a long ways and we had been expected to make some tremendous discovery once we landed. We had made a discovery, all right, but it didn't mean a thing.

We finally gave up with the sweeping business and stood there, scuffing our feet and wondering what to do next when Tyler suddenly let out a yell and pointed at a place on the surface where his boots had kicked away the dust.

We all bent to look at what he had found. We saw three holes in the surface, each an inch or so across and some three inches deep, placed in a triangle and close together. Tyler got down on his hands and knees and shone his light down into the holes, each one of them in turn.

Finally he stood up. "I don't know," he said. "They could maybe be a lock of some sort. Like a combination. There are little notches on the sides, down at the bottom of them. If you moved those notches just right something might happen."

"Might blow ourselves up, maybe," said Orson. "Do it wrong and bang!"

"I don't think so," said Tyler. "I don't think it's

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anything like that. I don't say it's a lock, either. But I don't think it's a bomb. Why should they booby-trap a thing like this?"

"You can't tell what they might have done," I said. "We don't know what kind of things they were or why they were here."

Tyler didn't answer. He got down again and began carefully dusting the surface, shining his light on it while he dusted. We didn't have anything else to do, so we helped him.

It was Orson who found it this time—a hairline crack you had to hold your face down close to the surface to see. Having found it, we did some more dusting and worried it out. The hairline described a circle and the three holes were set inside and to one edge of it. The circle was three feet or so in diameter.

"Either of you guys good at picking locks?" asked Tyler.

Neither of us were.

"It's got to be a hatch of some sort," Orson said. "This metal ball we're standing on has to be a hollow ball. If it weren't its mass would be greater than it is."

"And no one," I said, "would be insane enough to build a solid ball. It would take too much metal and too much energy to move."

"You're sure that it was moved?" asked Orson.

"It had to be," I told him. "It wasn't built in this system. No one here could have built it."

Tyler had pulled a screwdriver out of his tool kit and was poking into the hole with it.

"Wait a minute," said Orson. "I just thought of something."

He nudged Tyler to one side, reached down and inserted three fingers into the holes and pulled. The circular section rose smoothly on its hinges.

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Wedged into the area beneath the door were objects that looked like the rolls of paper you buy to wrap up Christmas presents. Bigger than rolls of paper, though. Six inches or so across.

I got hold of one of them and that first one was not easy to grip, for they were packed in tightly. But I managed with much puffing and grunting to pull it out. It was heavy and a good four feet in length.

Once we got one out, the other rolls were easier to lift. We pulled out three more and headed for the ship.

But before we left I held the remaining rolls over to one side, to keep them from tilting, while Orson shone his light down into the hole. We had half expected to find a screen or something under the rolls, with the hole extending on down into a cavity that might have been used as living quarters or a work-room. But the hole ended in machined metal. We could see the grooves left by the drill or die that had bored the hole. That hole had just one purpose, to store the rolls we had found inside it.

Back in the ship we had to wait a while for the rolls to pick up some heat before we could handle them. Even so we had to wear gloves when we began to unroll them. Now, seeing them in good light, we realized that they were made up of many sheets rolled up together. The sheets seemed to be made of some sort of extremely thin metal or tough plastic. They were stiff from the cold and we spread them out on our lone table and weighted them down to hold them flat.

On the first sheet were diagrams of some sort, drawings and what might have been specifications written into the diagrams and along the margins. The

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specifications, of course, meant nothing to us (although later some were puzzled out and mathematicians and chemists were able to figure out some of the formulas and equations).

"Blueprints," said Tyler. "This whole business was an engineering job."

"If that's the case," said Orson, "those strange things fastened to the structural frames could be mounts to hold engineering instruments."

"Could be," said Tyler.

"Maybe the instruments are stored in some other holes like the one where we found the blueprints," I suggested.

"I don't think so," said Tyler. "They would have taken the instruments with them when they left."

"Why didn't they take the blueprints, too?"

"The instruments would have been worthwhile to take. They could be used on another job. But the blueprints couldn't. And there may have been many sets of prints and spec sheets. These we have may be only one of many sets of duplicates. There would have been a set of master prints and those they might have taken with them when they left."

"What I don't understand," I said, "is what they could have been building out here. What kind of construction? And why here? I suppose we could think of Pluto as a massive construction shack, but why exactly here? With all the galaxy to pick from, why this particular spot?"

"You ask too many questions all at once," Orson told me.

"Let's look," said Tyler. "Maybe we'll find out."

He peeled the first sheet off the top and let it drop to the floor. It snapped back to the rolled-up position.

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The second sheet told us nothing, nor did the third or fourth. Then came the fifth sheet.

"Now, here is something," said Tyler.

We leaned close to look.

"It's the solar system," Orson said.

I counted rapidly. "Nine planets."

"Where's the tenth?" asked Orson. "There should be a tenth."

"Something's wrong," said Tyler. "I don't know what it is."

I spotted it. "There's a planet between Mars and Jupiter."

"That means there is no Pluto shown," said Orson.

"Of course not," said Tyler. "Pluto never was a planet."

"Then this means there once actually was a planet between Mars and Jupiter," said Orson.

"Not necessarily," Tyler told him. "It may only mean there was supposed to be."

"What do you mean?"

"They bungled the job," said Tyler. "They did a sloppy piece of engineering."

"You're insane!" I shouted at him.

"Your blind spot is showing, Howard. According to what we think, perhaps it is insane. According to the theories our physicists have worked out. There is a cloud of dust and gas and the cloud contracts to form a protostar. Our scientists have invoked a pretty set of physical laws to calculate what happens. Physical laws that were automatic—since no one would be mad enough to postulate a gang of cosmic engineers who went about the universe building solar systems."

"But the tenth planet," persisted Orson. "There has to be a tenth planet. A big, massive——"

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"They messed up the projected fifth planet," Tyler said. "God knows what else they messed up. Venus, maybe. Venus shouldn't be the kind of planet it is. It should be another Earth, perhaps a slightly warmer Earth, but not the hellhole it is. And Mars. They loused that up, too. Life started there, but it never had a chance. It hung on and that was all. And Jupiter, Jupiter is a monstrosity——"

"You think the only reason for a planet's existence is its capability of supporting life?"

"I don't know, of course. But it should be in the specs. Three planets that could have been life-bearing and of these only one was successful."

"Then," said Orson, "there could be a tenth planet. One that wasn't even planned."

Tyler rapped his fist against the sheet. "With a gang of clowns like this anything could happen."

He jerked away the sheet and tossed it to the floor.

"There!" he cried. "Look here."

We crowded in and looked.

It was a cross section, or appeared to be a cross section, of a planet.

"A central core," said Tyler. "An atmosphere——"

"Earth?"

"Could be. Could be Mars or Venus."

The sheet was covered with what could have been spec notations.

"It doesn't look quite right," I protested.

"It wouldn't if it were Mars or Venus. And how sure are you of Earth?"

"Not sure at all," I said.

He jerked away the sheet to reveal another one.

We puzzled over it.

"Atmospheric profile," I guessed half-heartedly.

"These are just general specs," said Tyler. "The

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details will be in some of the other rolls. We have a lot of them out there."

I tried to envision it. A construction shack set down in a cloud of dust and gas. Engineers who may have worked for millennia to put together stars and planets; to key into them certain factors that still would be at work, billions of years later.

Tyler said they had bungled and perhaps they had. But maybe not with Venus. Maybe Venus had been built to different specifications. Maybe it had been designed to be the way it was. Perhaps, a billion years from now, when humanity might well be gone from Earth, a new life and a new intelligence would rise on Venus.

Maybe not with Venus, maybe with none of the others, either. We could not pretend to know.

Tyler was still going through the sheets.

"Look here," he was yelling. "Look here—the bunglers——"

Most science fiction readers expect to find intelligent aliens on other worlds. But we've dropped the Bug-Eyed Monsters and learned to accept intelligence regardless of form. But what is an alien? Is he a different being physically—or mentally? And perhaps the most familiar is sometimes the most alien.

THOMAS N. SCORTIA **Thou Good and Faithful**

On the second night of planetfall on Berrigan's World, Lieutenant Royce met Meer on the Street of Reeds. In the half light of the ochre moon, her face was delicate and only slightly alien. The fine down that covered her face and hands shone like a faint aura. She smiled when she saw him and hurried to meet him.

"It is good to see you," she said. The greeting was ritual but he sensed something more than that in the tone.

"It is good to see you," he replied and then explained, "I was restless; so I decided to take a walk."

"Past your guards and your screens and all that into the night of an alien planet. Is that not dangerous?" she teased.

"I suppose it's against regulations," he admitted, "but the party commander does have certain prerogatives."

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"Come walk me to the square," she said, touching his arm. He felt a flush of pleasure at her touch. Watch yourself, he told himself. It's only a pretty girl and you've been on space duty a long time. Still it's a pleasant night and . . .

"I'd be delighted," he said, extending his arm.

They walked to the edge of the square which was almost a thousand meters across. Actually it was an ellipse dominated in its cobblestoned center by a featureless monolithic structure that towered into the yellow-streaked night sky. It seemed strangely brooding and menacing.

"It is my turn to watch in the Archives over the sacred Vessels tonight," she said. "I'm late and my sister will be impatient."

"What are these Vessels?" he asked. "I would like to see them."

She shook her head. "You know it isn't possible. My father explained that. Of all the things you might ask, this one only we cannot allow. Berrigan in the ancient times made the rule and only the daughters of the Senior and those who are joining their lives may ever see the Vessels."

"But what are they?" he asked.

"Really nothing," she said. "A few plastic cases of records, ancient histories, several pieces of apparatus we do not understand, nothing really."

"I've seen odder things form the basis of a religion," he admitted.

She laughed in the half-darkness. "No, it is not a religion with us. Still, Berrigan made the rules long ago and we keep the rules."

She turned and he watched her delicate form move across the great square, treading a flattened parabolic

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path that was traced by deeper colored stones into the pavement. The reason for the path eluded him but he supposed that Berrigan, that ancient recluse who had settled this world, had some odd symbolic reason for structuring the square in this manner.

He waited until he could barely make out her form against the darker shadows of the building they called the Archives. Peculiar. Why not temple or some similar word? No, she had said that there was nothing of a religious nature about the building. There wouldn't be, of course; all the old records showed that Berrigan had been a militant atheist.

He returned to the shuttle encampment by the way of the Street of Willows, thinking that it was a shame they would be on this lovely world for such a short time. The *Deneb* was his first starship post as executive officer and this was the first extended planetfall of their extended duty. He was grateful for the respite. It was the only time in a year he had allowed himself to relax from the heavy demands of his new assignment. The *Deneb* orbited invisibly high overhead under the command of Captain Grek, and Royce supposed he should shuttle back within the next two days to report their progress. At the moment he was too concerned, however, with seeing the first fermenting batches of keelgrass run successfully through the extraction process.

Besides there was Windom. Mr. Windom, he corrected himself with faint irony. It was the custom of the military to refer to civilians, even civil servants of Windom's rank, simply by their last names, reserving the "mister" for someone of military rank. Not so with Windom, who insisted from the start on being addressed as Mr. Windom. It was both-

ersome, Royce thought, but you didn't lock horns with a man of Mr. Windom's rank on trivial matters of etiquette.

He reached the edge of the encampment which sprawled on the north border of the city, its temporary metal buildings ordered in ranks like the points of a star around the *Deneb's* shuttle. The sentry challenged him and then saluted when he returned the challenge. His ring chronometer told him that it was already into the second watch, much later than he had thought. He was surprised as he approached his quarters to find Mr. Windom standing by the officers' mess, staring silently into a burning rjehlstick. He did not identify the man immediately, but the faint coal glowing in the darkness told him who it was. No one on the crew indulged in this particular mild vice, indeed few of the officers or men could afford it.

"Mr. Royce," the man began without preliminary, "I've been waiting for your return. There's something we must discuss." Windom's voice was cold and mechanical in the dark, its accents just faintly slurred from the influence of the rjehl.

"Tonight, Mr. Windom? I'm rather tired."

"Tonight, Mr. Royce," the man insisted.

"Come on in," Royce said, gesturing toward his quarters.

They entered the outer wardroom and he keyed the light with a modulated whistle and then toned it to a soft blue that rested the eyes. Windom entered behind him and noting Royce's pointed gaze at the rjehlstick, discarded it in the corner dispenser. The stimulus of the smoke was the last thing Royce wanted in his system before bedtime.

"Mr. Royce," Windom said, "I'll come right to the

point. We are already thirty hours behind in the assembly of the towers and we may expect the first of the keelgrass to be out of the fermenters by second watch tomorrow afternoon."

"We've gone ahead as fast as we can," Royce said.

"The designs I brought you when I came aboard were detailed and highly simplified. Your engineers should have been able to assemble the towers and run their first tests by this afternoon."

"I'm sure Mr. Gerhardt has done his best. . . ."

"Which is certainly not good enough," Windom interrupted coldly.

Royce's first impulse was to snap at the man but he contained his temper with difficulty. "The difference between a computer model study of an assembly and the reality on foreign terrain is something we should all appreciate," he said. He found his dislike of the man with his supercilious manner coloring his speech. It was an unfortunate reaction, he told himself. Like many humans, Windom came from a planet where genetic manipulation had made changes in the basic stock. The changes about the nostrils with the heavy filter membranes flaring the nares, coupled with a pronounced mongoloid fold, gave Windom a look that on Royce's world was associated with an expression of disdain. The cast to Windom's features was subtle and Royce knew that he was operating under an unreasonable prejudice. Still he could not but think the man was sneering at him as he spoke.

"Mr. Royce," Windom said in a more conciliatory voice, "I understand the problems of command. This is why I was assigned to this project from Prime. Nevertheless, every day we delay means the death of thousands of highly civilized beings and the slow col-

lapse of a hard-built society on Aldebaran II. The biological we were sent to procure can halt the plague and little else that we know can help."

"You'll have your five thousand kilos in the ninety days," Royce promised.

"The ninety days was the estimate Prime gave us. We must better that if we can," Windom said.

"Yes," Royce said, "it would look better on our efficiency reports." He emphasized the "our" and then wished he hadn't. Windom's gaze was cold.

"It's not a question of our efficiency reports," Windom said. "I grant you this is important to us personally, but even more important is that every day shaved from the estimate represents several thousand lives."

"Of course," Royce said. "I'll meet with Mr. Gerhardt first thing tomorrow."

"Good," Windom said rising. At the door, he paused and looked back. "Mr. Royce," he said somewhat hesitantly.

"Yes, Mr. Windom."

"It isn't too wise to become too close to the natives."

"I quite agree, Mr. Windom," Royce said angrily. "Now, if you don't mind. . . ."

"Good night," Windom said and the hatch irised behind his lean back.

For a long time Royce sat, staring at the discarded rjehlstick. His anger was unreasonable, of course. Windom had conducted himself in every way in the most correct of fashions. There *was* a severe pressure on them to complete the mission. The EDA, the complex nucleic acid—dipinacolamine adinolic acid—could not be synthesized in Prime laboratories and only an extensive search of the old archives had

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shown that the keelgrass on Berrigan's World produced the material in small quantities. The medico-computer models had predicted that this was the specific for the Aldebaran II plague, and fortunately the one report filed by Berrigan before he broke off all communication with Prime included a sample of the grass.

He must have been a remarkably odd man, Berrigan, Royce thought. One of the leading molecular biologists of his age—indeed the man who had been primarily responsible for inventing the genetic manipulation techniques that opened so many inhospitable worlds to human beings. Yet he had been a recluse and a profound misanthrope. (There was reason enough for that, Royce thought, considering the history of old Earth during that period.) He had assembled a group of colonists, set out for a perimeter of the galaxy and, except for the one robot probe that returned basic information on the world, he had simply disappeared from human society. And during that period human society was too much occupied with its own troubles to worry about him. Until now when only Berrigan's World could yield the specific biological for the Aldebaran II plague.

Royce turned to the day's reports on his desk. He had to admit that Windom was right. That was the trouble with the man; he seemed always to be right. They were behind schedule and the reason for that was largely poor planning by Gerhardt's men. He would have to push them harder and, of course, they would have to push the natives harder for the keelgrass. God knows, they got little enough of the EDA out of the stuff. Scarcely ten micrograms from a kilo of the stuff and that meant a great deal to process before they reached their target. He closed the folder

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and decided to call it a night. Time enough tomorrow to talk with Gerhardt. He was not disturbed as he drifted off to sleep to find that his thoughts were pleasantly and somewhat erotically occupied with Meer.

The next morning Royce found the *Deneb's* chief engineer, Mr. Gerhardt, climbing over the huge distribution towers, a radiation counter in his hands as he sampled effluents from various plates and tested them. Finally he dropped to the ground, a look of triumph on his face, and approached Royce. "Dammit," he announced in a rumbling gleeful voice, "I knew we could improve on the design."

"What do you mean?" Royce demanded.

"We changed the angles and the distribution of the plates from the original design."

"You should have consulted with me," Royce said hotly.

"Come on, Mr. Royce, you wouldn't have allowed it. You're too much at odds with Windom. Anyway it worked; I've just run a complete tracer analysis on the columns and the separation has been increased by some thirty percent in efficiency."

Royce's anger evaporated in an instant. He chuckled and said, "Come with me. I want to see Windom's face when he hears this."

They walked across the processing area to where Windom was speaking with Couton, Meer's father and Senior of the loose Berrigan's World government.

"Couton has promised a fifty percent increase in keelgrass delivery by four days from now," Windom said.

"Really," Royce said feeling smug. "How will he do that?"

"Some of their less desirable agrarian areas will be converted to growing the grass. It's a weed, you know, and matures in about a week."

"Good, we can certainly handle it." Then he told Windham of what Gerhardt had done.

"That was rash, of course," Windom said slowly.

"We are faced with a *fait accompli*," Royce said innocently. Windom looked at him closely and then at Gerhardt whose face bore an expression of quiet triumph.

"I don't think you understand me, Mr. Royce," Windom said. "I said it was rash but obviously Mr. Gerhardt had his reasons for the gamble. I never challenge the results of a man who shows he knows how to do a job."

Royce's face fell. He had been expecting some sort of diatribe about exceeding authority and jumping channels. Instead . . .

"Well done, Mr. Gerhardt," Mr. Windom said. "We can now use your extra capacity."

"Thank you, Mr. Windom," Gerhardt said. Royce was annoyed at the obvious signs of Gerhardt's pleasure. He realized that in some fashion Windom had snatched a clear moral victory out of defeat.

"I will go about the arrangements for greater deliveries," Couton said.

"You may require a better transportation system than your animal carts," Windom said.

"We have anticipated that. I have allotted a crew of five thousand to build a gravity monorail from the fields that are a hundred kilometers or more distant." He secured a map that Windom was holding and pointed out the extent of the operation.

"But that's your most productive farm land," Royce objected.

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"Is this not more important?" Couton asked. "Besides we can make do."

Royce nodded doubtfully and the old man left. "That will probably disrupt the local economy," Royce said slowly.

"That's true," Windom said.

"Do we want to do that?"

"We are in the process of saving lives. If the Berri-gan people are inconvenienced, Mr. Royce, let me remind you how much more inconvenient it is being dead."

He whirled on his heel and walked away.

That afternoon Captain Grek videoed from the bridge of the *Deneb*, his bluish face severe and unsmiling. The only sign that betrayed his concern was his tendency to flick the nictitating membranes rapidly across his eyes.

"Mr. Royce," he said, "there is something quite odd happening in the northern part of the major continent a thousand kilometers north of you."

"What's that, Captain?" Royce asked.

"As you know, that area is covered with heavy virgin forests. It appears that a very large work force has descended on this area and in a matter of a day has already deforested almost a quarter of the area. They appear to be about to make a complete job of it."

"I would imagine they are gathering materials for the monorail they promised," Royce said.

"The point is, Mr. Royce," Grek said slowly, "these forests are essential to the control of ground water during the rainy season. The removal of them will result in disastrous floods later this year and probably a large loss of life."

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Royce considered this and said, "I'll look into it, Captain."

The monorail was needed, of course, to fulfill their mission and the Berrigan natives for some reason were content to menace their own ecology to help fulfill the *Deneb's* mission. Should he interfere? After all, after the mission was complete they could send other missions to help reforest the area. Still . . .

Still, he thought, it presents a difficult moral problem. He thought of taking it up with Windom but he was quite sure already what that man's reaction would be. Still, the whole problem bothered him. He promised himself he would speak with Meer at the first opportunity about it.

By the next day the first of the fermented keel-grass was well into the processing cycle. "It's quite apparent," Windom said, "that our capacity is quite a bit greater than what we had hoped."

"We have a great deal of the weed maturing in the north and central provinces," Couton said. "Its normal cycle is six to seven days which means that we can increase our deliveries severalfold later this week."

"I thought you'd practically eliminated the keel-grass except for the central plains," Royce asked.

"Ths is true," Couton shrugged, "but we have diverted more land to its cultivation. The yield of the material you need is so low that we must grow a great deal of the grass to meet your needs."

True to his promise the deliveries of the grass to the fermenting racks increased by more than twice in the next four days. Gerhardt one evening triumphantly entered Royce's quarters, where he was in conference with Windom, with a small vial. "Well,

there's the beastie," he announced, holding out the vial.

Nestled inside were several small opalescent crystals. "The product of three days' extraction," Gerhardt said.

"And we need five thousand kilos," Royce said. "We'll never get it at this rate."

"Not at all," Windom said, before Gerhardt could speak. "The solutions of the extractors had to reach saturation first. From this point on we should expect nearly a hundred kilos a day."

"That's right," Gerhardt said, eyeing Windom oddly. "How did you know that?"

Windom smiled distantly. "I have always made it my business to know as much about the details of an operation as possible."

"That's very good," Royce said, feeling vaguely put down.

He was still a little disturbed at this new evidence of Windom's competence when he went for his walk that evening. Like many military men, he had been brought up to believe that bureaucrats were largely generators of red tape and road blocks, people who interposed masses of paper between the doers and the task. It must have occurred to him at one time or another that the complex workings of Galactic Prime could not be carried out by incompetents but this was his first exposure to a high-ranking civil service rating. The man, he finally decided, was working overtime to impress him.

His path inevitably took him down the Street of Reeds and he realized that he had timed his arrival to that hour when he knew Meer would be relieved by her sister at the Archives. Consciously he had not intended this, but he realized that a deeper motiva-

tion was working. The girl had been on his mind for some time with her fey beauty and her special winning grace. He had never found a woman before who seemed somehow to mesh so completely with his own inner image of maleness. He supposed that it was a matter of being personally flattered, coupled with a basic animal lust.

Only he wondered if it were not more than that. He would have to be careful, he warned himself. It would be so easy under the watchful eye of Windom to compromise his career at this time.

He was standing against the adobe wall of a two-story building when he saw her wending her way across the square, following the devious elliptical pattern. She came abreast of him and started.

"Oh, I didn't expect you," she said.

"Didn't you?" he asked.

"Well, that's not true," she said. "I hoped you would be here. I've expected you the past three nights."

"Can I walk with you?" he asked.

"Of course," she said. "Come to my home. My father would be pleased to share keelwine with you."

They took up a pace side by side. Royce felt awkward, almost as if he were a teenager on his first date. He had never felt so with women before, but the women he had known were knowledgeable and adept at the little civilized games the sexes play on the humanoid planets. Meer was completely innocent. Yes, he thought, that was exactly the word. Innocent.

After several blocks, she turned down a side street and stopped at an unimposing single-story sprawling structure. "This is my home," she said. "Won't you come in?"

Couton met them in the single common room.

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Royce noted sleeping pallets laid in the far corner and several low tables designed obviously for squatting rather than sitting.

"You honor my house," Couton said.

Royce made polite noises. They spoke of the day's happenings for some moments while Meer busied herself in the corner. She returned with a tray of earthenware mugs and a large earthenware bottle.

"We have little to offer in hospitality," she said. "The supplies of food and wine are growing increasingly scarce."

"I didn't know that," Royce said.

"It's of no matter," Couton said. He poured the wine into two mugs and they squatted and drank. Meer squatted beside Royce and after his first sip, she took the mug and sipped herself. He wondered at the gesture until it was repeated each time he drank. Couton looked on with approval.

"I must leave," Royce said at last.

"You would not care to spend the night?" Couton asked.

"I'm afraid I would cramp you," Royce said, noting that there were only two pallets.

"You would be with Meer, of course," Couton said matter-of-factly.

Royce fidgeted uncomfortably. Was this a part of the local custom? Would he commit some grievous offense by refusing? He eyed Meer, who looked at him with great brown eyes that were moist and very willing. For a moment he felt a tense excitement well up in him and he thought, who would know? Then common sense asserted itself and he knew he would have to take the chance of offending.

"I'm sorry," he said, rising. "It's not possible this evening."

Couton's face fell while Meer turned hers aside. "Did something displease you? Is there any way that I can make amends?" the father asked.

"No, no," Royce assured him. "Your daughter is a delight and certainly the most desirable woman I have ever met. It's just that it's impossible now."

"An injunction?" Couton said, nodding. "We understand that. We have been obeying Berrigan's injunctions for centuries. Perhaps the situation will change?"

"Perhaps?" Meer asked, her voice low and hopeful.

He patted her hand self-consciously, suddenly painfully aware of the odd articulation and the soft, almost invisible coating of down. "Perhaps," he said, feeling completely defeated by the situation.

He finally took his leave, pausing to talk with Meer at the door, and returned to the encampment. He fell asleep, feeling vaguely disturbed and more . . . vaguely disappointed.

The noon staff meeting the next day proved disturbing. "One of the problems," Gerhardt said, "is that in spite of our greater purification capacity, yields of EDA are off by about eighteen per cent."

"Have you run an analysis of the keelgrass we're getting?" Windom asked.

"Of course. That seems to be the problem. The natives rely heavily on phosphate and inorganic nitrate fertilizers they get from mines to the west. Now that they have been diverting a good portion of their farm land to the grass, they're forced to use land that's been heavily fertilized grass for centuries."

"That stuff is a weed," Royce objected.

"That's true," Gerhardt said, "and weeds are highly adaptive. The keelgrass adapts to a high nitro-

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gen soil by producing a diamino analogue of EDA which cuts down on the available EDA itself."

"Then we'll simply have to increase production," Windom said.

"I don't think you realize what that means," Royce said. "We've already in the past three weeks diverted a large part of their labor force and a good portion of their arable land to our purposes. To increase that demand might be dangerous to them."

"We will not have to make the demand," Windom said somewhat smugly. "They'll do it willingly."

"Dammit, I won't have you jeopardize the lives of hundreds of innocent natives to carry out this mission."

"Mr. Gerhardt," Windom said, "will you leave us?"

As soon as the Chief Engineer had departed, Windom whirled on Royce. "Mister Royce, I respect your humanitarian concerns but the fact remains that I will willingly sacrifice the lives of thousands of backward natives to save an advanced culture such as the one we have planted on Aldebaran II. You can call that cynical or inhuman or what have you, but the choice is simple enough. It is a choice that I'm empowered to make."

"You bastard, Windom," Royce said. "You're a devil." He rose to leave.

"All effective men at times are devils," Windom said wryly, "and it's Mr. Windom, if you don't mind, Mr. Royce."

Royce stalked out in disgust.

The crude wooden monorail brought in fresh keelgrass from the north and west each day. Some of the outlying dairy islands were now involved in the effort and as the weeks wore on into the second month, the

racks of fermenting keelgrass mounted around the extractors and countercurrent towers. Royce shuttled back to the ship the fifth week to report and confer with Captain Grek. The man's lidded eyes were cold and emotionless but Royce noted an undercurrent of concern about him.

"Mr. Royce," Grek said at last, "as you know, my own race has quite a history of exploitation at the hands of the parent stock."

"Yes," Royce said.

"A most shameful history, if I may say so?"

"I agree," Royce said.

"What I see happening below is very much the same kind of exploitation. Whole cities to the north have now been abandoned and are deteriorating as the inhabitants move to the harvesting work camps."

"This is not something we requested," Royce said.

"Nevertheless, this is what is happening."

Royce returned troubled and mentioned it to Windom. Windom said, "No, I didn't expect that, but I'm not surprised."

"Surely you can put a stop to it," Royce said.

"And miss our goal?" Windom demanded. "I think not."

Royce first heard of the famine in the north from Meer in the seventh week. On impulse he had again met her on the Street of Reeds after her vigil at the Archives. "I would invite you to late feeding," she said, "but we have little enough these days."

"You always seemed to be self-sufficient on your world," he said, dreading the answer.

"Still we are better off than the north people, many of whom have died in the past two weeks."

"But why?" he demanded.

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"You arrived at the start of the harvest," she said. "Naturally when we heard of your need, we destroyed the crops and turned the land to the grass."

"You destroyed your food?" he asked.

"Naturally. It was necessary."

"I'm sorry," he said, touching her. "I'm terribly sorry."

She looked up at him and said, "It is what we wanted to do. We wanted to please you." She paused and looked at the ground. "Only I seem not to please you."

"No, that's not true," he said, feeling the tense stirring in his being.

She shook her head without speaking and suddenly quite on impulse he leaned over and kissed her. She responded in a complete fashion, pressing into him, passive and yet somehow aggressive. He felt his hands reach out, follow the primordial route, and then . . .

"My father is gone tonight," she said. "Come. . . ."

He let himself be drawn silently through the dark streets to the door of her home and inside and then he was engulfed in quite the most intense sensation he had ever experienced in his life.

When early morning came, he left her just at the first touch of light on the horizon. All the way back, he walked in a dazed inner contemplation of what had happened. Over and over in his mind the same phrase recurred. That's the way it should be. That's the way it was meant to be.

He saw her regularly in the next two weeks but the intensity of his involvement with her was tainted with the knowledge of what their coming had now done to her people. He had never seen anything quite

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like the natives of Berrigan's World and their almost monomaniacal efforts to please the foreigners. New fields were destroyed for the keelgrass and the fermenting racks proliferated across the plain. To make room for them some of the nearer buildings of the city were destroyed.

And all around, day by day, he saw the effects of their wanton disregard for their own well-being. The men who brought the great carts of grass were now gaunt and hollow-eyed and moved with increasing slowness. The news of growing famines in the north and now the west came to him. The *Deneb's* medical officer reported that some of the workers were now showing definite signs of malnutrition. The speed with which the famine and other associated diseases developed in the ninth week surprised him. The medical officer assured him that this was quite in line with the accelerated metabolism of the natives, however.

Finally he sought out Windom again in protest. "We can't go on this way," Royce said. "We're destroying their whole society."

"We can remedy the damage," Windom said. "The important thing is that we must have our five thousand kilos within the next two weeks."

"The whole social structure of the planet could collapse by then. Don't you realize what is happening?"

Windom turned on him with a look of anger. It was the first time, Royce realized, that he had seen him show the emotion. "Yes, Mr. Royce, I know what is happening and it's no more pleasant to me than it is to you. The fact remains that you and I have a duty that transcends what is happening here."

"I'll protest to Prime," Royce threatened. "What we're embarked on now amounts to genocide."

"Look, Mister," Windom said slowly. "Don't con-

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fuse your personal emotions with your duties. Oh, yes, I know all about your little dalliance. If you want to endanger your career . . . well, that's your business, but you will not endanger my mission."

"Or your efficiency report at Prime," Royce sneered.

"If that's what you believe," Windom said. "It doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is that we will have our supply of biologicals in time to save millions. Then we will do what is necessary to repair the damage we have done here."

"I'm sure the Captain will have something to say about this," Royce snapped.

"I have already briefed the Captain on the realities of our situation," Windom said. "I thought it necessary as you became more deeply involved here."

"He can't allow this to happen, not a man with the Captain's background."

"He is fully in agreement with my actions," Windom said.

Royce made his way as quickly as he could to the communications hut and videoed the Captain. Grek's blue face was pained but he shook his head sadly. "Mr. Royce, there are certain data just made available to me that alter the whole complexion of the operation. However, I promise you that you and your party will leave within two weeks."

"After how much damage?" Royce demanded.

"I have already contacted Prime," Captain Grek said. "Three ships are on the way with supplies and equipment for quickly restoring the status quo."

"While a great many people will die."

"It is necessary, I'm sorry to say," Grek said sadly.

He spent that night with Meer and told her of what

had happened. "I don't understand your people," he said. "Why do they do this?"

"There is no other way. It has to be that way," she said. "You know there is nothing I would not do to please you."

"Will you leave with me when we go?" he asked.

"Berrigan's injunction says——"

"Damn Berrigan's injunction," he snapped. "There's precedent for this sort of thing. I can get Prime's permission."

"I can't leave unless it is recorded in the Archives," she said.

"What does that mean?"

"We go and join our names in the Archives. It is the only time any one other than the Senior's family is ever allowed there."

"We would have to wait on my world to be married," he said.

"In our eyes we would already be so," she said. She sank her head softly on his shoulders and sighed. "It would be what I want most."

"Then I'll prepare a request for Prime's permission," he said. "First thing tomorrow," he added dreamily.

Yet it was almost a week before he could bring himself to do so. He knew that the request would probably be granted. Yet he preferred a direct request which would take days longer rather than going through channels and the captain. Somehow he found himself very reluctant to take this route, especially since it would probably come to Mr. Windom's attention.

By now the effects of the northern famine were all too apparent in their area. News of the plagues and widespread disease in the west came to his morn-

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ing briefing and Royce grew progressively more angry. Along with this was the insistent feeling of guilt. He argued with himself that this was the reason why he had not pursued the petition to Prime.

He had one final confrontation with Windom. "Dammit," he said, "we have almost all of the five thousand kilos now. Where are your relief ships?"

"They'll be here," Windom assured him.

"With all of your vaunted skill in planning, they should have been here weeks ago."

"Mr. Royce," Windom said slowly with an unexpected gentleness in his voice. "I understand all of your concern, probably more than you realize. Grant me that I am not an evil man. Do that at least. I came here as you did with a limited knowledge of the society we were asking to help us. It's been only in the last few weeks that Prime has finally acquainted me with the complete profile of these people. So much has been buried in the old records."

"I fail to see how this excuses your genocidal tactics," Royce said.

"I would have done what I did regardless," Windom said. "I would have prepared to repair the damage sooner, had I known how profound the effect of our visit would be."

"Knowing you, I find this hard to believe," Royce said.

"It doesn't matter," Windom said. "What does matter is that you are a young officer with an unusual second-in-command for one of your age and the beginning of a promising career that may well lead you to the very top. You've shown considerable ability and intelligence and you're now prepared to discard much of this for a transitory emotion."

"Spare me your deep concern," Royce said,

scarcely bothering that his full contempt was showing.

"We need men who have wide command abilities," Windom said slowly. "They're few enough considering the sprawling multiples of worlds we must police and administer. You're just that to me, Mr. Royce: good material about to be destroyed."

"Thank you for placing me in proper perspective," Royce snapped. "I seem to fit well into the pragmatic scheme you've ordered for the Berrigans and the rest of the galaxy."

Before Windom could say more, he left. It was growing dark as he left the encampment and made his way angrily to Meer's home. Couton met him at the door and offered the ritual gestures of hospitality. The man looked drawn and weak. God, Royce thought, doesn't even the Senior get food?

"Meer," he said to her, "can it be tonight?"

She came up to him and he held her close, alarmed at the way the flesh now seemed to hug her oddly-shaped ribcase. He could feel every bone; yet there was something sensual and overwhelming about her.

"Yes," she said. "Now, if you wish."

"Now," he said.

"I must come also, of course," Couton said. "It is the only time I am allowed in the Archives." Royce nodded and waited while Couton and his daughter found wraps against the early night chill. They made their way through the Street of Reeds and finally to the square.

"You must follow the path," Meer said, and led the way. They walked the deep parabolic path set in the stones toward the brooding monolith that was the Archives.

At the broad steps ascending into the black maw

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of the building, Royce felt a sudden sense of panic. "It's very dark," he said.

"There are always lamps burning inside," Meer said, and led the way up the stairs.

They entered and he found himself in a single large room that stretched the full height of the building. There were several shrouded alcoves on either side. It was much like entering a darkened cathedral with dim flickering tallow lamps stationed along the walls. They moved past glassed cases of instruments whose intent Royce could not define. All of them had an air of the antique about them. Finally they stopped before a dais and Meer ascended to a large sprawling platform where a single manuscript book lay open. Behind the platform, half shrouded in shadows, Royce saw rank on rank of similar books; enough, he thought, to trace the bloodlines of the planet back through the centuries to the original colonists.

"I had already selected the appropriate Archive," Meer said. She motioned him forward and as he stood by her side, she took a simple reed pen and began to inscribe her name on a separate page. At her instructions he did the same and in the far left margin Couton finally added a witnessing notation.

"Is that all there is to it?" he asked.

"That is all," she said.

"No ceremony?"

"I told you that the Archives were not religious," she said. He felt distinctly relieved.

"We will make one final formality to the founder," Couton said.

"To Berrigan?" he asked.

"To Berrigan and the founder," she said and led

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the way down the dais. They walked back the way they came and at a juncture turned in. In an alcove the full height of the building they stopped while Couton came forward and began to light torches on each side of the passageway.

He waited as the flames leaped and defined the great statue occupying the alcove. It was the massive idealized figure of an earthman . . . Berrigan, Royce supposed, standing heroic and stern, looking down at a group of figures that assumed the attitude of children.

There were a whole series, culminating in two heroic figures smaller than Berrigan, but clearly human. A woman of remarkable beauty linked hand in hand to a man of similar beauty. The sculpture was quite remarkable, a labor of years, only . . .

Only it was the lesser figures that occupied his gaze. The smaller figures growing larger, changing definition until they merged with the heroic couple and then . . .

The knowledge was like a physical blow. He turned and moved rapidly away, feeling suddenly the panic, the fear that he had not felt for years.

Behind him Meer called, "Wait, wait," but he could not stop.

The party from the *Deneb* must have entered silently. Quite against regulations they were suddenly there, three senior officers including the medical officer and Mr. Windom.

"I had to stop this," Windom said.

"Let me alone," he said, half in hysteria and tried to push past them. In the next instant the medical officer had touched his arm with an impulse syringe and he was sinking into Mr. Gerhardt's arms. From a

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great distance he heard Mr. Windom say, "What a damn waste. What a damn terrible waste."

His first impression when he awoke aboard the *Deneb* was of the bluish face of Captain Grek, leaning close. "I think he is awake, Doctor," Grek said and he felt gentle fingers touching his forehead. His consciousness seemed to clear quickly at that point.

"I'm glad you're well again," Captain Grek said. "These indigenous diseases can be pretty bad after several centuries of isolation."

"Disease?" he asked.

"Apparently viral," the *Deneb's* medical officer said in a lofty manner and moved away.

"I think that must have been the problem, don't you think?" Mr. Windom said, coming into view. When Royce said nothing Windom continued, "You'll be glad to know that three ships are landing emergency forces at this moment. They will take perhaps two months to restore the social and ecological balance of Berrigan's World. The probe with our five thousand kilos of EDA has been dispatched at ten light speed to Aldebaran II and we are on our way back to base."

"That's fine," Royce said quietly. "Will Berrigan's World ever be the same?"

"As near as we can make it," Windom said. "After that, of course, it will be forever quarantined against human contact."

"Quarantined?"

"It's the only moral solution Prime will accept."

"That's an odd morality," he said, remembering Meer and the feeling of loss.

"What other solution do you have? A race of natural slaves? Any human may command them and

they will destroy themselves carrying out a human's wishes."

"I suppose so," he said. "It's probably the only way."

He felt Windom's hand on his shoulder. "I haven't saved you from your foolishness for yourself. We need bright young men and in spite of all this you're worth saving."

"Thank you," he said. "I don't suppose that there'll ever be a chance that. . . ."

"Would you really want such a wife?" Windom asked.

"No, not really. It was a pretty fantasy, but not really."

"Besides, the quarantine. We only realized with what we were dealing in the last weeks, as I told you. Berrigan was truly a remarkable man, a bitter warped man, but a remarkable one."

"Yes," Royce said sadly, "more bitter than anyone knew. Who would have thought that he would set out alone with such a remarkable plan?"

"For him it made sense," Captain Grek said. "He had grown to loathe his own race."

"Yes," Windom said. "It seemed perfectly logical. Why not populate the new world with the one race he loved and admired. Why not people a whole new world with mutated dogs?"

"Yes," Royce said, feeling lost and somehow cheated. "I suppose it makes a great deal of sense."



An android is sort of a robot, built of something like flesh instead of metal. He's designed by men to do the work humans consider too dirty or dangerous or demeaning. So obviously, he wouldn't have feelings built into him, and hence his plight should be of no concern to true men. Obviously!

EDWARD WELLEN

Androids Don't Cry

The man was just drifting into the rainbow at the end of his pot when the shadow of an android passed over him. The man raised up on an elbow, muttered, "A stinking andy," and sank back into his reefer dream.

The android strode on, keeping wider of the dirty walls. Rounding that corner, he had nearly trod on the man. The android shook his perfect head. Poor guy. Poor all of them. He moved along, taking the turns on the map in his mind. He ignored the way the men avoided his eyes and spat behind his back.

He had forgotten there were so many jobless, shiftless men back home on Earth. What helped you forget was that you didn't run into them outside their part of town. Besides, he had been away a long time. Even to an android ten years was a long time.

The android stopped at a door at the end of an alley. He stood still a long moment. The great chest swelled. The powerful fist knocked lightly but firmly.

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BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF THE YEAR

"Coming."

Slow footsteps. The door creaked open on a gaunt woman. Her hand blurred to her throat.

The android stared at her.

She brushed a jiggle of gray hair back with trembling fingers.

"Yes?"

"You're . . . Mrs. Dan Boesman? Mae Boesman?"

She nodded, grew aware of eyes at windows, stepped back indoors.

"Won't you come in?"

"Thank you."

His eyes adjusted quickly to the dimness and picked out the wedding picture on the table. She swiftly rubbed the plastic with her forearm and shyly handed the picture to the android.

"Yes, that's my Dan. He was just what you see—a kind and loving man. Yet that doesn't mean he was soft. But then you knew him, didn't you?"

"I knew him."

"I guessed that. Then you know he was determined to do his best for his family, no matter what. That's why he did the crazy thing he did."

The android handed the picture back. Android vocabulary had little provision for small talk.

"It's a . . . nice picture."

"Thank you." She clasped it against her breast and lowered her head. "It's all that's left of him."

She put it down hurriedly and turned as a teenager burst in yelling.

"Timmy said he saw an andy——"

The boy brought himself up short on seeing the android.

Mae Boesman reddened.

ANDROIDS DON'T CRY

"I apologize for my son. He really knows better than to use that term."

The android forced a smile.

"That's all right. I've heard worse."

"Even so. And a friend of his father's. Oh, I'm keeping you standing. Please sit down and tell me why you've come."

While the boy fidgeted, the android sat down carefully on the strongest chair.

"You knew my father? You were there? Tell me how it happened."

The boy leaned on the table and cupped his chin to drink in the android's words. Mae Boesman had seated herself across from the android. The android saw that she too wanted to know, too much to chide the boy. The best way was to give it to them straight, as far as he could.

"You know that he got himself up to look as much like an *andy*"—he shot a glance at the boy, who looked down—"as possible. He bluffed his way into the hiring hall. He fooled everyone so well that he was able to sign up and ship out. Of course, the real androids quickly caught on he wasn't one of them."

The android thought back and laughed. He saw the expression on the faces of the wife and the kid.

"Well, it *was* funny, the way he strained his guts and limbs to keep up with them and turn out a fair day's work. And in amusement and pity the androids covered for him as long as they could. But it had to happen. The foreman found him out and lasered a report to the home office. The company moved to void the contract and threatened to prosecute him for fraud if he didn't refund the advance he had turned over to you."

BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF THE YEAR

Mae Boesman's voice was a whisper. "I never knew that."

"It never came to that. The androids staged a wild-cat strike. The company backed down gracefully—and quietly ordered the foreman to work Dan to death."

Mae Boesman covered her mouth.

The android smiled.

"Wouldn't even have to work him to death. He was getting thinner and weaker on android rations. So there he was, out in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. Son, I guess you know what the job was: to sweep the asteroids into one heap, to recompact them into one big ball, another Earthlike planet for us—for man—to colonize right here in the solar system. And we did it. If you look up at the right time, there she shines—Jumart, the new evening star."

The kid's eyes were stars.

"Dangerous work, huh?"

The android grinned.

"I guess you could say that, Johnny. As the mass accreted and compacted, it increased in gravitational pull. The sweeping went faster and faster and grew trickier and trickier as the snowballing planet drew chunks and particles from all points. It was one big log jam, all right. Though of course the peaveying was not to break up the jam but to make it bigger. Anyway, you didn't want to get trapped between 'logs.' The android grew grave. "That's what happened to your dad, Johnny. He didn't get out of the way fast enough."

Mae Boesman shivered. A whisper escaped her.

"Crushed."

She got up and put her hands on the boy's shoulders and pulled him to her.

ANDROIDS DON'T CRY

The android nodded.

"It was bad. Very bad. They found very little of him."

She put her hands to her ears.

"Stop!"

"I'm sorry."

"No. It's terrible, but I'm glad to know at last how it truly was. The company never really told us anything. So cold, so impersonal."

The android laughed.

"The company. Oh, yes, we know the company." The android rose to get at a pocket. He handed her a credit order. "Take this. It's a bonus Dan had coming to him. That's why I'm here."

She took in the figure. Her eyes opened like time-lapse flowers.

"That much! But how——"

"Don't worry about how we got the company to fork over. All of it is legally yours."

"I can't believe it. Now Johnny can——" She broke off and down.

The android looked uncomfortable.

"And there may be more. Insurance money."

"But the company said——"

"I know. That he was ineligible. But we're working on it. And we're a strong union."

"I don't know what to say."

The android smiled.

"In that case, silence is best."

She seemed out of breath.

"Can I get you anything? I don't know what you . . . I mean, if there's anything you'd like. . . ."

"Nothing, thank you. I have to be going anyway."

"Must you?"

But she seemed relieved.

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"I must. There's always another big job to work on: out there. 'Cosmeticize the cosmos'—that's our motto."

"Well, if you must. But thank you for coming. And for . . . everything."

"Not at all."

The woman and child made another nice picture standing in the doorway, but the android did not look back. Not even when he heard them whisper.

"How'd it know my name?"

"Your father must've talked about us, I guess."

"Oh."

The android stepped into the tingle-jingle music that vibrated android flesh pleurably and bellied up against the bar for a shot of brainwash. He looked around. A hangout like all spaceport hangouts, peopling itself with the sweepings—or vacuumings—of the solar system. He spotted his friends in a booth and joined them.

"How was it, Dan, seeing the wife and kid again?"

The other android friend kicked the first android friend hard enough to dent the shin plate. But Dan Boesman didn't notice the byplay, even appeared not to have heard the question. Then he shook himself out of a trance of remembrance.

He looked at his friends fondly. After all, they and the other androids had saved his life, had chipped in to buy him the prosthetic devices, the spare parts that made him one of them. He tossed off the drink.

"Oh, it was all right." He signaled for another drink and leaned forward. "Tell us, what did you hear at the hiring hall? Where do we go from here?"

This has no plot, but it's truly fiction in the legal sense of the term: an assumption of a possibility as a fact irrespective of the question of its truth. It's the lovely, ineluctable logic of what is obvious, once it's pointed out.

THEODORE R. COGSWELL

The Population Implosion

Just as more radioactivity is released into the atmosphere by the burning of fossil fuels than by a properly designed nuclear power plant (all coal containing substances other than hydrocarbons, some of which are radioactive), so also is the present world population a mere drop in the bucket compared with what it was only one thousand years ago. In fact, the population of our planet has been shrinking geometrically since the time of Christ. It is true that local urban clusters such as New York, Los Angeles and Chinchilla, Pennsylvania, have been expanding rapidly during the last few decades, but if one considers the entire land mass, a quick examination of available genealogical statistics will show that the average population per square mile is steadily and rapidly decreasing.

The key to the proof of this is the geometrical expansion in the number of ancestors one has as one moves back generation by generation. Assuming no

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THE POPULATION IMPLOSION

an average of 7,642 persons per acre, computer dating and singles bars were unnecessary.

Where the other gentry lived, let alone the lower classes and the Scottish, Welsh and Irish servants, I haven't the slightest idea. But with my kin alone, the population density per square mile of all England was some sixty-six times that of Manhattan today. The only obvious conclusion that can be drawn from this is that there has been a fantastic population implosion during the last thousand years.

Take England alone. If you divide her present population of some forty-four million by the almost 275 billion living there in the year 1000, you'll note that today she has only about 1.6 ten-thousandths of the population she had ten centuries ago, a shrinkage of 6,250 percent. If we assume that some of the original population and I are not related, the latter figure is greatly inflated and the shrinkage becomes even more astronomical.

Since English and American birth rates are roughly the same, we can take the English historical experience as an approximate analog of what is happening in America. So the next time you hear a prophet of doom moaning about the horrible future that awaits us if something isn't done to defuse the population bomb, laugh in his face. Statistics show that you have nothing to worry about. —

There are very few love stories in science fiction that are worth reading. Yet happily a few do exist, and this is one. The hero may be a centenarian and the heroine may be almost a child, caught in a world where tomorrow and today mix without time-travel. But the emotions are curiously close to reality—at least some reality within us.

MICHAEL KURLAND

Think Only This of Me

I

I met her in Anno Domini and was charmed. The Seventeenth Century it was. Two weeks and three centuries later we were in love.

Her name: Diana Seven; my name: Christopher Charles Mar d'Earth. Both of old stock, or so I thought; both certainly of Earth; both certainly human, for what that might mean in this galactic day. She was young, how young I did not know, and I was gracefully middle-aged for an immortal. I would not see my first century again, but I would be a long time yet in my second. I looked to be somewhere around forty, normal span; she looked an unretouched twenty, except in motion when she looked barely teen and also ageless.

Anno Domini was my first pause in twenty years. I legislate in the Senior Chamber of the Parliament of Stars. We tend to feel, we beings of the Senior

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Chamber, that our efforts bind the intelligences of the galaxy together, for all that races still aggress and habited planets are still fused in anger. We also feel that, despite all our posturing, blustering and rhetoric, we accomplish nothing save the passage of time, for all that beings have not starved, races have not been destroyed and planets have not turned to stars through our efforts. This dichotomy slowly erodes empathy, emotion and intellect.

So I paused. I returned to Sol to become again a man of Earth, an Earthman, and walk among trees and down narrow, twisting streets and wide boulevards—but mainly to walk among the men and women of Earth, who are my constituency, my ancestry and my soul. The races of man are varied and the farther one gets from Sol the greater the variation, though all are men and can interbreed and trace their language back to a common source—if they still have sex, if they still have language. But I no more represent the Autocracy or the Diggers of Melvic than I speak for the Denzii Hive or the unfortunate Urechis of Mol.

I felt a need for history: to be one with Earth is to be a part of the sequence of man, a product of all that has come before and a precursor to all that will follow. To return to Sol, to Earth, to man, to our common history: that was my plan.

I spent the first month in the present, walking, looking, visiting, remembering—chronolizing myself to the fashions, mores, idiom and art of this most volatile of planetary cultures. Then I retreated to Earth itself, to the past, to Anno Domini, the religious years: twenty-four centuries called after the Son of the One God. The period right before what

THINK ONLY THIS OF ME

we call the present era, when man no longer needs any god but himself.

Earth is now all past: the present comes no closer than Earth's satellite, the moon; the future—I wonder at times, what future a planet can have when it has renounced the present.

I picked Seventeen to start and was garbed and armed and primed and screened and out before I could say, *All the world's a stage/And all the men and women merely players/They have their exits and their entrances.* . . .

The town was London and the year was sixteen-whatever. In this recreated past the years sometimes slip and events anachron—a fact of interest but to scholars and pickers of nit. The costumes of our recreated century were exotic, but no more than the smell. Charles had been beheaded a few years before. The Roundheads had been in power for however long the Roundheads were in power and now William the Orange was about to land at Plymouth Dock.

I was sitting in the Mermaid Tavern, at a small table at the rear. Next to me, over my left shoulder, was a large round table where Ben Jonson sat deep in conversation with Will Shakespeare, John Milton, Edmond Waller and the Earl of Someplace. As writers will when alone together, they were discussing money and I quickly tired of their talk.

She walked in as I was preparing to leave. Walked? She danced with the unassuming grace of windblown leaves. She flowed across the walk and quickstepped through the door as though directed by a master choreographer and rehearsed a dozen times before this take. These are the images that came to mind as she appeared in the doorway.

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I sat back down and watched as she came in. She was aware of everything and interested in all that she could see, and the very air around her was vibrant with the excitement of her life. And so I was attracted and excited and aware before a word had passed between us.

A man too doltish to see what she was stood by the door as she passed. He thought she was something other, and he spoke to her so: "Hey, girl—hey, wench, you should not be alone. Perhaps I'll keep you company if you ask me pretty."

She did not reply. She did not seem to hear, but passed him by as if he were a wall.

He reached out to grab her by the shoulder and I stood up, my hand falling to the handle of my walking stick.

She spun almost before his hand had touched her. She reached out, her fingers appearing almost but not quite to reach his neck. He fell away and she continued the pirouette and came inside without further pause.

I must have stood like stone, frozen in my foolish-heroic pose with half-aimed stick. She smiled at me. "No need," she said. "Thank you."

I stammered at her some wish that she share my table and she nodded, sat and smiled again, introduced herself as Diana and looked about. She was also, I decided, a visitor to this recreated Seventeen. I pointed out to her the round table next to us and its famous occupants, indicating each one with almost the pride of a creator, as though I had done something clever merely to be sitting next to them. Diana was interested, but not awed.

The sound of fifes came at us from a distance. A far rumble soon became the beat of many drums.

THINK ONLY THIS OF ME

The entourage of William approached and we all went outside the tavern to join the patient mob that awaited his passing.

First the soldiers, row on row, and for a long time nothing passed but soldiers. Then soldiers astride horses. Then soldiers astride horses pulling small cannon. Then a military band. Then more horses with soldiers astride, but now the uniform had changed. Then a coach and the crowd went wild—but it was the wrong coach. By now, unless he were twelve feet tall, the new king was an anticlimax. I looked over the crowd and tried to tell which were residents and which were guests of Anno Domini. I couldn't.

If this were the real Seventeenth Century—that is, if it were historical past rather than Anno Dominical recreation—there would be signs. The pox would have left its mark on most who lived. Rickets would be common. War cripples would be begging from every street corner. This Seventeenth Century, the only one the residents knew, was being redone by a benevolent hand.

The new king passed. His coach was open and he smiled and nodded and waved and was cheered. A stout, red-faced little man—anticlimax. I laughed.

We left then, Diana and I, and I offered to walk her to her inn. She named it and I discovered it was my own.

"How do you like this time?" I asked her as we walked. "Have you been here long?"

"All day," she said. "Then you're a guest too? I wondered why you were the only one in the tavern I hadn't heard of."

"Thanks," I said. "In realtime I am well known. My return to Earth was mentioned as primary news. I am a third of Earth's voice in the Parliament of the

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Stars. I am known and welcome in half a thousand worlds throughout the galaxy. I number some fifty life forms among my friends. It is not necessary that you have heard of me."

"You're insulted!" she said, clapping her hands together. "How delightful! Now you make me feel important, that my words could insult one as essential as you. I thank you for feeling insulted. I am pleased."

I hadn't thought of it that way, ever before. Somehow she made me glad that I had felt insulted. It was nice to be insulted for her: it made her happy. She reminded me of a beautiful half-grown kitten, newly exploring the world outside its kitten box.

The inn was a U-shaped structure around a central courtyard. The stables were to the right, the rooms to the left and the common room straight ahead. It had been called The Buckingham the last time I was there, some thirty years before. Now, after a decade of being the Pym & Thistle, it sported a new signboard over the door: The Two Roses. The device showed a red and a white rose thoroughly entwined. The landlord I didn't remember—a small, chubby man with a wide smile carved into his unhappy face. I asked him what the new name signified.

"It signifies I'm tired of changing the name of my inn," he told me. "I'm becoming nonpolitical. York and Lancaster settled their differences quite a ways back."

"Let us hope William doesn't think it means you prefer the white and red to his orange," I suggested. He look after me strangely as I escorted Diana across to the common room and we sat at a table in the corner.

THINK ONLY THIS OF ME

"Dinner?" I suggested.

Diana nodded enthusiastically, spilling her red hair around her face. "Meat!" she said. "Great gobs of rare roast—and maybe a potato."

"I—uh—I think they boil their meat these days," I told her in jest.

"No!" She was horrified. "Boil perfectly good, unresisting roasts and steaks? That's barbaric."

"*O tempora, o mores!*" I agreed, wondering what my accent would have sounded like to Marcus Tullius.

Diana looked puzzled. I tried again, slanting the accents in a different direction. She looked more puzzled.

"It means: 'Oh, what times—oh, what customs!' It's Latin," I told her.

"It's what?"

"Latin. That's a pre-language. Ancient and dead." Now I was puzzled. Who was this girl of Earth who didn't know of Latin? For the past four hundred years, since humanity had begun trying to recreate its cradle—or at least its nursery—all born of Earth, except those born on Earth, knew something of pre-history and the prelanguages: the times and the tongues of man before he met the stars.

"You know what tongue was spoken here?" I asked her.

"Common," she said, looking at me as if I had just asked if she knew what those five slender tubes at the end of her hand were called. "The language of Earth. The one standard language of humans throughout the Galaxy."

"I mean," I explained, "what language was spoken in the real Seventeenth Century London? What language all that beautiful poetry we heard discussed in

the tavern by those great names at the next table was translated from?"

She shook her head. "I hadn't thought——"

"English," I said.

"Oh. Of course. England—English. How silly!"

The servitor approached the table circumspectly, waiting until he was sure we had finished speaking before addressing us. "Evening m'lord, m'lady," he mumbled. "Roseguddenit. Venice impizenizeto."

Diana giggled. "English?" she asked. "Have we really receded in time?"

"In time for what?"

Diana giggled again. The thin lad in the servitor's apron looked puzzled, unhappy, frightened and resigned.

"Would you go over that again?" I asked him.

"Parme?"

"What you said, lad. Go over it again for diction, please."

Now he was also nervous and upset and clearly blamed me. "My lord?"

"Speak more slowly," I told him, "and pronounce more carefully and those of us without your quick wit and ready mind will be able to comprehend. Yes?"

"Yes, my lord." If he could have killed me. . . .
"Sorry, my lord. The roast is good tonight, my lord. The venison pie is very nice, my lord. My lady. What may I serve you?"

"Roast!" Diana stated. "Thick slices of roast. You don't boil your roast, do you? You wouldn't do that?"

The boy nervously replied that he wouldn't think of it, heard my order, then removed himself like a blown candle flame, leaving not even an after-image.

"You frighten people," Diana told me.

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"It's my most valued ability," I said. "I shall not frighten you."

"You certainly shall not," she agreed. "My teachers were all more menacing than you—and more unforgiving. And they didn't notice my body."

I ignored the last part of her remark and stared into her blue eyes. "You went to an unpermissive school," I said, smiling.

"The universe is unpermissive," she said seriously. It was a learned response and I wondered who had taught it and why.

The innkeeper approached us during dessert. "Good?" he asked. "You enjoyed?"

"Indeed," I assured him.

"My pleasure," he nodded. "My guests. There will be no reckoning."

"Gracious of you, sir," Diana said.

"Why?" I asked, being wiser and therefore trustless of hostels.

"I am taking your suggestion," he told me. "And I thank you by feeding you dinner."

"Suggestion?"

"Yes. I am changing the name of the inn. Henceforth it shall be known as The Two Roses and the Tulip. I have sent a boy to notify the signpainter."

II

We walked into the night, Diana and I. Hand in hand we walked, although it was conversation and not love that bound us then. We contrasted: she bright and quick, with an aim as true as a hawk's; I ponderous and sure as a great bear (I metaphor our speech only). We learned from each other. I ar-

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rayed my vast store of facts before her in the patterns dictated by the logic of my decades—she swooped and plucked out one here, another there, and presented them as jewels to be examined for themselves, or changed their position to create the fabric of a new logic.

"These people," she asked me, waving a hand to indicate the residents in the houses around us, "what do they feel? What do they think? They are human, yes? How can they just spend their lives pretending they're Anno Domini?"

"They're not pretending," I told her.

"But this *isn't* the Seventeenth Century."

"For them it is. They know of nothing else. Weren't you warned about postchronic talk while you're here?"

"I thought it was just not to spoil the—the—flavor. They *don't know*?"

"Truth."

"But that's cruel—unfair!"

"Why? They're stuck in their lives just as you and I are imbedded in our own. Are we any less actors in someone else's drama than they?"

"Philosophy, like religion, is a very useful drug," she didacted, "but it should be used only to condone the evils we cannot control—and not those we create."

"You're quoting," I guessed.

"My most valued ability," she agreed. "I have a memory like a wideband slow-crystal—the input can't be erased without destructing the device. Do you condone this make-believe?"

"It isn't make-believe. And convince me that it's evil."

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"But it's so limited——"

"They have the whole world. Their world—the world of the Seventeenth."

"They don't—not in any real sense. This whole area can't be bigger than——"

She looked to me for help. I shrugged. "I don't know either. But however large it is, it's also—in a very real sense—unbounded. How much can a man expect to see in one normal lifetime—especially limited to horses and sailing ships for transportation? Any of these people who wish to go to France or the New World will get there. Aided by Anno Domini, they will arrive in their France without noticing whatever odd maneuvering the ship does in the 'Channel.' I've taken that trip."

"What would happen if I decided to get up and just walk——" she pointed off to the left—"that way, in a straight line?"

"You'd come to the edge," I said. "Wherever that is."

"Yes. Suppose I were a native—a resident—then what?"

"Then you'd probably fall asleep by the side of the road, and when you woke you'd suddenly remember urgent business back in town, or forget what you were doing there in the first place. And you'd never have the urge to roam again."

"You mean they dethink and rethink these people? Just to keep them putting on a show for us?"

"Also to keep them happy," I argued. "It's for their own good. Think how they'd feel if they knew they were part of a, a display. This way they live out their lives without knowing of any options. It's no more unfair to live here than it was to live in the actual

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Seventeenth Century. A lot better—the food is adequate, diseases are eliminated, sanitation is much improved.”

“It sounds like an argument for slavery,” Diana snapped. “Or pigfarming!”

We had come to what had to be the main street of the district. It was paved and lit. Bayswater High Street, the signpost read. The lights were open flames on stanchions, bright enough to mark the way but not to illuminate. “Perhaps we had better head back,” I suggested. “In another half-hour it will be too dark to see our way.”

“The moon will be up in twenty minutes,” Diana told me. “And it’s only two days off full. Plenty of light.”

“Example of your memory?” I asked.

She nodded. “I saw a chart once.”

The houses were two and three story, the upper stories overlapping the first. Picturesque in daylight, they were transformed at dusk into squatting ogres lurking behind the streetlights. The few people left on the street were scurrying like singleminded rats toward their holes.

“Some things are changeless,” I said, pointing my walking stick at a receding back. “Fear of the night is one such. These people fear footpads and cut-throats—our people fear the stars. Evolution, I fear, is too slow a process. Our subconscious is still a million years behind us—in the caves of our youth.”

“You mean that literally?” Diana asked. “About our people fearing the stars?”

“Extraordinarily literally. Astrophobia is the current mode. Not a fear of standing under the stars, like Chicken Little, but fear that, circling one of those

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points of light, is the race that will destroy humanity. The government spends billions each year in pursuit of this fear. I believe that it couples with the subconscious belief that we deserve to be destroyed. That all Earth has turned its back to the stars to live wholly in the past is part of the syndrome—our fears unite here."

Diana asked me a question then, something about the deeper manifestations of this ailment, and I prattled on about how easy it was to recognize the problem, but no one was getting it cured because it was chronolous to declare the inside of your head sacrosanct—if you were of high enough status to make it stick. I'm not sure of what I said, as most of my attention was on three sets of approaching footsteps I was attempting to analyze without alarming Diana. In step, but not in the rhythm of soldiers—a slightly slower, swaggering step. Three young dandies out for an evening's entertainment, no doubt.

They rounded the corner and appeared under the light. They were well dressed, indeed foppishly dressed, and carrying swords—so they were gentlemen of this time. Or at least they were sons of gentlemen.

"What say?" the first one said, seeing us.

"Say what?" the second demanded.

"What?" asked the third. "What ho!" he amended, strutting toward us. "What have we here? A lissome lass, begad! And unescorted."

"Madam," the first said, "my lady, ma'am—chivalry is not dead! We shall prove this."

Diana looked puzzled, but completely unafraid. I don't know how I looked—I felt weak. "Get behind me," I instructed her.

"Yes, indeed," the third amplified, "we shall

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chivalrously rescue you from that old man there, who's clearly attempting to have his way with you."

"We shall," the second added, "expect a suitable reward."

"Is this some game?" Diana asked me.

"No," I told her. "These lads are going to try to kill me. If they succeed they'll kill you, too—even-tually."

The first drew his sword. I twisted the handle of my stick until I felt it click. We were now about even—three swords against one sword-stick with a narco-spray tip. Anyone within one meter of the front of the tip would fall inanimate ten seconds after he was hit—and I should be able to keep even three of them away for ten seconds.

"These are truly enemies?" Diana asked me, staring into my eyes. There was an undercurrent of excitement in her expression.

"Yes," I said briefly. "But don't worry. Just stay —"

"I trust you," she said, nodding as though she had just made a prime decision. "Enemies!" Then she was in motion.

She dove forward onto her shoulder and pushed off as she rolled, catching the first one on the chin with the heel of her boot. He flew backward and came to a skidding stop on his back across the street. The second was just starting to react when she slammed him across the side of his head with her forearm. He slid slowly to the ground, folding in the middle as he dropped.

The third was aware of his danger, although he had no clear idea of what this whirlwind was. His sword was up and he was facing her. I managed one step toward them when, with a small cry of joy, she

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was past his guard and had fastened both of her hands around his throat. She must have known just where to press with her small fingers, because he didn't struggle, didn't even gasp—he just crumpled. She went down with him, keeping her grip. Her eyes were alive with excitement and she was grinning. She had, somehow, not the look of a person who has vanquished a foe, but more that of a terrier who has cornered a rat.

"All right," I said, going over and pulling her off. "It's all right. It's all over."

She looked up, small and sweet and innocent, except for a rip in the right sleeve of her dress. "He's still alive, this one."

"No!" I yelled, when I saw her hands tighten around his throat.

She stared at me. "The other two, they are dead."

"Leave him," I instructed.

"Yes." She stood up, sounding disappointed.

I took her hand and led her away. I began to tremble slightly—a touch of aftershock. Diana was calm and gentle. I had no empathy for the three ruffians—they had danced to their own tune—but I worried about Diana. No—I think rather she frightened me. I was not concerned with the ease with which she dispatched—body combat ballet is not new to me. I worried rather about the joy with which she destroyed.

I remembered to disarm the stick, so as not to shoot myself in the foot. "Diana," I said, picking my words not to offend, "I admire the way you handled those men. It shows great skill and training. But when a man is down—more particularly when he is unconscious—you don't have to kill him."

"But he was an enemy. You said so."

Semantic problem—or something more?

"Christopher?" We stopped at the innyard and she stared up at me, her eyes wide.

"Yes?" Tears were forming in the corners of her eyes and she was shaking. Delayed reaction? I held her and stroked her long hair.

"Those men wanted to hurt us. It wasn't a secondary thing, like wanting to take our money and hurting us if we resisted. They *just* wanted to hurt us."

"True."

"Why would anyone behave like that?"

It wasn't the fight that had her upset, but the morals of her opponents. "You killed two of them and were working on the third," I reminded her.

"But that was their doing. You said they were enemies. They declared status, not I. They attacked unprovoked. And I had your word."

"Right," I said, deciding to watch my words around this girl who took my definitions so literally and acted on them with such finality. "Well, they behaved that way because they've been taught to think it's fun."

"I don't understand," she said.

"Neither do I," I agreed.

We retired to our separate rooms and I spent some time studying the cracks in the ceiling in an effort to think before I fell asleep.

Diana and I spent the next ten days together in Shakespeare's London. Diana was delighted by everything and I was delighted by her. We grew closer together in that indefinable way men and women grow closer together, with neither of us mentioning it but both of us quite aware. She questioned me incessantly about everything, but gave little detail in re-

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turn. I learned she had no family and grew up in a special school run by Earth government. I learned how beautiful she was, inside and out, in motion and in stillness.

After the first week we shared the same room. Luckily Seventeen was a time that allowed of such a change. The innkeeper persisted in winking at me whenever he could, until I felt I had earned that dinner, but we suffered no other hardship for our affection.

Then one day over breakfast we decided to abandon the Seventeenth Century. I voted for the Twentieth, and Diana ayed, although she knew little of it. "Those are the breakthrough years, aren't they?" she asked. "First flights to the nearer planets!"

I munched on a bacon stick. "Out of the cradle and into the nursery," I said. "And the babes yelling, 'No, no, I don't *want* to walk—haven't learned to crawl properly yet.' As though that skill were going to be of value to them in the future. Interesting times. As in the ancient curse."

"Curse?" Diana asked, wide-eyed as a child.

I nodded. "May your children live in interesting times," I said. "Chinese."

"Not much of a curse," Diana insisted. "Where are the mummies' hearts and the vampires and such?"

"Now that would be interesting," I said. After breakfast I pushed the call for Anno Domini and they removed us in a coach. They declothed us and reclothed us and backgrounded us and thrust us into an aeroplane.

III

This dubious contrivance, all shiny and silver and with two whole piston engines—to keep us going forward so we wouldn't fall down—flew us to LaGuardia Field outside New York City. The field, like the aeroplane, was sleek and shiny and new and modern. Everything was modern—it was in the air. The modern taxi drove us to the modern city with its modern skyscrapers muraled with the most modern art. The year was 1938 and nothing could go wrong.

We checked into the Plaza and took a tenth-floor suite overlooking Central Park. It was evening and the park lights, glowing over the paths, roads, fields, rocks, ponds, streams, lakes and other structured wildnesses, turned it into a rectangular fairyland. The skyline surrounding the park was civilization surrounding and oppressing imagination, keeping it behind high walls and ordering its ways. This is known as interpretive sightseeing.

Diana had a lot of things she wanted to do. She wanted to see a play and a movie and a zoo and an ocean liner and a war and a soap opera and a rocket leaving for the moon.

"Everything but the rocket," I told her. "Your timing's off by about thirty years. They haven't even designed the machines to build the machines to build the rocket yet."

We compromised on a visit to the top of the Empire State Building, the closest thing to a trip to the moon that 1938 New York could provide.

"This is all real, isn't it?" Diana asked as we wandered around the guard rail, peering at Bronx tenements and Jersey slums.

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"In a sense," I said.

"I mean the buildings are buildings, not sets, and the streets are streets and the river is a river and the ships are ships."

"And the people are people," I agreed. "The original had eight million, I believe. One of the three largest cities of the time. That's a lot of people to stuff into a small area and move around by automobile and subway."

She nodded. "How many people are here now—residents, I mean?"

"I don't know," I told her. "I doubt if they have the full original millions."

"Still," she said seriously, "it would be fair to say that there are a great many."

"That would be fair," I agreed.

"Why are they here?"

"It's getting chilly," I said, buttoning the two top buttons on my coat. "Let's go eat dinner."

"How can we justify bilking so many people out of their lives—out of whatever value their lives might have—by making them live in an artificial past?"

"How do their lives have any less value here than in realtime?" I asked in my best Socratic manner.

"Suppose you were an inventor," Diana hypothesized. "How would you feel to discover that you had reinvented the wheel, or the typer; or the bloaterjet?"

"I'd never know it was a reinvention," I said.

"But it would be. And you would have been cheated out of whatever good and new and beautiful you could have invented in realtime."

"I doubt Anno Domini encourages invention," I said.

"Worse! Where shall we eat dinner?"

We took a Domino Cab to where Glenn Miller and

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his band were providing the dinner music. The music must have soothed Diana, since we got through the rib roast and into the crepes suzette before the sociology seminar continued.

"What about people like Glenn Miller here—or Shakespeare—who were real people in history? Are they actors?"

"No, they're mindplants. Each of them has the personality and ability of the character he becomes, to the best of our ability to recreate it."

Diana sat silent for a minute, considering, her mouth puckered into a tight line and her eyebrows pulled down in concentration. She stared at her spoon. Then she picked it up and waved it at me. "That's disgusting. You don't cheat them out of the future—you cheat them out of their very lives."

It was my turn to be silent. I was silent through *String of Pearls* and *Goldberg's Blues*. Diana watched me as though expecting momentarily to see wisdom fall from my lips, or possibly smoke rise from my ears. I found myself uncomfortably defending policies I had never really thought about before. I tried to think it out, but was distracted by Diana's stare. I felt that I had to look as if I were thinking and it's very hard to work at looking the part and think at the same time.

"I would say it's more productive rather than less," I said when I had the idea sorted out. "You know our Shakespeare has added several plays to the list that the original never got around to writing. *Saint Joan* and *Elizabeth the First*—those are his. We haven't cheated him. Both he and humanity have benefited from this arrangement."

"It's not an arrangement," Diana stated positively.

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"It's a manipulation. It takes two to make an arrangement. Let's dance."

There is something deeply satisfying about two bodies pressed together and moving together. The waltz and the foxtrot are more purely sexual than either the stately minuet before them or the frenzied hump after. We glided about the floor, letting our bodies work at becoming one.

"Christopher," Diana said.

"Hm?"

"I'm glad we've become friends."

"More than friends?"

"That, too," she said, squeezing against me. "But friends is something else. I think you're my only friend."

"I hope you exaggerate," I said. "That's very sad."

We danced silently for a moment. Then Diana stopped and pulled me back to our table. We sat down. "This is a major thing, isn't it?"

"Friendship?"

"No. Anno Domini and this whole recreation. How many different historical times are there?"

"You're so beautiful and so serious and so young," I said. "And so intent—and so knowledgeable in some fields and so ignorant in others. Whoever brought you up had strange educational values."

"I told you I don't like talking about that," she said. Her expression could best be described as petulant.

"It requires no conversation," I told her. "Fifty."

"Fifty historical periods?" she said, instantly picking up the thread. One of the things I admired, that ability. "But there aren't that many centuries!"

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"Many are covered with more than one set. The really popular ones are started every twenty-five years. All have one, at least. There may be some centuries that appeal not at all to you, but someone has a need for them."

"What sort of need? Why that word?"

"Ah! Now we speak of purpose: what you asked me before. The past is Earth's only industry. Its function is to hold together the more than two hundred diverse human cultures, spread out on close to a thousand planets, circling as many suns. Tens of thousands of people from all these planets, all these new directions for humankind, are here at any one time, sharing the one thing they all have in common: the past.

"This maintains Earth's preeminence in the councils of man and presumably bolsters her prominence in the Parliament of Stars. But more important: it provides a living point of origin for the human race.

"The psychologists decided over four hundred years ago, at the time of the Mabden Annihilation, that this was the best—perhaps the only—way to hold us together. Those of us who weren't already too far out. There are external threats still, you know."

"I know," Diana said dryly. "You mentioned the fear syndrome earlier in this connection."

"It should be taken seriously," I insisted. "Here on Earth you feel secure, but it's only because you're so far away from the action. The Denzii——"

"I take it very seriously," Diana assured me. "So seriously that I'd prefer not to talk about it even now."

"Yes. I didn't mean to frighten you."

"Frighten?" Diana smiled gently. "No, you don't

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do that. Tell me, what else is there to do in this year, in this town?"

We took the subway to the Battery and walked quietly on the grass around the Aquarium, which was closed and shuttered for the night. Then we took the ferry over to Staten Island and stood in the open on the top deck, letting the cold brinewind flap our coats and sting our cheeks. We waved to the Statue of Liberty and she smiled at us—or perhaps it was a trick of the light. I had my coat wrapped around Diana and she huddled against my chest and I felt young and bold and ready to explore uncharted worlds. We talked of minor things and we shared a cup of coffee, black and four sugars, and I think, perhaps, realized fully that we were in love.

The next day we went to the Bronx Zoo in the morning, came back to Manhattan in early afternoon for a matinee of *Our Town*, and then returned to the hotel to dress. A man was waiting in the sitting room of our suite. He was standing.

"Why, Kroner," Diana said, "how delightful to see you. And how silly you look in those clothes here." Thus she effectively suppressed the *Who are you and what are you doing in my room?* that I had been about to contribute to the occasion. Kroner was a short man with too much hair on his head. He wore a onesuit that squeezed around his stocky, overly muscled body. The weightlifter is a physical type I have always disliked. I didn't recognize the Identification and Position badge he wore, except that it was medium-high status and something to do with education.

"Who is he?"

"Kroner," Diana said. "My professor—or one of. And this is Christopher Mar."

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"Delighted." Clearly he lied.

"Surprised." I said. We touched hands. "To what do we owe this visit and what may we do for you? Any professor of Diana's——" I waved a hand vaguely. The current trend toward the vague can be very useful in conversation.

"I suppose you know what you're doing?" Kroner asked coldly.

"I have no idea of what that means," I told him. "At which of us are you sneering?"

"Both of you, I suppose," Kroner said. He sighed and sat down on the sofa. "You're right, I was being hostile. And there's no reason. You're a very important man, Senior Senator Mar—there's no way I can threaten you. And Grecia knows I'm only interested in protecting and helping her. When she disappeared from Seventeen without notifying us——"

"Who?" I interrupted.

"Grecia. Your companion."

"Is that right?" I asked Diana (Grecia).

She nodded.

"Of course you have a perfect right——"

"What does she call herself?" Kroner asked.

"Diana Seven," I said. Diana (Grecia) looked defiantly down at Kroner and remained silent.

Kroner nodded thoughtfully. "Of course," he said. "A clear choice. Then he doesn't know? You haven't told him?"

"No," Diana (Grecia) said. "Why should I?"

"Of course," Kroner repeated. "From your point of view, no reason. You've always been the most stubborn and independent-minded. No matter how much we strive for uniformity. Not that we mind, you understand—it's just that the variations make the training more difficult to program. I suppose it will make

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you harder to predict in action, so it's all for the best."

"Haven't told me what?" I demanded. I tried to picture some horrible secret, but nothing would come to mind.

"Diana Seven is not a name," Kroner told me, "it's a designation. Choosing it as her alias is the sort of direct thinking we've come to expect from Grecia."

"It's a comment," Diana (Grecia) said.

"Grecia is number seven in an official government program known as Project Diana," Kroner said. "The number is arbitrary."

"So is the name," Diana (Grecia) said. "You know how I was named? Listen, I'll recite the names of the first seven girls, in order—that should give you the idea: Adena, Beth, Claudia, Debra, Erdra, Fidelity, Grecia. It goes on like that. I prefer Diana Seven, it's more honest."

"Diana Seven you are to me forever," I told her. "I don't understand, though. What sort of government project?"

"This is going to sound silly," Kroner said, managing to look apologetic, "but I don't think you have the need to know."

"I might not have the—but I do indeed need to know very badly, and I can develop the official Need to Know in a very few minutes realtime."

"I will tell everything," Diana said, sitting down on a straight-back chair and crossing her shapely legs. "What do you push to get them to bring up drinks?"

"I'll do it," I said, picking up the housephone and dialing. "What would you like?"

"Coffee," Diana said.

"Another profession," Kroner said. "I guess you're right—we'd better talk about it."

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"Something harder than coffee for you," I said, and ordered a pot of coffee and a portable bar sent up.

"Grecia——"

"Call her Diana—she prefers it."

Kroner shrugged. He was not very happy. "Diana is a GAM. Project Diana is one of a series of GAM projects that Future is funding."

GAM = Genetically Altered Man. GAMs were in disfavor now, at least on Earth, as it was felt that no alteration of the zygote could make up for a happy home life, or some such illogic.

"I thought the Bureau of the Future was only involved in long-range planning of city growth and transportation and that sort of thing," I said.

"And defense," Kroner told me. "Diana is a defense project."

That stopped me. I went into the bedroom to take off my tie and think of something clever to ask.

"What do you mean, 'a defense project'?" I cleverly asked when I returned. The bar was ported in then, so I had to wait for my answer. The waiter tried hard to preserve his air of waiterly detachment and not stare at Kroner, and even harder not to smile.

Kroner glared at him and stood up, flexing his biceps under the skintight onesuit. "What's the matter?" he demanded. "What are you staring at? Haven't you ever seen a Frog Prince before?"

The waiter merely gulped and fled the room. We all burst out laughing and I remembered that in my youth one of my closest friends had been a weight-lifter. "You really should have dressed for the period," I told Kroner.

He shrugged. "I was wearing a period overcoat,"

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he said, gesturing to a crumpled garment lying over a chair.

I fixed our various drinks and we sipped them and stared at each other. "We've been keeping an eye on the girls while they were on their travels," Kroner said. "When Diana took off with you we got worried. Diana has a certain reputation among the staff as a trouble-maker and you are a—prominent senator. The combination could be explosive."

"How?" I asked.

"The projects are played down," Kroner said. "For us, any press is bad. We'd be caught between two fires: those who are afraid of any GAM projects—the 'The only good superman is a dead superman' group—and those who would feel sorry for Diana and her sisters—poor little girls deprived of a home life and mother love and apple pie."

"It might have been nice, you know, all that stuff," Diana said, a surface anger in her voice covering some deeper emotion. "Why do people decide they have the right to do what's good for other people?"

"What?" I asked, feeling ignorant and ignored.

"We didn't exactly do it because it was good for you," Kroner said sadly. "We did it because it was necessary for us. We never lied to you about that."

"Great ethics," Diana said in a low, clipped voice that had an undertone of controlled scream. "We screwed up your life from before you were born, but at least we didn't lie to you—and that makes it all right." She turned to me. "Did you know I'm a mule?" she demanded.

"What?"

"A mule. Or perhaps a hinny. Except instead of a cross between a jackass and a mare, I'm a cross be-

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tween a human gamete and a micro-manipulator. Sterile."

"You mean you're——"

"No pills, no inserts, no children—no chance. Just me. Dead end. Supermule."

I went over to hold her, to show I understood, but she drew away. Mulelike, I couldn't help thinking, in her anger. "I'm on your side, you know," I said to her. She nodded, but stayed encased in herself.

I asked Kroner, "In what way is this girl a weapon?"

"Not a weapon," Kroner said. "More like a soldier."

"A hunting dog," Diana said. Well, it was a better self-image than a mule.

Kroner nodded. "In a way. Superfast reflexes for one thing. One of the reasons she's small: information travels to the brain faster. Nerves react and transmit faster. Eyes see farther into the infrared and ultraviolet. Raw strength is of little use today. You know how old she is?"

I didn't. "I'm not good at guessing age," I said.

"Twelve," Kroner said.

There was, I believe, a long pause then.

"Do you mind?" Diana asked softly.

"I am surprised," I said.

"The tendency in naturally evolved high intelligence is for longer childhoods, not shorter," Kroner said. "You must experience more, cogitate more, and have more time to experiment—play—to develop a really high intelligence potential. But it is possible to mature a high intelligence very quickly in an extremely enriched environment. Twelve years from birth to adult is about the best we can manage. The

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body takes that long to grow and mature anyway, if we want a comparatively normal body."

"Diana is an adult," I said. "No matter how many times, or how few, the Earth has circled the sun since her birth."

Kroner nodded. "Diana is a highly capable adult, able to handle herself well in almost any situation."

"I'll not argue that," I said. "She dispatched three ruffians who attacked us and did so with unseemly ease."

"Ah!" Kroner said. "We thought that was she. Very good, Diana. Of course, that's what she's been trained and bred for, so it's fitting that she did."

"Trained for close combat?" I asked. "What sort of war are you expecting?"

"Not that," Kroner explained. "For you, as for most of the rest of humanity, killing any sentient being—and many lower animals—would be murder. You'd have to steel yourself and be highly motivated to perform the act. For Diana, killing anything that isn't human—or even humans who are clearly 'enemy'—is equivalent to hunting. And, like a good hunting dog, she enjoys it. Isn't that so, Diana?"

She nodded. "I can't see anything wrong with killing an enemy. And the fact that I know this is genetics and conditioning doesn't matter—all attitudes anyone has are a result of genetics and conditioning. If you gentlemen will excuse me, it's been a long day and I think I'll go to bed."

Kroner and I spoke privately for a short while after Diana retired. I suspect Diana listened at the door, as she was awake when I went to bed, but if so I'm glad of it.

"Does this mean I have to worry about Diana's

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getting angry at me and breaking my neck?" I asked Kroner, when she had left.

"Not at all," he said. "If anything, the opposite. She may tend to overprotect you. To kill a human being who is not an enemy would, in any case, be murder, and she is incapable of murder."

"How does she determine an enemy?"

"I think, at the moment, she'll take your word for it. She appears to be fixated on you. You may call it love, if you like, but we prefer the scientific term."

"I appear to be fixated on her," I said. "Whatever you call it."

"That's fine. We approve. As long as you aren't planning to use her—or make a political issue or anything of that sort—we're on your side."

"What is she doing here anyway? Is school out? Vacation?"

Kroner fixed himself another drink. "No," he said. "This is part of her training. Mixing with humanity to learn more fully what it is she may be fighting for. Two years of this—going and doing more or less where and what she wants—then she'll be ready for, let's call it graduate school."

"More fixating?"

"That's right. Fixating on man. Those in charge of this project seem a bit afraid of their creation."

"Historical precedent," I said. "Or, at least, literary."

"Yes," Kroner said. "Take care of Diana. Enjoy her. Love her. She needs more love than the other girls."

"You mean she fixates more strongly?" I asked.

Kroner smiled. "As of now," he said, "I'm on vacation. Bye." He picked up his coat and left.

I went in to sleep with Diana and she held me

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tight for a long while. I think she would have cried if she had known how. I held her, but it's hard to comfort someone who cannot cry.

Back in realtime—away from Earth and Anno Domini—I used my status to find out about the Project. Diana opted to stay with me. We fixated well together.

It was difficult, even for me, to open the private record of Project Diana. It was the most recent in a line of such projects dating back to shortly after the Mabden Annihilation. I immersed myself in it and read motive, intent, achievement, method, fear and design in the record crystals.

Earth is afraid of its heroes. Always has been.

Diana is sterile by design. Female by convenience—easier to control without the Y chromosome. She is sterile by design. Safer. Can't breed a superrace behind our backs.

Diana's cells won't regenerate. Our long life depends upon regeneration—actually replication—of certain cells. Diana's—let us call it template—is inaccessible to our techniques. Also by design. Safer thus. Can't make long-range plans behind our backs. She will also age fast and be old by forty—probably dead by fifty.

I went home that evening and cried myself to sleep. Diana held me, but the crying frightened her and she couldn't help because I wouldn't tell her why, and it's hard to comfort someone unless you know why he's crying.

I have two years with her before she has to go off to prepare for the war we may never have. She wants to go. They want her for twenty-five years, she says, and she owes them that.

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We're planning what we will do when she returns. There are so many things she wants to do and see in this vast galaxy. I promised to show them all to her.

I hardly cry at all any more, even late at night.

When men die, they leave their dreams behind them. And those who are left must pick up the dreams, to fulfill them as best they have been prepared. Thus the spirits of men are given new form. Or the ghosts of their dreams, perchance . . .

ROBERT F. YOUNG

Ghosts

When Professor Tom died he left Jenny and Jim the house he had lived in, the old movies he had loved to watch, and the workshop where he had tinkered away the final years of his life.

Jenny and Jim buried him high on the valley slope where the woodbine ran wild each spring and the first wildflowers appeared—where the warm rays of Arcturus struck each springtime morning, heralding the new day. Jim said a few words over the grave and Jenny stood beside him, trying to cry. She couldn't. She had no tears.

"We give to you this man, God," Jim said, "to do with as you must. We give him to you because you are his god. He was ours."

Together they shoveled earth over the crude wooden casket and afterward Jenny placed a handful of spring flowers on the grave. Then she and Jim walked down the slope of the valley and across the fields to where the white prefabricated house stood, the aluminum workshop just behind it.

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"Shall we watch a movie tonight?" Jenny asked. "Or do you think it would be disrespectful?"

"I don't think it would be disrespectful," Jim answered. "I don't think Professor Tom would mind."

The movie they decided upon was *Made for Each Other*, starring Carole Lombard and James Stewart. They waited till after the sun went down. Then Jim put the film in the projector, turned out the lights. They sat down on the sofa to watch. They had watched the movie many times with Professor Tom and had hugged and kissed like the actors did, but never when he was looking. They had felt he might disapprove. But it was all right now, not because he was gone, but because they were man and wife. So they sat there on the sofa with their arms around each other, and every time Carole Lombard kissed James Stewart Jenny kissed Jim. And whenever James Stewart kissed Carole Lombard Jim kissed Jenny. Afterward they went outside to sit on the steps and scan the skies. But although they scanned them all night, they saw nothing but stars.

At length morning arrived. Lovely Arcturus rose above the green lip of the valley and songbirds climbed air currents into the sky to drink the nectar of the new day.

Jenny said to Jim, "Maybe we're being in much too much of a hurry—maybe it takes time."

Jim answered, "Maybe it'll come tonight."

Jim had been Professor Tom's gardener and handyman, Jenny his cook and housekeeper. On Earth, before his retirement, Professor Tom had been an engineer in the mechanized-menial field and Jenny and Jim were almost as beautiful as the stars in the old movies. He had loved them both, but it had been

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Jenny he had loved the most and sometimes tears he did not understand had come into his eyes when he looked at her.

He had said on his deathbed, "I never figured on things coming to this so soon. I preached humility all my life, but all the while I was just as arrogant as everybody else. I never thought that death would really step on my heels. But you two will be all right. The supply ship will be here within a year and I've left a note to the captain to take good care of you. He's an old friend of mine."

"Will you marry us?" Jenny had asked and Professor Tom had looked at her and blinked.

"You said," Jim pointed out, "that once you were a justice of the peace. That gives you the authority to make us man and wife."

"That was long ago," said Professor Tom, "but yes, I suppose it does. However——"

"Surely," Jenny had interposed, "you wouldn't want us to live in sin. We're madly in love and there's no telling how we'll carry on without you here to chaperone us."

A tear zigzagged down Professor Tom's sere cheek as he said, "Poor child, what do you know about making love—and what good would the knowledge do you if you had it? But if it will make you happy——"

There was no bible in the house, but the professor had made do without it. He had spoken the beautiful words they had heard so often in the old movies. "In sickness and in health . . . Love, honor and obey . . . I now pronounce you man and wife."

Life went on much as it had before. Jim worked in Professor Tom's flower garden in daytime, keep-

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ing it free from weeds. There was a kitchen garden, too, and Jim cultivated it as faithfully as he had before, although it would serve no useful purpose now. He and Jenny had already thrown out the food that was moldering in the refrigerator. They had turned off the unit and put away the dishes.

Every day Jenny cleaned the house from front to back, dusting furniture and scrubbing floors. Except for fixing meals for Professor Tom her routine was unchanged. Sometimes, while she was working, she would hum songs from the movie she and Jim had watched the night before. And sometimes in the middle of dusting the living room she would drop the cloth and dance the way Ruby Keeler did in *42nd Street*. *42nd Street* was her favorite movie, but *My Blue Heaven* was her favorite song.

Sitting on the sofa in the light reflected from the screen, the automatic projector whirring behind them, they would embrace and kiss and Jim would say, "Did you have a good day, darling?"

She would answer, "Yes, my sweet."

He would kiss her eyes and ears and nose and she would kiss his chin. They would hold each other as tightly as they could, but nothing ever came of their ardor and the skies remained as empty as before.

"Perhaps tomorrow," Jenny would say.

Jim would answer, "Yes, I'm sure tomorrow will be the Big Day."

But the Big Day failed to dawn and Happiness continued to hide in the hills, in the woodbine and the wildflowers—in the green bowers of the trees.

Professor Tom had stored both their memory banks with generous helpings of information, but for

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the most part these had to do with electronics, mechanical engineering, horticulture and cookery. It was to the old movies that they were indebted for their practical education. Most of the movies were products of the 1930's, but there were some from the twenties and a handful from the forties and fifties. The professor had spent a great many years and a great deal of money collecting them and naturally he had taken them with them when he had retired to Arcturus VI to live out his sunset years in solitude and peace in the isolated valley he had bought "—light-years removed," as he had put it, "from the malicious machinations of mankind."

Sitting with Jenny and Jim in the living room one night, watching *The Bells of St. Mary's*, he had said, "That's the way it was in those days—only that wasn't the way it really was at all."

"But how can something be true and yet not be true at all?" Jenny asked and he had laughed.

"I can see, my dear, that despite the perfection of your computerized thought processes—or even more probably because of it—you're incapable of any non-Aristotelian thinking. Many things can be both true and untrue. The worlds we watch upon that magic screen, my dear, are distorted reflections of reality inhabited by the ghosts of people whose real selves were often hidden from their own eyes. A reality powdered and perfumed and with its vitals eviscerated—a reality tailored for people who hadn't outgrown their need to be told fairy tales before they went to bed." Professor Tom sighed. "But I'll take it any day. For all its pious hypocrisies—for all its omissions and its untrue truths—it's a thousand times better than the reality I lived in all my life and

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finally left behind. I guess when men grow old they like to hide in caves and watch reflections on the walls."

In addition to the old movies, Professor Tom's collection comprised dozens of animated cartoons. Jenny and Jim found them fascinating. Some featured animals drawn to look like men or men drawn to look like animals. Others featured animals that were really meant to be animals but that talked and sometimes lived like human beings. In one way the cartoons were more educational than the movies, for they threw light on a certain mystery the movies were completely mum about. A mystery Professor Tom's books—most of which were devoted to electronics and mechanical engineering—did not even mention. In fact, if it hadn't been for the cartoons Jenny and Jim would never have learned the Secret of Life.

But apparently knowing the Secret of Life was not enough. The valley exchanged its green dress for summer's golden gown. The warm days and nights began parading past the prefabricated house. But although Jenny and Jim sat each evening on the sofa, aping the actions of the shadows on the screen, their embraces and kisses went unrewarded. The dawn of each new day found them sitting disappointed on their doorstep, as lonely as before.

"Maybe it's like that song that Don Ameche sings to Sonja Henie," Jenny said. "You know the one I mean—that only one in a million is lucky in love. Or maybe what we're trying to do is harder than we think."

"Maybe," Jim answered. "And maybe it's because they do things between scenes that we don't know about."

"Do things such as what?"

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"Like maybe they take off their clothes and kiss and hug that way."

"Why would they take their clothes off? What difference would their being naked make?"

"I don't know," said Jim, "but it wouldn't hurt to try."

That evening before they sat down on the sofa they removed their clothes. Professor Tom had lost interest in sex even before he retired and Jenny's body, although differently shaped, wasn't a great deal different from Jim's. The movie they watched abounded in love scenes, but although they embraced and kissed every time the two main characters did, their efforts went as unrewarded as before.

During one dawn, as they sat disconsolately on their doorstep, Jim said, "I think I know the reason, Jenny—I think I know why for us it doesn't work. We're different—and this world is different, too. We're going to have to *make* it happen. We've got everything we need to work with, thanks to Professor Tom, and he taught us practically all he knew. Maybe he foresaw a time like this."

They got busy right away. Jim made the blueprint first, after consulting several of Professor Tom's books. Then he made all the parts. Jenny helped him with the assembling. They worked day and night, taking time out only to watch the old movies and to kiss and embrace like the stars. There was hope in them now and they put more and more passion into their kisses.

"I want it to be a boy," Jenny said.

"Yes," Jim answered. "I want a son."

They had begun work in midsummer. Fall was on hand when they finished, and yellow and crimson patterns had begun to show upon the hills. Jim had

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built a lightweight electric motor to provide the necessary power. He made two light but long-lasting batteries to feed it. Together he and Jenny climbed the valley slope.

"We'll give it all the height we can," he said. "That way it'll have a maximum chance of getting to wherever it has to go and of returning with its bundle."

He turned on the little motor and released the device into the air. Slowly it rose into the sky. It circled the valley once, as he had programed it to do, then sped off toward the south.

Jenny said, "But suppose the nursery doesn't lie in that direction."

"Then—after it comes back we'll recharge its batteries and send it to the west. And after that, if necessary, to the east and to the north. The nursery *has* to be somewhere."

"Later on, if it's successful, we'll send it for others, won't we?" Jenny said.

"Of course. But first we'll make love—otherwise it won't work."

Hand in hand they walked down the slope and across the fields to the house.

The captain of the supply ship found them in the living room six months later. They were sitting on the sofa, their bodies covered with dust, their arms around each other, their lips touching in a final kiss.

Before them in the shadows an empty screen hung ghostlike on the wall. Behind them stood the automatic projector they had used to project their dreams. The length of copper wire they had used to short themselves out was lying on the floor at their feet.

The captain went all through the house. Professor Tom's note was lying on the bedtable beside his

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empty bed. The captain read it. Then he returned to the living room and looked once more at the faces of Jenny and Jim. He had known Tom all his life and he had known Tom's long-dead wife. In Jenny's face he saw young Tom's beloved bride—in Jim's, he saw young Tom.

When he made them I'll bet he didn't even know

. . .

His first thought was to repair them, to bring them back to life. Then he found the mechanical stork lying in the back yard. One of its canvas wings was broken, its tiny motor was burned out and its power source had given up the ghost after its fourth and final flight. He guessed the truth.

He had his men search the valley for Professor Tom's grave. After they found it he had them carry Jenny and Jim up the slope and bury them beside it. It was only fitting that they should sleep beside their god.

He spoke a few words to his own: "All of us leave ghosts behind of one kind or another. In a way, we're ghosts ourselves. We haunt ourselves our whole lives through because no matter how hard we try we can never fulfill our dreams. We're a lot like Jenny and Jim, which makes them human in a way. Grant them peace."

When spring came back again, the woodbine reached down from the hills and covered the two new graves and wildflowers appeared to welcome the springtime sun.

This is an article, meant as the afterword in a book which repeatedly stressed the doom of the city. I don't normally include nonfiction in a book of stories, and I'm tired of speculating on the future of the city. But this is so well thought out and such a joy to read that I found it irresistible.

FREDERIK POHL

Afterword

Cities are a hobby of mine. Like Catullus, *odi et amo*. I hate them because they are destructive of nature and man; I love them because they work.

I have worn out more shoes on the streets of a hundred cities than I ever expect to buy again. To me, the only way to know a city is to walk its streets, twenty miles or so of them at least—which is why Los Angeles, for example, is still alien to me; one does not walk there, and therefore it is hard for me to believe that one lives there. I like to see the life of the run-down slums, the residential areas and the marts of business, as well as the cathedrals and museums. What I know best about Leningrad I learned touring the back streets with my son, entering the grocery stores and the wineshops, watching the commuters race to board the trolleybuses, standing on the bridges and looking out over the branches of the Neva. Paris to me is the workingmen's cafés under Montmartre and the tatty opulence of the avenue d'Iéna as well as the view upstream from the Ile de

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la Cité. Tokyo is the department stores along the Ginza and the teams of sawyers cutting down trees that are asphyxiated with SO_2 . Munich is the shopping mall under the animated clock and the bustle of new construction. I wonder what all these cities will look like a hundred years from now. I have seen some of them over a period of decades, seen them change, seen them stay the same.

I do not think they will die. Cities have a life of their own. Like all living things, they grow to their own pattern, not ours.

This has been a great problem for the people who plan. Cities do not like to be planned very much. I have had a hobby of interest in the attempts of human beings to impose their fantasies on cities—rebuilding old ones, inventing new ones like Komsomolsk and Reston—which has led me on a lot of excursions, by way of the green bus out of London, to see Welwyth Garden City, by a limping two-engine piston plane on a thousand-mile round-trip flight from Rio for the sake of spending two hours in that gaudy, heartbreaking and already outmoded dream, Brasília. They are dreams, these planned new cities. All of them are dreams, and making them come true destroys them. I have not seen Le Corbusier's planned city of Chandigarh (I will one day, if I live long enough), but I know what soured that particular dream. It was planned as the capital of a province, but the province split in two when India and Pakistan divided, and so it is a city without a function. Goats graze the esplanades. I have seen the vestigial traces of the American planned cities of the 30's; they have been swallowed up, one by one, by urban sprawl.

So from all this evidence and more, I do not think

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that it is possible for a man to dream a city and make it live, any more than it is possible for him to dream a woman, and look up to find her walking down the street into his life. And yet—

And yet there must be some way to make city living joyous as well as productive. And yet there must be some magic formula to create cities that do not need to destroy the people who live in them—the cold rage of New Yorkers, the grim despair of Muscovites, the passionate contempt of Neapolitans. There must be a way, but I am not sure where it is to be found.

A city is an accumulation of a diversity of social capital.

The accumulation is important. It is a matter of scale effect, that is, of size. No city is a real city unless it can support an opera house, a honky-tonk amusement area, an East Village or Haight-Ashbury, factories, colleges, a spectrum of churches and temples, folk dancing in the styles of Greece and Spain and Israel, adult courses in pottery baking and Sanskrit. I don't want all of those things for myself. No one does. Not all of them for any individual. But unless they are all available, unless you can find a place to get a meal at four in the morning or to buy an out-of-print book, then it is not a city; it is only a huddling place for a lot of people.

The diversity is equally important. Washington and Moscow are not really cities. They have central functions—government—that overpower everything else they do. There is no diversity. They are ad hoc headquarters encampments on a huge scale, but they do not give the people who live in them the variety of experience and input that makes a city work.

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In this book a number of writers have touched on some of the things that make cities essential, and tried to project into the future some of the limitless possible directions city development may take. At the same time they have turned their microscopes on some of the things that make cities unbearable, and tried to see what other things the future will bring. They are all part of the same pattern: pollution and sexuality, power failures and traffic jams, the city abandoned to our successors. (But has any real city ever been abandoned? Only Rome, once, for a day or two; and then the people come back. All the cities that have disappeared are what they are because the people were forcibly driven away, not because they left voluntarily.) I do not know that these visions exhaust the future of the city. In fact, I am pretty sure they do not; I don't agree that cities are intolerable. Or more accurately, I think that even if they are intolerable it doesn't matter because we will go on tolerating them anyway.

For I do not think that civilization (the base, *civitatem*, meaning "the city") can survive without cities. In some form.

I am in some doubt about the form. I know the arguments of those who think that the form is not important. I like the idea of the world of the exploded city—"Don't commute, communicate!"—in which everyone does his own thing in his own place, linked to one another by electronic media rather than physical proximity. Maybe this is the wave of the future for city building. At times I have thought so, and have been one of its prophets. Certainly it is so that for most of us the commuting is preposterously superfluous. We get up in the morning, endure an hour or so on the train and arrive in

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a cubicle in a building from which most of our activity has to do with reading pieces of paper that cross our desk (why not read them on a cathode-tube screen from Biloxi of Saskatchewan?), talking to associates (why not just pick up the phone and order a conference call?), or sitting in on meetings that are always difficult to convene (did you ever try to get five busy executives in the same room at the same time?) and often enough are inconclusive anyway. Insofar as "the city" represents to most of us the place where we work, and get out of as fast as we can when the working day is through, clearly it can be replaced by wires and microwave relays.

Yet that is not all that a city does. You can dial an associate on the phone and talk to him. But you can't run into him on the phone; the chance encounter in a restaurant, on a street, only happens when there is physical presence. You do not need to go to a concert hall to hear a concert. But there is a joy and a purpose to being physically present in a place with other people who are like-minded, at least in that they too want to be present in that place for whatever is going on. You can't even imagine a political rally exploded into ten thousand separate homes, viewed by TV. The speeches would be the same, but the crowd excitement would not exist. Hearing Bernstein's *Mass* on records, even watching it on TV, is not the same as sitting in an auditorium with four or five thousand other people who, like you, are being bombarded by the quadriphonic amplified sound and saturated with the color and movement on the stage.

For all these reasons, I think that city life is a failed experiment that we will never give up on.

The cities I know best, New York and London,

are absolute failures in some very essential ways. New York is dirty, noisy, preposterously expensive and essentially unsafe. Not *every* person who comes to New York gets robbed, raped or murdered. But no person is exempt, and few areas of the city are wholly secure; in New York your person is always at risk. London is physically safer, but it is also dirty, also noisy and rapidly becoming just as preposterously expensive. Not only are these things true now; they have been true pretty generally throughout the history of both cities—four hundred years of history for New York, two thousand years for London. They have almost always been dirty, noisy, expensive and unsafe, in no way fit to live in.

And yet they survive.

It is this paradox that guarantees the future of the city as an institution.

When institutions survive doggedly in spite of incontrovertible indications that they are unstable, inadequate and doomed, it says something about the value of the institutions. They are so needed that they cannot be allowed to fail. Whatever their faults, their virtues outweigh them.

And thus it is with cities. We have them, and we will always have them . . . as long as we have civilization at all.

Recently, Poul Anderson has been writing novels which explore the problems of different races learning to inhabit the same world. Good will and intelligence are not quite enough to remove all difficulties; cultural differences are too deep in the roots of every race. Here he examines that aspect of culture which gives a race the spiritual strength needed to find a way of facing death and life.

POUL ANDERSON

The Problem of Pain

Maybe only a Christian can understand this story. In that case, I don't qualify. But I do take an interest in religion, as part of being an amateur psychologist, and—for the grandeur of its language if nothing else—a Bible is among the reels that accompany me wherever I go. This was one reason Peter Berg told me what had happened in his past. He desperately needed to make sense of it, and no priest he'd talked to had quite laid his questions to rest. There was an outside chance that an outside viewpoint like mine would see what a man couldn't who was within the faith.

His other reason was simple loneliness. We were on Lucifer, as part of a study corporation. That world is well named. It will never be a real colony for any beings whose ancestors evolved amidst clean green-

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ery. But it might be marginally habitable, and if so, its mineral wealth would be worth exploiting. Our job was to determine whether that was true. The gentlest looking environment holds a thousand death traps until you have learned what the difficulties are and how to grip them. (Earth is no exception.) Sometimes you find problems which can't be solved economically, or can't be solved at all. Then you write off the area or the entire planet, and look for another.

We'd contracted to work three standard years on Lucifer. The pay was munificent, but presently we realized that no bank account could buy back one day we might have spent beneath a kindlier sun. It was a knowledge we carefully avoided discussing with teammates.

About midway through, Peter Berg and I were assigned to do an in-depth investigation of a unique cycle in the ecology of the northern middle latitudes. This meant that we settled down for weeks—which ran into months—in a sample region, well away from everybody else to minimize human disturbances. An occasional supply flitter gave us our only real contact; electronics were no proper substitute, especially when that hell-violent star was forever disrupting them.

Under such circumstances, you come to know your partner maybe better than you know yourself. Pete and I got along well. He's a big, sandy-haired, freckle-faced young man, altogether dependable, with enough kindness, courtesy, and dignity that he need not make a show of them. Soft-spoken, he's a bit short in the humor department. Otherwise I recommend him as a companion. He has a lot to tell from his own wanderings, yet he'll listen with genuine in-

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terest to your memories and brags; he's well-read too, a good cook when his turn comes; he plays chess at just about my level of skill.

I already knew he wasn't from Earth, had in fact never been there, but from Aeneas, nearly 200 light-years distant, more than 300 from Lucifer. And, while he's gotten an education at the new little university in Nova Roma, he was raised in the outback. Besides, that town is only a far-off colonial capital. It helped explain his utter commitment to belief in a God who became flesh and died for love of man. Not that I scoff. When he said his prayers, night and morning in our one-room shelterdome, trustingly as a child, I didn't rag him nor he reproach me. Of course, over the weeks, we came more and more to talk about such matters.

At last he told me of that which haunted him.

We'd been out through the whole of one of Lucifer's long, long days; we'd toiled, we'd sweated, we'd itched and stunk and gotten grimy and staggered from weariness, we'd come near death once; and we'd found the uranium-concentrating root which was the key to the whole weirdness around us. We came back to base as day's fury was dying in the usual twilight gale; we washed, ate something, went to sleep with the hiss of storm-blown dust for a lullaby. Ten or twelve hours later we awoke and saw, through the vitryl panels, stars cold and crystalline beyond this thin air, auroras aflame, landscape hoar, and the twisted things we called trees all sheathed in glittering ice.

"Nothing we can do now till dawn," I said, "and we've earned a celebration." So we prepared a large meal, elaborate as possible—breakfast or supper, what relevance had that here? We drank wine in the

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course of it, and afterward much brandy while we sat, side by side in our loungers, watching the march of constellations which Earth never saw. And we talked. Finally we talked of God.

"—Maybe you can give me an idea," Pete said. In the dim light, his face bore a struggle. He stared before him and knotted his fingers.

"M-m, I dunno," I said carefully. "To be honest, no offense meant, theological conundrums strike me as silly."

He gave me a direct blue look. His tone was soft: "That is, you feel the paradoxes don't arise if we don't insist on believing?"

"Yes. I respect your faith, Pete, but it's not mine. And if I did suppose that a, well, a spiritual principle or something is behind the universe"—I gestured at the high and terrible sky—"in the name of reason, can we confine, can we understand whatever made *that*, in the bounds of one little dogma?"

"No. Agreed. How could finite minds grasp the infinite? We can see parts of it, though, that've been revealed to us." He drew breath. "Way back before space travel, the Church decided Jesus had come only to Earth, to man. If other intelligent races need salvation—and obviously a lot of them do!—God will have made His suitable arrangements for them. Sure. However, this does not mean Christianity is not true, or that certain different beliefs are not false."

"Like, say, polytheism, wherever you find it?"

"I think so. Besides, religions evolve. The primitive faiths see God, or the gods, as power; the higher ones see Him as justice; the highest see Him as love." Abruptly he fell silent. I saw his fist clench, until he grabbed up his glass and drained it and refilled it in nearly a single savage motion.

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"I must believe that," he whispered.

I waited a few seconds, in Lucifer's crackling night stillness, before saying: "An experience made you wonder?"

"Made me . . . disturbed. Mind if I tell you?"

"Certainly not." I saw he was about to open himself; and I may be an unbeliever, but I know what is sacred.

"Happened about five years ago. I was on my first real job. So was the"—his voice stumbled the least bit—"the wife I had then. We were fresh out of school and apprenticeship, fresh into marriage. Our employers weren't human. They were Ythrians. Ever heard of them?"

I sought through my head. The worlds, races, beings are unknowably many, in this tiny corner of this one dust-mote galaxy which we have begun to explore a little. "Ythrians, Ythrians . . . wait. Do they fly?"

"Yes. Surely one of the most glorious sights in creation. Your Ythrian isn't as heavy as a man, of course; adults mass around 25 or 30 kilos—but his wingspan goes up to six meters, and when he soars with those feathers shining gold-brown in the light, or swoops in a crack of thunder and whistle of wind ———"

"Hold on," I said. "I take it Ythri's a terrestroid planet?"

"Pretty much. Somewhat smaller and drier than Earth, somewhat thinner atmosphere—about like Aeneas, in fact, which it's not too far from as interstellar spaces go. You can live there without special protection. The biochemistry's quite similar to ours."

"Then how the devil can those creatures be that size? The wing loading's impossible, when you have

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only cell tissue to oxidize for power. They'd never get off the ground."

"Ah, but they have antlibranches as well." Pete smiled, though it didn't go deep. "Those look like three gills, sort of, on either side, below the wings. They're actually more like bellows, pumped by the wing muscles. Extra oxygen is forced directly into the bloodstream during flight. A biological super-charger system."

"Well, I'll be a . . . never mind what." I considered, in delight, this new facet of nature's inventive-ness. "Um-m-m . . . if they spend energy at that rate, they've got to have appetites to match."

"Right. They're carnivores. A number of them are still hunters. The advanced societies are based on ranching. In either case, obviously, it takes a lot of meat animals, a lot of square kilometers, to support one Ythrian. So they're fiercely territorial. They live in small groups—single families or extended households—which attack, with intent to kill, any uninvited outsider who doesn't obey an order to leave."

"And still they're civilized enough to hire humans for space exploration?"

"Uh-huh. Remember, being flyers, they've never needed to huddle in cities in order to have ready communication. They do keep a few towns, mining or manufacturing centers, but those are inhabited mostly by wing-clipped slaves. I'm glad to say that institution's dying out as they get modern machinery."

"By trade?" I guessed.

"Yes," Pete replied. "When the first Grand Survey discovered them, their most advanced culture was at an Iron Age level of technology; no industrial revolution, but a lot of sophisticated minds around, and subtle philosophies." He paused. "That's important to

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my question—that the Ythrians, at least of the Planha-speaking *choths*, are not barbarians and have not been for many centuries. They've had their equivalents of Socrates, Aristotle, Confucious, Galileo, yes, and their prophets and seers."

After another mute moment: "They realized early what the visitors from Earth implied, and set about attracting traders and teachers. Once they had some funds, they sent their promising young folk off-planet to study. I met several at my own university, which is why I got my job offer. By now they have a few spacecraft and native crews. But you'll understand, their technical people are spread thin, and in several branches of knowledge they have no experts. So they employ humans."

He went on to describe the typical Ythrian: warm-blooded, feathered like a golden eagle (though more intricately) save for a crest on the head, and yet not a bird. Instead of a beak, a blunt muzzle full of fangs juts before two great eyes. The female bears her young alive. While she does not nurse them, they have lips to suck the juices of meat and fruits, wherefore their speech is not hopelessly unlike man's. What were formerly the legs have evolved into arms bearing three taloned fingers, flanked by two thumbs, on each hand. Aground, the huge wings fold downward and, with the help of claws at the angles, give locomotion. That is slow and awkward—but aloft, ah!

"They become more alive, flying, than we ever do," Pete murmured. His gaze had lost itself in the shuddering auroras overhead. "They must: the metabolic rate they have then, and the space around them, speed, sky, a hundred winds to ride on and be kissed by. . . . That's what made me think Enherrian, in particular, believed more keenly than I could hope to.

I saw him and others dancing, high, high in the air, swoops, glides, hoverings, sunshine molten on their plumes; I asked what they did, and was told they were honoring God."

He sighed. "Or that's how I translated the Planha phrase, rightly or wrongly," he went on. "Olga and I had taken a cram course, and our Ythrian teammates all knew Anglic; but nobody's command of the foreign tongue was perfect. It couldn't be. Multiple billion years of separate existence, evolution, history—what a miracle that we could think as alike as we did!

"However, you could call Enherrian religious, same as you could call me that, and not be too grotesquely off the mark. The rest varied, just like humans. Some were also devout, some less, some agnostics or atheists; two were pagans, following the bloody rites of what was called the Old Faith. For that matter, my Olga"—the knuckles stood forth where he grasped his tumbler of brandy—"had tried, for my sake, to believe as I did, and couldn't.

"Well. The New Faith interested me more. It was new only by comparison—at least half as ancient as mine. I hoped for a chance to study it, to ask questions and compare ideas. I really knew nothing except that it was monotheistic, had sacraments and a theology though no official priesthood, upheld a high ethical and moral standard—for Ythrians, I mean. You can't expect a race which can only live by killing animals, and has an oestrous cycle, and is incapable by instinct of maintaining what we'd recognize as a true nation or government, and on and on—you can't expect them to resemble Christians much. God has given them a different message. I wished to know

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what. Surely we could learn from it." Again he paused. "After all . . . being a faith with a long tradition . . . and not static but a seeking, a history of prophets and saints and believers . . . I thought it must know God is love. Now what form would God's love take to an Ythrian?"

He drank. I did too, before asking cautiously: "Uh, where was this expedition?"

Pete stirred in his lounge. "To a system about 80 light-years from Ythri's," he answered. "The original survey crew had discovered a terrestroid planet there. They didn't bother to name it. Prospective colonists would choose their own name anyway. Those could be human or Ythrian, conceivably both—if the environment proved out.

"Offhand, the world—our group called it, unofficially, Gray, after that old captain—the world looked brilliantly promising. It's intermediate in size between Earth and Ythri, surface gravity 0.8 terrestrial; slightly more irradiation, from a somewhat yellower sun, than Earth gets, which simply makes it a little warmer; axial tilt, therefore seasonal variations, a bit less than terrestrial; length of year about three-quarters of ours, length of day a bit under half; one small, close-in, bright moon; biochemistry similar to ours—we could eat most native things, though we'd require imported crops and livestock to supplement the diet. All in all, seemingly well-nigh perfect."

"Rather remote to attract Earthlings at this early date," I remarked. "And from your description, the Ythrians won't be able to settle it for quite a while either."

"They think ahead," Pete responded. "Besides, they have scientific curiosity and, yes, in them per-

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haps even more than in the humans who went along, a spirit of adventure. Oh, it was a wonderful thing to be young in that band!"

He had not yet reached 30, but somehow his cry was not funny.

He shook himself. "Well, we had to make sure," he said. "Besides planetology, ecology, chemistry, oceanography, meterology, a million and a million mysteries to unravel for their own sakes—we must scout out the death traps, whatever those might be.

"At first everything went like Mary's smile on Christmas morning. The spaceship set us off—it couldn't be spared to linger in orbit—and we established base on the largest continent. Soon our hundred-odd dispersed across the globe, investigating this or that. Olga and I made part of a group on the southern shore, where a great gulf swarmed with life. A strong current ran eastward from there, eventually striking an archipelago which deflected it north. Flying over those waters, we spied immense, I mean immense patches—no, floating islands—of vegetation, densely interwoven, grazed on by monstrous marine creatures, no doubt supporting any number of lesser plant and animal species.

"We wanted a closer look. Our camp's sole aircraft wasn't good for that. Anyhow, it was already in demand for a dozen jobs. We had boats, though, and launched one. Our crew was Enherrian, his wife Whell, their grown children Rusa and Arrach, my beautiful new bride Olga, and me. We'd take three or four Gray days to reach the nearest atlantis weed, as Olga dubbed it. Then we'd be at least a week exploring before we turned back—a vacation, a lark, a joy."

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He tossed off his drink and reached for the bottle. "You ran into grief," I prompted.

"No." He bent his lips upward, stiffly. "It ran into us. A hurricane. Unpredicted; we knew very little about that planet. Given the higher solar energy input and, especially, the rapid rotation, the storm was more violent than would've been possible on Earth. We could only run and pray.

"At least, I prayed, and imagined that Enherrian did."

Wind shrieked, hooted, yammered, hit flesh with fists and cold knives. Waves rumbled in that driven air, black and green and fang-white, fading from view as the sun sank behind the cloud-roil which hid it. Often a monster among them loomed castle-like over the gunwale. The boat slipped by, spilled into the troughs, rocked onto the crests and down again. Spin-drift, icy, stinging, bitter on lips and tongue, made a fog across her length.

"We'll live if we can keep sea room," Enherrian had said when the fury first broke. "She's well-found. The engine capacitors have ample kilowatt-hours in them. Keep her bow on and we'll live."

But the currents had them now, where the mighty gulf stream met the outermost islands and its waters churned, recoiled, spun about and fought. Minute by minute, the riptides grew wilder. They made her yaw till she was broadside on and surges roared over her deck; they shocked her onto her beam ends, and the hull became a toning bell.

Pete, Olga, and Whell were in the cabin, trying to rest before their next watch. That was no longer possible. The Ythrian female locked hands and wing-claws around the net-covered framework wherein she

had slept, hung on and uttered nothing. In the wan glow of a single overhead fluoro, among thick restless shadows, her eyes gleamed topaz. They did not seem to look at the crampedness around—at what, then?

The humans had secured themselves by a line onto a lower bunk. They embraced, helping each other fight the leaps and swings which tried to smash them against the sides. Her fair hair on his shoulder was the last brightness in his cosmos. "I love you," she said, over and over, through hammer blows and groans. "Whatever happens, I love you, Pete, I thank you for what you've given me."

"And you," he would answer. *And You*, he would think. *Though You won't take her, not yet, will You? Me, yes, if that's Your Will. But not Olga. It'd leave Your creation too dark.*

A wing smote the cabin door. Barely to be heard through the storm, an Ythrian voice—high, whistly, but resonant out of full lungs—shouted: "Come topside!"

Whell obeyed at once, the Bergs as fast as they could slip on life jackets. Having taken no personal grav units along, they couldn't fly free if they went overboard. Dusk raved around them. Pete could just see Rusa and Arrach in the stern, fighting the tiller. Enherrian stood before him and pointed forward. "Look," the captain said. Pete, who had no nictitating membranes, must shield his eyes with fingers to peer athwart the hurricane. He saw a deeper darkness hump up from a wall of white; he heard surf crash.

"We can't pull free," Enherrian told him. "Between wind and current—too little power. We'll likely be wrecked. Make ready."

Olga's hand went briefly to her mouth. She hud-

dled against Pete and might have whispered, "Oh, no." Then she straightened, swung back down into the cabin, braced herself as best she could, and started assembling the most vital things. He saw that he loved her still more than he had known.

The same calm descended on him. Nobody had time to be afraid. He got busy too. The Ythrians could carry a limited weight of equipment and supplies, but sharply limited under these conditions. The humans, buoyed by their jackets, must carry most. They strapped it to their bodies.

When they re-emerged, the boat was in the shoals. Enherrian ordered them to take the rudder. His wife, son, and daughter stood around—on hands which clutched the rails with prey-snatching strength—and spread their wings to give a bit of shelter. The captain clung to the cabin top as lookout. His yelled commands reached the Bergs dim, tattered.

"Hard right!" Upward cataracts burst on a skerry to port. It glided past, was lost in murk. "Two points starboard—steady!" The hull slipped between a pair of rocks. Ahead was a narrow opening in the island's sheer black face. To a lagoon, to safety? Surf raged on either side of that gate, and everywhere else.

The passage was impossible. The boat struck, threw Olga off her feet and Arrach off her perch. Full reverse engine could not pull free. The deck canted. A billow and a billow smashed across.

Pete was in the water. It grabbed him, pulled him under, dragged him over a sharp bottom. He thought: *Into Your hands, God. Spare Olga, please, please—* and the sea spewed him back up for one gulp of air.

Wallowing in blindness, he tried to gauge how the breakers were acting, what he should do. If he could somehow belly-surf in, he might make it, he barely

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might. . . . He was on the neck of a rushing giant, it climbed and climbed, it shoved him forward at what he knew was lunatic speed. He saw the reef on which it was about to smash him and knew he was dead.

Talons closed on his jacket. Air brawled beneath wings. The Ythrian could not raise him, but could draw him aside . . . the bare distance needed, and Pete went past the rock whereon his bones were to have been crushed, down into the smother and chaos beyond. The Ythrian didn't break free in time. He glimpsed the plumes go under, as he himself did. They never rose.

He beat on, and on, without end.

He floated in water merely choppy, swart palisades to right and left, a slope of beach ahead. He peered into the clamorous dark and found nothing. "Olga," he croaked. "Olga. Olga."

Wings shadowed him among the shadows. "Get ashore before an undertow eats you!" Enherrian whooped, and beat his way off in search.

Pete crawled to gritty sand, fell, and let annihilation have him. He wasn't unconscious long. When he revived Rusa and Whell were beside him. Enherrian was further inland. The captain hauled on a line he had snubbed around a tree. Olga floated at the other end. She had no strength left, but he had passed a bight beneath her arms and she was alive.

At wolf-gray dawn the wind had fallen to gale force or maybe less, and the cliffs shielded lagoon and strand from it. Overhead it shrilled, and outside the breakers cannonaded, their rage aquiver through the island. Pete and Olga huddled together, a shared cloak across their shoulders. Enherrian busied him-

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self checking the salvaged material. Whell sat on the hindbones of her wings and stared seaward. Moisture gleamed on her grizzled feathers like tears.

Rusa flew in from the reefs and landed. "No trace," he said. His voice was emptied by exhaustion. "Neither the boat nor Arrach." Through the rust in his own brain, Pete noticed the order of those words.

Nevertheless—he leaned toward the parents and brother of Arrach, who had been beautiful and merry and had sung to them by moonlight. "How can we say——?" he began, realized he didn't have Planha words, and tried in Anglic: "How can we say how sorry we both are?"

"No necessity," Rusa answered.

"She died saving me!"

"And what you were carrying, which we needed badly." Some energy returned to Rusa. He lifted his head and its crest. "She had deathpride, our lass."

Afterward Pete, in his search for meaning, would learn about that Ythrian concept. "Courage" is too simple and weak a translation. Certain Old Japanese words came closer, though they don't really bear the same value either.

Whell turned her hawk gaze full upon him. "Did you see anything of what happened in the water?" she asked. He was too unfamiliar with her folk to interpret the tone; today he thinks it was loving. He did know that, being creatures of seasonal rut, Ythrians are less sexually motivated than man is, but probably treasure their young even more. The strongest bond between male and female is children, who are what life is all about.

"No, I . . . I fear not," he stammered.

Enherrian reached out to lay claws, very gently

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and briefly, on his wife's back. "Be sure she fought well," he said. "She gave God honor." (Glory? Praise? Adoration? His due?)

Does he mean she prayed, made her confession, while she drowned? The question dragged itself through Pete's weariness and caused him to murmur: "She's in heaven now." Again he was forced to use Anglic words.

Enherrian gave him a look which he could have sworn was startled. "What do you say? Arrach is dead."

"Why her . . . spirit——"

"Will be remembered in pride." Enherrian resumed his work.

Olga said it for Pete: "So you don't believe the spirit outlives the body?"

"How could it?" Enherrian snapped. "Why should it?" His motions, his posture, the set of his plumage added: Leave me alone.

Pete thought: *Well, many faiths, including high ones, including some sects which call themselves Christian, deny immortality. How sorry I feel for these my friends, who don't know they will meet their beloved afresh!*

They will, regardless. It makes no sense that God, Who created what is because in His goodness He wished to share existence, would shape a soul only to break it and throw it away.

Never mind. The job on hand is to keep Olga alive, in her dear body. "Can I help?"

"Yes, check your medical kit," Enherrian said.

It had come through undamaged in its box. The items for human use—stimulants, sedatives, anesthetics, antitoxins, antibiotics, coagulants, healing promoters, et standard cetera—naturally outnum-

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bered those for Ythrians. There hasn't been time to develop a large scientific pharmacopoeia for the latter species. True, certain materials work on both, as does the surgical and monitoring equipment. Pete distributed pills which took the pain out of bruises and scrapes, the heaviness out of muscles. Meanwhile Rusa collected wood, Whell started and tended a fire, Olga made breakfast. They had considerable food, mostly freeze-dried, gear to cook it, tools like knives and a hatchet, cord, cloth, flashbeams, two blasters and abundant recharges: what they required for survival.

"It may be insufficient," Enherrian said. "The portable radio transceiver went down with Arrach. The boat's transmitter couldn't punch a call through that storm, and now the boat's on the bottom—nothing to see from the air, scant metal to register on a detector."

"Oh, they'll check on us when the weather slacks off," Olga said. She caught Pete's hand in hers. He felt the warmth.

"If their flitter survived the hurricane, which I doubt," Enherrian stated. "I'm convinced the camp was also struck. We had built no shelter for the flitter, our people will have been too busy saving themselves to secure it, and I think that thin shell was tumbled about and broken. If I'm right, they'll have to call for an aircraft from elsewhere, which may not be available at once. In either case, we could be anywhere in a huge territory; and the expedition has no time or personnel for an indefinite search. They will seek us, aye; however, if we are not found before an arbitrary date——" A ripple passed over the feathers of face and neck; a human would have shrugged.

"What . . . can we do?" the girl asked.

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"Clear a sizable area in a plainly artificial pattern, or heap fuel for beacon fires should a flitter pass within sight—whichever is practicable. If nothing comes of that, we should consider building a raft or the like."

"Or modify a life jacket for me," Rusa suggested, "and I can try to fly to the mainland."

Enherrian nodded. "We must investigate the possibilities. First let's get a real rest."

The Ythrians were quickly asleep, squatted on their locked wing joints like idols of a forgotten people. Pete and Olga felt more excited and wandered a distance off, hand in hand.

Above the crag-enclosed beach, the island rose toward a crest which he estimated as three kilometers away. If it was in the middle, this was no large piece of real estate. Nor did he see adequate shelter. A mat of mossy, intensely green plants squeezed out any possibility of forest. A few trees stood isolated. Their branches tossed in the wind. He noticed particularly one atop a great outcrop nearby, gaunt brown trunk and thin leaf-fringed boughs that whipped insanely about. Blossoms, torn from vines, flew past, and they were gorgeous; but there would be naught to live on here, and he wasn't hopeful about learning, in time, how to catch Gray's equivalent of fish.

"Strange about them, isn't it?" Olga murmured.

"Eh?" He came startled out of his preoccupations.

She gestured at the Ythrians. "Them. The way they took poor Arrach's death."

"Well, you can't judge them by our standards. Maybe they feel grief less than we would, or maybe their culture demands stoicism." He looked at her

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and did not look away again. "To be frank, darling, I can't really mourn either. I'm too happy to have you back."

"And I you—oh, Pete, Pete, my only——"

They found a secret spot and made love. He saw nothing wrong in that. Do you ever in this life come closer to the wonder which is God?

Afterward they returned to their companions. Thus the clash of wings awoke them, hours later. They scrambled from their bedrolls and saw the Ythrians swing aloft.

The wind was strong and loud as yet, though easing off in fickleness, flaws, downdrafts, whirls and eddies. Clouds were mostly gone. Those which remained raced gold and hot orange before a sun low in the west, across blue serenity. The lagoon glittered purple, the greensward lay aglow. It had warmed up till rich odors of growth, of flowers, blent with the sea-salt.

And splendid in the sky danced Enherrian, Whell, and Rusa. They wheeled, soared, pounced and rushed back into light which ran molten off their pinions. They chanted, and fragments blew down to the humans: "*High flew your spirit on many winds . . . be always remembered. . . .*"

"What is that?" Olga breathed.

"Why, they—they——" The knowledge broke upon Pete. "They're holding a service for Arrach."

He knelt and said a prayer for her soul's repose. But he wondered if she, who had belonged to the air, would truly want rest. And his eyes could not leave her kindred.

Enherrian screamed a hunter's challenge and rushed down at the earth. He flung himself meteoric

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past the stone outcrop Pete had seen; for an instant the man gasped, believing he would be shattered; then he rose, triumphant.

He passed by the lean tree of thin branches. Gusts flailed them about. A nearly razor edge took off his left wing. Blood spurted; Ythrian blood is royal purple. Somehow Enherrian slewed around and made a crash landing on the bluff top just beyond range of what has since been named the surgeon tree.

Pete yanked the medikit to him and ran. Olga wailed, briefly, and followed. When they reached the scene, they found that Whell and Rusa had pulled feathers from their breasts to try staunching the wound.

Evening, night, day, evening, night.

Enherrian sat before a campfire. Its light wavered, picked him red out of shadow and let him half vanish again, save for the unblinking yellow eyes. His wife and son supported him. Stim, cellfreeze, and plasma surrogate had done their work, and he could speak in a weak roughness. The bandages on his stump were a glaring white.

Around crowded shrubs which, by day, showed low and russet-leaved. They filled a hollow on the far side of the island, to which Enherrian had been carried in an improvised litter. Their odor was rank, in an atmosphere once more subtropically hot, and they clutched at feet with raking twigs. But this was the most sheltered spot his companions could find, and he might die in a new storm on the open beach.

He looked through smoke, at the Bergs, who sat as close together as they were able. He said—the surf growled faintly beneath his words, while never a leaf

rustled in the breathless dark—"I have read that your people can make a lost part grow forth afresh."

Pete couldn't answer. He tried but couldn't. It was Olga who had the courage to say, "We can do it for ourselves. None except ourselves." She laid her head on her man's breast and wept.

Well, you need a lot of research to unravel a genetic code, a lot of development to make the molecules of heredity repeat what they did in the womb. Science hasn't had time yet for other races. It never will for all. There are too many.

"As I thought," Enherrian said. "Nor can a proper prosthesis be engineered in my lifetime. I have a few years left; an Ythrian who cannot fly soon becomes sickly."

"Grav units——" Pete faltered.

The scorn in those eyes was like a blow. Dead metal to raise you, who have had wings?

Fierce and haughty though the Ythrian is, his quill-clipped slaves have never rebelled: for they are only half alive. Imagine yourself, human male, castrated. Enherrian might flap his remaining wing and the stump to fill his blood with air; but he would have nothing he could do with that extra energy, it would turn inward and corrode his body, perhaps at last his mind.

For a second, Whell laid an arm around him.

"You will devise a signal tomorrow," Enherrian said, "and start work on it. Too much time has already been wasted."

Before they slept, Pete managed to draw Whell aside. "He needs constant care, you know," he whispered to her in the acrid booming gloom. "The drugs got him over the shock, but he can't tolerate more, and he'll be very weak."

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True, she said with feathers rather than voice. "Olga shall nurse him. She cannot get around as easily as Rusa or I, and lacks your physical strength. Besides, she can prepare meals and the like for us."

Pete nodded absently. He had a dread to explain. "Uh . . . uh . . . do you think—well, I mean in your ethic, in the New Faith—might Enherrian put an end to himself?" And he wondered if God would really blame the captain.

Her wings and tail spread, her chest erected, she glared. "You say that of him?" she shrilled. Seeing his concern, she eased, even made a *krrr* noise which might answer to a chuckle. "No, no, he has his death-pride. He would never rob God of honor."

After survey and experiment, the decision was to hack a giant cross in the island turf. That growth couldn't be ignited, and what wood was burnable—deadfall—was too scant and stingy of smoke for a beacon.

The party had no spades; the vegetable mat was thick and tough; the toil became brutal. Pete, like Whell and Rusa, would return to camp and topple into sleep. He wouldn't rouse till morning, to gulp his food and stumble off to labor. He grew gaunt, bearded, filthy, numb-brained, sore in every cell.

Thus he did not notice how Olga was waning. Enherrian was mending, somewhat, under her care. She did her jobs, which were comparatively light, and would have been ashamed to complain of headaches, giddiness, diarrhea, and nausea. Doubtless she imagined she suffered merely from reaction to disaster, plus a sketchy and ill-balanced diet, plus heat and brilliant sun and—she'd cope.

The days were too short for work, the nights too

short for sleep. Pete's terror was that he would see a flitter pass and vanish over the horizon before the Ythrians could hail it. Then they might try sending Rusa for help. But that was a long, tricky flight; and the gulf coast camp was due to be struck soon.

Sometimes he wondered dimly how he and Olga might do if marooned on Gray. He kept enough wits to dismiss that fantasy for what it was. Take the simple fact that native life appeared to lack certain vitamins—

Then one darkness, perhaps a terrestrial week after the shipwreck, he was aroused by her crying his name. He struggled to wakefulness. She lay beside him. Gray's moon was up, nearly full, swifter and brighter than Luna. Its glow drowned most of the stars, frosted the encroaching bushes, fell without pity to show him her fallen cheeks and rolling eyes. She shuddered in his arms; he heard her teeth clapping. "I'm cold, darling, I'm cold," she said in the sub-tropical summer night. She vomited over him, and presently she was delirious.

The Ythrians gave what help they could, he what medicines he could. By sunrise (an outrageousness of rose and gold and silver-blue, crossed by the jubilant wings of waterfowl) he knew she was dying.

He examined his own physical state, using a robot he discovered he had in his skull: yes, his wretchedness was due to more than overwork, he saw that now; he too had had the upset stomach and the occasional shivers, nothing like the disintegration which possessed Olga, nevertheless the same kind of thing. Yet the Ythrians stayed healthy. Did a local germ attack humans while finding the other race undevourable?

The rescuers, who came on the island two Gray

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days later, already had the answer. That genus of bushes is widespread on the planet. A party elsewhere, after getting sick and getting into safety suits, analyzed its vapors. They are a cumulative poison to man; they scarcely harm an Ythrian. The analysts named it the hell shrub.

Unfortunately, their report wasn't broadcast until after the boat left. Meanwhile Pete had been out in the field every day, while Olga spent her whole time in the hollow, over which the sun regularly created an inversion layer.

Whell and Rusa went grimly back to work. Pete had to get away. He wasn't sure of the reason, but he had to be alone when he screamed at heaven, "Why did You do this to her, why did You do it?" Enherrian could look after Olga, who had brought him back to a life he no longer wanted. Pete had stopped her babblings, writhings, and saw-toothed sounds of pain with a shot. She ought to sleep peacefully into that death which the monitor instruments said was, in the absence of hospital facilities, ineluctable.

He stumbled off to the heights. The sea reached calm, in a thousand hues of azure and green, around the living island, beneath the gentle sky. He knelt in all that emptiness and put his question.

After an hour he could say, "Your will be done," and return to camp.

Olga lay awake. "Pete, Pete!" she cried. Anguish distorted her voice till he couldn't recognize it; nor could he really see her in the yellowed sweating skin and lank hair drawn over a skeleton, or find her in the stench and the nails which flayed him as they clutched. "Where were you, hold me close, it hurts, how it hurts——"

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He gave her a second injection, to small effect.

He knelt again, beside her. He has not told me what he said, or how. At last she grew quiet, gripped him hard, and waited for the pain to end.

When she died, he said, it was like seeing a light blown out.

He laid her down, closed eyes and jaw, folded her hands. On mechanical feet he went to the pup tent which had been rigged for Enherrian. The cripple calmly awaited him. "She is fallen?" he asked.

Pete nodded.

"That is well," Enherrian said.

"It is not," Pete heard himself reply, harsh and remote. "She shouldn't have aroused. The drug should've—Did you give her a stim shot? Did you bring her back to suffer?"

"What else?" said Enherrian, though he was unarmed and a blaster lay nearby for Pete to seize. *Not that I'll ease him out of his fate!* went through the man in a spasm. "I saw that you, distraught, had misgauged. You were gone and I unable to follow you. She might well die before your return."

Out of his void, Pete gaped into those eyes. "You mean," rattled from him, "you mean . . . she . . . mustn't?"

Enherrian crawled forth—he could only crawl, on his single wing—to take Pete's hands. "My friend," he said, his tone immeasurably compassionate, "I honored you both too much to deny her her death-pride."

Pete's chief awareness was of the cool sharp talons.

"Have I misunderstood?" asked Enherrian anxiously. "Did you not wish her to give God a battle?"

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Even on Lucifer, the nights finally end. Dawn blazed on the tors when Pete finished his story.

I emptied the last few cc. into our glasses. We'd get no work done today. "Yeh," I said. "Cross-cultural semantics. Given the best will in the universe, two beings from different planets—or just different countries, often—take for granted they think alike; and the outcome can be tragic."

"I assumed that at first," Pete said. "I didn't need to forgive Enherrian—how could he know? For his part, he was puzzled when I buried my darling. On Ythri they cast them from a great height into wilderness. But neither race wants to watch the rotting of what was loved, and so he did his lame best to help me."

He drank, looked as near the cruel bluish sun as he was able, and mumbled, "What I couldn't do was forgive God."

"The problem of evil," I said.

"Oh, no. I've studied these matters, these past years: read theology, argued with priests, the whole route. Why does God, if He is a loving and personal God, allow evil? Well, there's a perfectly good Christian answer to that. Man—intelligence everywhere—must have free will. Otherwise we're puppets and have no reason to exist. Free will necessarily includes the capability of doing wrong. We're here, in this cosmos during our lives, to learn how to be good of our unforced choice."

"I spoke illiterately," I apologized. "All that brandy. No, sure, your logic is right, regardless of whether I accept your premises or not. What I meant was: the problem of pain. Why does a merciful God

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permit undeserved agony? If He's omnipotent, He isn't compelled to.

"I'm not talking about the sensation which warns you to take your hand from the fire, anything useful like that. No, the random accident which wipes out a life . . . or a mind——" I drank. "What happened to Arrach, yes, and to Enherrian, and Olga, and you, and Whell. What happens when a disease hits, or those catastrophes we label acts of God. Or the slow decay of us if we grow very old. Every such horror. Never mind if science has licked some of them; we have enough left, and then there were our ancestors who endured them all.

"Why? What possible purpose is served? It's not adequate to declare we'll receive an unbounded reward after we die, and therefore it makes no difference whether a life was gusty or grisly. That's no explanation.

"Is this the problem you're grappling, Pete?"

"In a way." He nodded, cautiously, as if he were already his father's age. "At least, it's the start of the problem.

"You see, there I was, isolated among Ythrrians. My fellow humans sympathized, but they had nothing to say that I didn't know already. The New Faith, however. . . . Mind you, I wasn't about to convert. What I did hope for was an insight, a freshness, that'd help me make Christian sense of our losses. Enherrian was so sure, so learned, in his beliefs—

"We talked, and talked, and talked, while I was regaining my strength. He was as caught as I. Not that he couldn't fit our troubles into his scheme of things. That was easy. But it turned out that the New

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Faith has no satisfactory answer to the problem of *evil*. It says God allows wickedness so that we may win honor by fighting for the right. Really, when you stop to think, that's weak, especially in carnivore Ythrian terms. Don't you agree?"

"You know them, I don't," I sighed. "You imply they have a better answer to the riddle of pain than your own religion does."

"It seems better." Desperation edged his slightly blurred tone. "They're hunters, or were until lately. They see God like that, as the Hunter. Not the Torturer—you absolutely must understand this point—no, He rejoices in our happiness the way we might rejoice to see a game animal gamboling. Yet at last He comes after us. Our noblest moment is when we, knowing He is irresistible, give Him a good chase, give him a good fight.

"Then He wins honor. And some infinite end is furthered. (The same one as when my God is given praise? How can I tell?) We're dead, struck down, lingering at most a few years in the memories of those who escaped this time. And that's what we're here for. That's why God created the universe."

"And this belief is old," I said. "It doesn't belong just to a few cranks. No, it's been held for centuries by millions of sensitive, intelligent, educated beings. You can live by it, you can die by it. If it doesn't solve every paradox, it solves some that your faith won't, quite. This is your dilemma, true?"

He nodded again. "The priests have told me to deny a false creed and to acknowledge a mystery. Neither instruction feels right. Or am I asking too much?"

"I'm sorry, Pete," I said, altogether honestly. It hurt. "But how should I know? I looked into the

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abyss once, and saw nothing, and haven't looked since. You keep looking. Which of us is the braver?

"Maybe you can find a text in Job. I don't know, I tell you, I don't know."

The sun lifted higher above the burning horizon.



When you find a story where all the logic is somehow slaunchways but where the result is pure delight, you don't need to see the author's name; it will be by R. A. Lafferty. And under all the strangeness will be a curious reality. Here Lafferty discusses briefly such things as joy, alien invasions, and female chauvinism.

R. A. LAFFERTY

Parthen

Never had the springtime been so wonderful. Never had business been so good. Never was the World Outlook so bright. And never had the girls been so pretty.

It is true that it was the chilliest spring in decades—sharp, bitter, and eternally foggy—and that the sinuses of Roy Ronsard were in open revolt. It is admitted that bankruptcies were setting records, those of individuals and firms as well as those of nations. It is a fact that the aliens had landed (though their group was not identified) and had published their Declaration that one-half of mankind was hereby obsoleted and the other half would be retained as servants. The omens and portents were black, but the spirits of men were the brightest and happiest ever.

To repeat, never had the girls been so pretty! There was no one who could take exception to that.

Roy Ronsard himself faced bankruptcy and the loss of everything that he had built up. But he faced

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it in a most happy frame of mind. A Higher Set of Values will do wonders toward erasing such mundane everyday irritations.

There is much to be said in favor of cold, vicious springtimes. They represent weather at its most vital. There is something to be said for exploding sinuses. They indicate, at least, that a man has something in his head. And, if a man is going to be a bankrupt, then let him be a happy bankrupt.

When the girls are as pretty as all that, the rest does not matter.

Let us make you understand just how pretty Eva was! She was a golden girl with hair like honey. Her eyes were blue—or they were green—or they were violet or gold and they held a twinkle that melted a man. The legs of the creature were like Greek poetry and the motion of her hips was something that went out of the world with the old sail ships. Her breastwork had a Gothic upsweet—her neck was passion incarnate and her shoulders were of a glory past describing. In her whole person she was a study of celestial curvatures.

Should you never have heard her voice, the meaning of music has been denied you. Have you not enjoyed her laughter? Then your life remains unrealized.

Is it possible that exaggeration has crept into this account? No. That is not possible. All this fits in with the cold appraisal of men like Sam Pinta, Cyril Colbert, Willy Whitecastle, George Goshen, Roy Ron-sard himself—and that of a hundred men who had gazed on her in amazement and delight since she came to town. All these men are of sound judgment in this field. And actually she was prettier than they admitted.

Too, Eva Ellery was but one of many. There was Jeannie who brought a sort of pleasant insanity to all who met her. Roberta who was a scarlet dream. Helen—high-voltage sunshine. Margaret—the divine clown. And it was high adventure just to meet Hildgarde. A man could go blind from looking at her.

"I can't understand how there can be so many beautiful young women in town this year," said Roy. "It makes the whole world worth while. Can you let me have fifty dollars, Willy? I'm going to see Eva Ellery. When I first met her I thought that she was a hallucination. She's real enough, though. Do you know her?"

"Yes. A most remarkable young woman. She has a small daughter named Angela who really stops the clock. Roy, I have just twenty dollars left in the world and I'll split it with you. As you know, I'm going under, too. I don't know what I'll do after they take my business away from me. It's great to be alive, Roy."

"Wonderful. I hate not having money to spend on Eva, but she's never demanding in that. In fact she's lent me money to smooth out things pertinent to the termination of my business. She's one of the most astute business women I ever knew and has been able to persuade my creditors to go a little easy on me. I won't get out with my shirt. But, as she says, I may get out with my skin."

There was a beautiful, cold, mean fog and one remembered that there was a glorious sun (not seen for many days now) somewhere behind it. The world rang with cracked melody and everybody was in love with life.

Everybody except Peggy Ronsard and wives like

her who did not understand the higher things. Peggy had now become like a fog with no sun anywhere behind it. Roy realized, as he came home to her for a moment, that she was very drab.

"Well?" Peggy asked with undertones in her voice. Her voice did not have overtones like that of Eva. Only undertones.

"Well what? My—uh—love?" Roy asked.

"The business—what's the latest on it today? What have you come up with?"

"Oh, the business. I didn't bother to go by today. I guess it's lost."

"You are going to lose it without a fight? You used not to be like that. Two weeks ago your auditing firm said that you had all sorts of unrealized assets and that you'd come out of this easily."

"And two weeks later my auditing firm is also taking bankruptcy. Everybody's doing it now."

"There wasn't anything wrong with that auditing firm till that Roberta woman joined it. And there wasn't anything wrong with your company till you started to listen to that Eva creature."

"Is she not beautiful, Peggy?"

Peggy made a noise Roy understood as assent, but he had not been understanding his wife well lately.

"And there's another thing," said Peggy dangerously. "You used to have a lot of the old goat in you and that's gone. A wife misses things like that. And your wolfish friends have all changed. Sam Pinta used to climb all over me like I was a trellis—and I couldn't sit down without Willy Whitecastle being on my lap. And Judy Pinta says that Sam has changed so much at home that life just isn't worth living any more. You all used to be such loving men! What's happened to you?"

"Ah—I believe that our minds are now on a higher plane."

"You didn't go for that higher plane jazz till that Eva woman came along. And that double-damned Roberta! But she does have two lovely little girls, I'll admit. And that Margaret, she's the one that's got Cyril Colbert and George Goshen where they're pushovers for anything now. She does have a beautiful daughter, though."

"Have you noticed how many really beautiful women there are in town lately, Peggy?"

"Roy, I hope those aliens got every damned cucumber out of that patch! The monsters are bound to grab all the pretty women first. I hope they're a bunch of sadist alligators and do everything that the law disallows to those doll babies."

"Peggy, I believe that the aliens (and we are told that they are already among us) will be a little more sophisticated than popular ideas anticipate."

"I hope they're a bunch of Jack the Rippers. I believe I could go for Jack today. He'd certainly be a healthy contrast to what presently obtains."

Peggy had put her tongue on the crux. For the beautiful young women, who seemed to be abundant in town that springtime, had an odd effect on the men who came under their influence. The goats among the men had become lambs and the wolves had turned into puppies.

Jeannie was of such a striking appearance as to make a man almost cry out. But the turmoil that she raised in her gentlemen friends was of a cold sort, for all that the white flames seemed to leap up. She was Artemis herself and the men worshiped her on the higher plane. She was wonderful to look at

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and to talk to. But who would be so boorish as to touch?

The effect of Eva was similar—and of Roberta and Helen (who had three little daughters as like her as three golden apples) and of Margaret and of Hildegarde. How could a man not ascend to the higher plane when such wonderful and awesome creatures as these abounded?

But the damage was done when the man carried this higher plane business home to their comparatively colorless wives. The men were no longer the ever-loving husbands that they should have been. The most intimate relations ceased to take place. If continued long this could have an effect on the statistics.

But daily affairs sometimes crept into the conversations of even those men who had ascended to the higher plane.

"I was wondering," Roy asked George Goshen, "when our businesses are all gone—who do they go to?"

"Many of us have wondered that," George told him. "They all seem to devolve upon anonymous recipients or upon corporations without apparent personnel. But somebody is gathering in the companies. One theory is that the aliens are doing it."

"The aliens are among us, the authorities say, but nobody has seen them. They publish their program and their progress through intermediaries who honestly do not know the original effectors. The aliens still say that they will make obsolete one-half of mankind and make servants of the other half."

"Jeannie says—did you ever see her pretty little daughters?—that we see the aliens every day and do not recognize them for what they are. She says that likely the invasion of the aliens will have obtained

its objective before we realize what that is. What's the news from the rest of the country and the world?"

"The same. All business is going to pot and everybody is happy. On paper, things were never more healthy. There's a lot of new backing from somewhere and all the businesses thrive as soon as they have shuffled off their old owners. The new owners—and nobody can find out who or what they are—must be happy with the way things are going. Still, I do not believe that anybody could be happier or more contented than I am. Can you let me have fifty cents, George? I just remembered that I haven't eaten today. Peggy has gone to work for what used to be my company, but she's a little slow to give me proper spending money. Come to think of it, Peggy has been acting peculiar lately."

"I have only forty cents left in the world, Roy. Take the quarter. My wife has gone to work also, but I guess there will never be any work for us. Did you think we'd ever live to see the NO MALES WANTED signs on every hiring establishment in the country? Oh, well—if you're happy nothing else matters."

"George, there's a humorous note that creeps into much of the world news lately. It seems that ours is not the only city with an unusual number of pretty young ladies this season. They've been reported in Teheran and Lvov, in Madras and Lima and Boston. Everywhere."

"No! Pretty girls in Boston? You're kidding. This has certainly been an upside-down year when things like that can happen. But did you ever see a more beautiful summertime, Roy?"

"On my life I never did."

The summer had been murky and the sun had not been seen for many months. But it was a beautiful

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murk. And when one is attuned to inner beauty the outer aspect of things does not matter. The main thing was that everyone was happy.

Oh, there were small misunderstandings. There was a wife—this was reported as happening in Cincinnati, but it may have happened in other places also—who one evening reached out and touched her husband's hand in a form of outmoded affection. Naturally the man withdrew his hand rudely, for it was clear that the wife had not yet ascended to his higher plane. In the morning he went away and did not return.

Many men were drifting away from their homes in those days. Most men, actually. However that old cohabitational arrangement had grown into being, it no longer had anything to recommend it. When one has consorted within the light itself, what can he find in a tallow candle?

Most of the men became destitute wanderers and loafers. They were happy with their inner illumination. Every morning the dead ones would be shoveled up by the women on the disposal trucks and carted away. And every one of those men died happy. That's what made it so nice. To anyone who had entered higher understanding death was only an interlude.

It was a beautiful autumn day. Roy Ronsard and Sam Pinta had just completed their fruitless rounds of what used to be called garbage cans but now had more elegant names. They were still hungry, but happily so for it was truly a beautiful autumn.

The snow had come early, it is true, and great numbers of men had perished from it. But if one had a happy life, it was not a requisite for it to be

a long life. Men lived little in the world now, dwelling mostly in thought. But sometimes they still talked to each other.

"It says here—" Roy Ronsard began to read a piece of old newspaper that had been used for wrapping bones—"that Professor Eimer, just before he died of malnutrition, gave as his opinion that the aliens among us cannot stand sunlight. He believed it was for this reason that they altered our atmosphere and made ours a gloomy world. Do you believe that, Sam?"

"Hardly. How could anybody call ours a gloomy world? I believe that we are well rid of that damned sun."

"And it says that he believed that one of the weapons of the aliens was their intruding into men a general feeling of euphor—the rest of the paper is torn off."

"Roy, I saw Margaret today. From a distance, of course. Naturally I could not approach such an incandescent creature in my present condition of poverty. But Roy, do you realize how much we owe to those pretty girls? I really believe that we would have known nothing of the higher plane or the inner light if it had not been for them. How could they have been so pretty?"

"Sam, there is one thing about them that always puzzled me."

"Everything about them puzzled me. What do you mean?"

"All of them have daughters, Sam. And none of them have husbands. Why did none of them have husbands? Or sons?"

"Never thought of it. It's been a glorious year, Roy. My only regret is that I will not live to see the win-

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ter that will surely be the climax to this radiant autumn. We have had so much—we cannot expect to have everything. Do you not just love deep snow over you?”

“It’s like the blanket of heaven, Sam. When the last of us is gone—and it won’t be too long now—do you think the girls will remember how much light they brought into our lives?”

I make no apology for including two stories by Norman Spinrad in this book. They are totally dissimilar; both are excellent. And to anyone who has watched the progress of weekend television, this development will have to seem inevitable. The only wonder is that nobody has realized the virtues of Spinrad's idea yet.

NORMAN SPINRAD

The National Pastime

The Founding Father

I know you've got to start at the bottom in the television business, but producing sports shows is my idea of cruel and unusual punishment. Sometime in the dim past, I had the idea that I wanted to make films, and the way to get to make films seemed to be to run up enough producing and directing credits on television, and the way to do *that* was to take whatever came along, and what came along was an offer to do a series of sports specials on things like kendo, sumo wrestling, jousting, Thai boxing, in short, ritual violence. This was at the height (or the depth) of the antiviolence hysteria, when you couldn't so much as show the bad guy getting an on-camera rap in the mouth from the good guy on a moron western. The only way you could give the folks what they really wanted was in the All-American wholesome package of a sporting event. Knowing this up front—unlike the jerks who warm chairs

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as network executives—I had no trouble producing the kind of sports specials the network executives knew people wanted to see without quite knowing why, and thus I achieved the status of boy genius. Which, alas, ended up in my being offered a long-term contract as a producer in the sports department that was simply too rich for me to pass up, I mean I make no bones about being a crass materialist.

So try to imagine my feelings when Herb Dieter, the network sports programming director, calls me in to his inner sanctum and gives me The Word. “Ed,” he tells me, “as you know, there’s now only one major football league, and the opposition has us frozen out of the picture with long-term contracts with the NFL. As you also know, the major league football games are clobbering us in the Sunday afternoon ratings, which is prime time as far as sports programming is concerned. And as you know, a sports programming director who can’t hold a decent piece of the Sunday afternoon audience is not long for this fancy office. And as you know, there is no sport on God’s green earth that can compete with major league football. Therefore, it would appear that I have been presented with an insoluble problem.

“Therefore, since you are the official boy genius of the sports department, Ed, I’ve decided that you must be the solution to my problem. If I don’t come up with something that will hold its own against pro football by the beginning of next season, my head will roll. Therefore, I’ve decided to give you the ball and let you run with it. Within ninety days, you will have come up with a solution or the fine print boys will be instructed to find a way for me to break your contract.”

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I found it very hard to care one way or the other. On the one hand, I liked the bread I was knocking down, but on the other, the job was a real drag and it would probably do me good to get my ass fired. Of course the whole thing was unfair from my point of view, but who could fault Dieter's logic, he personally had nothing to lose by ordering his best creative talent to produce a miracle or be fired. Unless I came through, *he* would be fired, and then what would he care about gutting the sports department, it wouldn't be his baby anymore. It wasn't very nice, but it was the name of the game we were playing.

"You mean all I'm supposed to do is invent a better sport than football in ninety days, Herb, or do you mean something more impossible?" I couldn't decide whether I was trying to be funny or not.

But Dieter suddenly had a twenty-watt bulb come on behind his eyes (about as bright as he could get). "I do believe you've hit on it already, Ed," he said. "We can't get any pro football, so you're right, you've got to *invent* a sport that will outdraw pro football. Ninety days, Ed. And don't take it too hard; if you bomb out, we'll see each other at the unemployment office."

So there I was, wherever *that* was. I could easily get Dieter to do for me what I didn't have the will-power to do for myself and get me out of the stinking sports department—all I had to do was *not* invent a game that would outdraw pro football. On the other hand, I liked living the way I did, and I didn't like the idea of losing *anything* because of failure.

So the next Sunday afternoon, I eased out the night before's chick, turned on the football game, smoked two joints of Acapulco Gold and consulted my muse. It was the ideal set of conditions for a

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creative mood: I was being challenged, but if I failed, I gained too, so I had no inhibitions on my creativity. I was stoned to the point where the whole situation was a game without serious consequences; I was hanging loose.

Watching two football teams pushing each other back and forth across my color television screen, it once again occurred to me how much football was a ritual sublimation of war. This seemed perfectly healthy. Lots of cultures are addicted to sports that are sublimations of the natural human urge to clobber people. Better the sublimation than the clobbering. People dig violence, whether anyone likes the truth or not, so it's a public service to keep it on the level of a spectator sport.

Hmmm . . . that was probably why pro football had replaced baseball as the National Pastime in a time when people, having had their noses rubbed in the stupidity of war, needed a war substitute. How could you beat something that got the American arm-pit as close to the gut as that?

And then from the blue grass mountaintops of Mexico, the flash hit me: the only way to beat football was at its own game! Start with football itself, and convert it into something that was an even *closer* metaphor for war, something that come could be called——

!!COMBAT FOOTBALL!!

Yeah, yeah, Combat Football, or better, COMBAT football. Two standard football teams, standard football field, standard football rules, except: take off all their pads and helmets and jerseys and make it a

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warm-weather game that they play in shorts and sneakers like boxing. More meaningful, more intimate violence. Violence is what sells football, so give 'em a bit more violence than football, and you'll draw a bit more than football. The more violent you can make it and get away with it, the better you'll draw.

Yeah . . . and you could get away with punching, after all boxers belt each other around and they still allow boxing on television; sports have too much All American Clean for the antiviolence freaks to attack, in fact, where their heads are at, they'd *dig* Combat Football. Okay. So in ordinary football, the defensive team tackles the ball carrier to bring him to his knees and stop the play. So in Combat, the defenders can slug the ball carrier, kick him, tackle him, why not, anything to bring him to his knees and stop the play. And to make things fair, the ball carrier can slug the defenders to get them out of his way. If the defense slugs an offensive player who doesn't have possession, it's ten yards and an automatic first down. If anyone but the ball carrier slugs a defender, it's ten yards and a loss of down.

Presto: Combat Football!

And the final touch was that it was a game that any beer-sodden moron who watched football could learn to understand in sixty seconds, and any lout who dug football would have to like Combat better.

The boy genius had done it again! It even made sense after I came down.

Farewell to the Giants

Jeez, I saw a thing on television last Sunday you wouldn't believe. You really oughta watch it next

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week, I don't care who the Jets or the Giants are playing. I turned on the TV to watch the Giants game and went to get a beer, and when I came back from the kitchen I had some guy yelling something about today's professional combat football game, and it's not the NFL announcer, and it's a team called the New York Sharks playing a team called the Chicago Thunderbolts, and they're playing in L.A. or Miami, I didn't catch which, but someplace with palm trees anyway, and all the players are bare-ass! Well, not really bare-ass, but all they've got on is sneakers and boxing shorts with numbers across the behind—blue for New York, green for Chicago. No helmets, no pads, no protectors, no jerseys, no nothing!

I check the set and sure enough I've got the wrong channel. But I figured I could turn on the Giants game anytime, what the hell, you can see the Giants all the time, but what in hell is *this*?

New York kicks off to Chicago. The Chicago kick-returner gets the ball on about the 10—bad kick—and starts upfield. The first New York tackler reaches him and goes for him and the Chicago player just belts him in the mouth and runs by him! I mean, with the ref standing there watching it, and no flag thrown! Two more tacklers come at him on the 20. One dives at his legs, the other socks him in the gut. He trips and staggers out of the tackle, shoves another tackler away with a punch in the chest, but he's slowed up enough so that three or four New York players get to him at once. A couple of them grab his legs to stop his motion, and the others knock him down, at about the 25. Man, what's going on here?

I check my watch. By this time the Giants game has probably started, but New York and Chicago are lined up for the snap on the 25, so I figure what the

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hell, I gotta see some more of this thing, so at least I'll watch one series of downs.

On first down, the Chicago quarterback drops back and throws a long one way downfield to his flanker on maybe the New York 45; it looks good, there's only one player on the Chicago flanker, he beats this one man and catches it, and it's a touchdown, and the pass looks right on the button. Up goes the Chicago flanker, the ball touches his hands—and pow, right in the kisser! The New York defender belts him in the mouth and he drops the pass. Jeez, what a game!

Second and ten. The Chicago quarterback fades back, but it's a fake, he hands off to his fullback, a gorilla who looks like he weighs about two-fifty, and the Chicago line opens up a little hole at left tackle and the fullback hits it holding the ball with one hand and punching with the other. He belts out a tackler, takes a couple of shots in the gut, slugs a second tackler, and then someone has him around the ankles; he drags himself forward another half yard or so, and then he runs into a good solid punch and he's down on the 28 for a three-yard gain.

Man, I mean *action*! What a game! Makes the NFL football look like something for faggots! Third and seven, you gotta figure Chicago for the pass, right? Well on the snap, the Chicago quarterback just backs up a few steps and pitches a short one to his flanker at about the line of scrimmage. The blitz is on and everyone comes rushing in on the quarterback and before New York knows what's happening, the Chicago flanker is five yards downfield along the left sideline and picking up speed. Two New York tacklers angle out to stop him at maybe the Chicago 40, but he's got up momentum and one

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of the New York defenders runs right into his fist—I could hear the thud even on television—and falls back right into the other New York player, and the Chicago flanker is by them, the 40, the 45, he angles back toward the center of the field at midfield, dancing away from one more tackle, then on maybe the New York 45 a real fast New York defensive back catches up to him from behind, tackles him waist-high, and the Chicago flanker's motion is stopped as two more tacklers come at him. But he squirms around inside the tackle and belts the tackler in the mouth with his free hand, knocks the New York back silly, breaks the tackle, and he's off again downfield with two guys chasing him—40, 35, 30, 25, he's running away from them. Then from way over the right side of the field, I see the New York safety man running flat out across the field at the ball carrier, angling toward him so it looks like they'll crash like a couple of locomotives on about the 15, because the Chicago runner just doesn't see this guy. Ka-boom! The ball carrier running flat out runs right into the fist of the flat out safety at the 15 and he's knocked about ten feet one way and the football flies ten feet the other way, and the New York safety scoops it up on the 13 and starts upfield, 20, 25, 30, 35, and then slam, bang, whang, half the Chicago team is all over him, a couple of tackles, a few in the gut, a shot in the head, and he's down. First and ten for New York on their own 37. And that's just the first series of downs!

Well let me tell you, after that you know where they can stick the Giants game, right? This Combat Football, that's the real way to play the game, I mean it's football and boxing all together, with a little wrestling thrown in, it's a game with *balls*. I mean, the *whole game* was like that first series. You oughta

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take a look at it next week. Damn, if they played the thing in New York we could even go out to the game together. I'd sure be willing to spend a couple of bucks to see something like that.

Commissioner Gene Kuhn Addresses the First Annual Owners' Meeting of the National Combat Football League

Gentlemen, I've been thinking about the future of our great sport. We're facing a double challenge to the future of Combat Football, boys. First of all, the NFL is going over to Combat rules next season, and since you can't copyright a sport (and if you could the NFL would have us by the short hairs anyway) there's not a legal thing we can do about it. The only edge we'll have left is that they'll have to at least wear heavy uniforms because they play in regular cities up north. But they'll have the stars, and the stadiums, and the regular home town fans and fatter television deals.

Which brings me to our second problem, gentlemen, namely that the television network which created our great game is getting to be a pain in our sport's neck, meaning that they're shafting us in the crummy percentage of the television revenue they see fit to grant us.

So the great task facing our great National Pastime, boys, is to ace out the network by putting ourselves in a better bargaining position on the television rights while saving our million-dollar asses from the NFL competition, which we just cannot afford.

Fortunately, it just so happens your commissioner has been on the ball, and I've come up with a couple

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of new gimmicks that I am confident will insure the posterity and financial success of our great game while stiff-arming the NFL and the TV network nicely in the process.

Number one, we've got to improve our standing as a live spectator sport. We've got to start drawing big crowds on our own if we want some clout in negotiating with the network. Number two, we've got to give the customers something the NFL can't just copy from us next year and clobber us with.

There's no point in changing the rules again because the NFL can always keep up with us there. But one thing the NFL is locked into for keeps is the whole concept of having teams represent cities; they're committed to that for the next twenty years. We've only been in business four years and our teams never play in the damned cities they're named after because it's too cold to play bare-ass Combat in those cities during the football season, so it doesn't have to mean anything to us.

So we make two big moves. First, we change our season to spring and summer so we can play up north where the money is. Second, we throw out the whole dumb idea of teams representing cities; that's old-fashioned stuff. That's crap for the coyotes. Why not six teams with *national* followings? Imagine the clout that'll give us when we renegotiate the TV contract. We can have a flexible schedule so that we can put any game we want into any city in the country any time we think that city's hot and draw a capacity crowd in the biggest stadium in town.

How are we gonna do all this? Well look boys, we've got a six-team league, so instead of six cities, why not match up our teams with six national groups?

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I've taken the time to draw up a hypothetical league lineup just to give you an example of the kind of thing I mean. Six teams: the Black Panthers, the Golden Supermen, the Psychedelic Stompers, the Caballeros, the Gay Bladers and the Hog Choppers. We do it all up the way they used to do with wrestling, you know, the Black Panthers are all spades with naturals, the Golden Supermen are blond astronaut types in red-white-and-blue bunting, the Psychedelic Stompers have long hair and groupies in mini-skirts up to their navels and take rock bands to their games, the Caballeros dress like gauchos or something, whatever makes Latin types feel feisty, the Gay Bladers and Hog Choppers are mostly all-purpose villains—the Bladers are black-leather-and-chainmail faggots and the Hog Choppers we recruit from outlaw motorcycle gangs.

Now is that a *league*, gentlemen? Identification is the thing, boys. You gotta identify your teams with a large enough group of people to draw crowds, but why tie yourself to something local like a city? This way, we got a team for the spades, a team for the frustrated Middle Americans, a team for the hippies and kids, a team for the spics, a team for the faggots, and a team for the motorcycle nuts and violence freaks. And any American who can't identify with any of those teams is an odds-on bet to hate one or more of them enough to come out to the game to see them stomped. I mean, who wouldn't want to see the Hog Choppers and the Panthers go at each other under Combat rules?

Gentlemen, I tell you it's creative thinking like this that made our country great, and it's creative thinking like this that will make Combat Football the greatest goldmine in professional sports.

Stay Tuned, Sports Fans. . . .

Good afternoon, Combat fans, and welcome to today's major-league Combat football game between the Caballeros and the Psychedelic Stompers brought to you by the World Safety Razorblade Company, with the sharpest, strongest blade for your razor in the world.

It's 95 degrees on this clear New York day in July, and a beautiful day for a Combat football game, and the game here today promises to be a real smasher, as the Caballeros, only a game behind the league-leading Black Panthers take on the fast-rising, hard-punching Psychedelic Stompers and perhaps the best running back in the game today, Wolfman Ted. We've got a packed house here today, and the Stompers, who won the toss, are about to receive the kick-off from the Caballeros. . . .

And there it is, a low bullet into the end zone, taken there by Wolfman Ted. The Wolfman crosses the goal line, he's up to the 5, the 10, the 14, he brings down number 71 Pete Lopez with a right to the windpipe, crosses the 15, takes a glancing blow to the head from number 56 Diaz, is tackled on the 18 by Porfirio Rubio, number 94, knocks Rubio away with two quick rights to the head, crosses the 20, and takes two rapid blows to the mid-section in succession from Beltran and number 30 Orduna, staggers and is tackled low from behind by the quick-recovering Rubio and slammed to the ground under a pile of Caballeros on the 24.

First and ten for the Stompers on their own 24. Stompers quarterback Ronny Seede brings his team

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to the line of scrimmage in a double flanker formation with Wolfman Ted wide to the right. A long count——

The snap, Seede fades back to——

A quick hand-off to the Wolfman charging diagonally across the action toward left tackle, and the Wolfman hits the line on a dead run, windmilling his right fist, belting his way through one, two, three Caballeros, getting two, three yards, then taking three quick ones to the ribcage from Rubio, and staggering right into number 41 Manuel Cardozo, who brings him down on about the 27 with a hard right cross.

Hold it! A flag on the play! Orduna number 30 of the Caballeros and Dickson number 83 of the Stompers are waling away at each other on the 26! Dickson takes two hard ones and goes down, but as Orduna kicks him in the ribs, number 72, Merling of the Stompers, grabs him from behind and now there are six or seven assistant referees breaking it up. . . .

Something going on in the stands at about the 50 too—a section of Stompers rooters mixing it up with the Caballero fans——

But now they've got things sorted out on the field, and it's 10 yards against the Caballeros for striking an ineligible player, nullified by a 10-yarder against the Stompers for illegal offensive striking. So now it's second and seven for the Stompers on their own 27——

It's quieted down a bit there above the 50-yard line, but there's another little fracas going on in the far end zone and a few groups of people milling around in the aisles of the upper grandstand——

There's the snap, and Seede fades back quickly, dances around, looks downfield, and throws one in-

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tended for number 54, Al Viper, the left end at about the 40. Viper goes up for it, he's got it——

And takes a tremendous shot along the base of his neck from number 18 Porfirio Rubio! The ball is jarred loose. Rubio dives for it, he's got it, but he takes a hard right in the head from Viper, then a left. Porfirio drops the ball and goes at Viper with both fists! Viper knocks him sprawling and dives on top of the ball, burying it and bringing a whistle from the head referee as Rubio rains blows on his prone body. And here come the assistant referees to pull Porfirio off as half the Stompers come charging downfield toward the action——

They're at it again near the 50-yard line! About forty rows of fans going at each other. There goes a smoke bomb!

They've got Rubio away from Viper now, but three or four Stompers are trying to hold Wolfman Ted back and Ted has blood in his eye as he yells at number 41, Cardozo. Two burly assistant referees are holding Cardozo back. . . .

There go about a hundred and fifty special police up into the midfield stands. They've got their mace and prods out. . . .

The head referee is calling an official's time out to get things organized, and we'll be back to live National Combat Football League action after this message. . . .

The Circus Is in Town

"We've got a serious police problem with Combat Football," Commissioner Minelli told me after the

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game between the Golden Supermen and the Psychedelic Stompers last Sunday in which the Supermen slaughtered the Stompers 42-14 and during which there were ten fatalities and 189 hospitalizations among the rabble in the stands.

"Every time there's a game, we have a riot, your honor," Minelli (who had risen through the ranks) said earnestly. "I recommend that you should think seriously about banning Combat Football. I really think you should."

This city is hard enough to run without free advice from politically ambitious cops. "Minelli," I told him, "you are dead wrong on both counts. First of all, not only has there *never* been a riot in New York during a Combat football game, but the best studies show that the incidence of violent crimes and social violence diminishes from a period of three days before a Combat game clear through to a period five days afterward, not only here, but in every major city in which a game is played."

"But only this Sunday ten people were killed and nearly two hundred injured, including a dozen of my cops——"

"In the *stands*, you nitwit, not in the streets!" Really, the man was too much!

"I don't see the difference——"

"Ye gods, Minelli, can't you see that Combat Football keeps a hell of a lot of violence off the streets? It keeps it in the stadium, where it belongs. The Romans understood that two thousand years ago! We can hardly stage gladiator sports in this day and age, so we have to settle for a civilized substitute."

"But what goes on in there is murder. My cops are taking a beating. And we've got to assign two

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thousand cops to every game. It's costing the taxpayers a fortune, and you can bet . . . *someone* will be making an issue out of it in the next election."

I do believe that the lout was actually trying to pressure me. Still, in his oafish way, he had put his finger on the one political disadvantage of Combat Football: the cost of policing the games and keeping the fan clubs in the stands from tearing each other to pieces.

And then I had one of those little moments of blind inspiration when the pieces of a problem simply fall into shape as an obvious pattern of solution.

Why bother keeping them from tearing each other to pieces?

"I think I have the solution, Minelli," I said. "Would it satisfy your sudden sense of fiscal responsibility if you could take all but a couple dozen cops off the Combat football games?"

Minelli looked at me blankly. "Anything less than two thousand cops in there would be mincemeat by half time," he said.

"So why send them in there?"

"Huh?"

"All we really need is enough cops to guard the gates, frisk the fans for weapons, seal up the stadium with the help of riot doors, and make sure no one gets out till things have simmered down inside."

"But they'd tear each other to ribbons in there with no cops!"

"So let them. I intend to modify the conditions under which the city licenses Combat Football so that anyone who buys a ticket legally waives his right to police protection. Let them fight all they want. Let them really work out their hatreds on each other until they're good and exhausted. Human beings have

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an incurable urge to commit violence on each other. We try to sublimate that urge out of existence, and we end up with irrational violence on the streets. The Romans had a better idea—give the rabble a socially harmless outlet for violence. We spend billions on welfare to keep things pacified with bread, and where has it gotten us? Isn't it about time we tried circuses?"

As American as Apple Pie

Let me tell it to you, brother, we've sure been waiting for the Golden Supermen to play the Panthers in *this* town again, after the way those blond mothers cheated us 17-10 the last time and wasted three hundred of the brothers! Yeah man, they had those stands packed with honkies trucked in from as far away as Buffalo—we just weren't ready, is why we took the loss.

But this time we planned ahead and got ourselves up for the game even before it was announced. Yeah, instead of waiting for them to announce the date of the next Panther-Supermen game in Chicago and then scrambling with the honkies for tickets, the Panther Fan Club made under the table deals with ticket brokers for blocks of tickets for whenever the next game would be, so that by the time today's game was announced, we controlled two-thirds of the seats in Daley Stadium and the honkies had to scrape and scrounge for what was left.

Yeah man, today we pay them back for that last game! We got two-thirds of the seats in the stadium and Eli Wood is back in action and we gonna just go out and stomp those mother's today!

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Really, I'm personally quite cynical about Combat; most of us who go out to the Gay Bladers games are. After all, if you look at it straight out, Combat Football is rather a grotty business. I mean, look at the sort of people who turn out at Supermen or Panthers or for God's sake *Caballero* games: the worst sort of proletarian apes. Aside from us, only the Hogs have any semblance of class, and the Hogs have beauty only because they're so incredibly up-front gross, I mean all that shiny metal and black leather!

And of course that's the only real reason to go to the Blader games: for the spectacle. To see it and to be part of it! To see semi-naked groups of men engaging in violence and to be violent yourself—and especially with those black leather and chain mail Hog Lovers!

Of course I'm aware of the cynical use the loathsome government makes of Combat. If there's nastiness between the blacks and P.R.s in New York, they have the league schedule a Panther-Caballero game and let them get it out on each other safely in the stadium. If there's college campus trouble in the Bay Area, it's a Stompers-Supermen game in Oakland. And us and the Hogs when just *anyone* anywhere needs to release general hostility. I'm not stupid, I know that Combat Football is a tool of the Establishment. . . .

But lord, it's just so much bloody *fun*!

We gonna have some fun today! The Hogs is playing the Stompers and that's the wildest kind of Combat game there is! Those crazy freaks come to the game stoned out of their minds, and you know that at least Wolfman Ted is playing on something stronger than pot. There are twice as many chicks

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at Stomper games than with any other team the Hogs play because the Stomper chicks are the only chicks beside ours who aren't scared out of their boxes at the thought of being locked up in a stadium with twenty thousand hot-shot Hogger rape artists like us!

Yeah, we get good and stoned, and the Stomper fans get good and stoned, and the Hogs get stoned, and the Stompers get stoned, and then we all groove on beating the piss out of each other, *whoo-whee!* And when we win in the stands, we drag off the pussy and gang-bang it.

Oh yeah, Combat is just good clean dirty fun!

It makes you feel good to go out to a Supermen game, makes you feel like a real American is supposed to, like a man. All week you've got to take crap from the niggers and the spics and your god-damn crazy doped-up kids and hoods and bums and faggots in the streets, and you're not even supposed to think of them as niggers and spics and crazy doped-up kids and bums and hoods and faggots. But Sunday you can go out to the stadium and watch the Supermen give it to the Panthers, the Caballeros, the Stompers, the Hogs, or the Blades and maybe kick the crap out of a few people whose faces you don't like yourself.

It's a good healthy way to spend a Sunday afternoon, out in the open air at a good game when the Supermen are hot and we've got the opposition in the stands outnumbered. Combat's a great thing to take your kid to too!

I don't know, all my friends go to the Caballero games, we go together and take a couple of six packs of beer apiece, and get *muy boracho* and just have

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some crazy fun, you know? Sometimes I come home a little cut up and my wife is all upset and tries to get me to promise not to go to the Combat games anymore. Sometimes I promise, just to keep her quiet, she can get on my nerves, but I never really mean it.

Hombre, you know how it is, women don't understand these things like men do. A man has got to go out with his friends and feel like a man sometimes. It's not too easy to find ways to feel *muy macho* in this country, *amigo*. The way it is for us here, you know. It's not as if we're hurting anyone we shouldn't hurt. Who goes out to the Caballero games but a lot of dirty gringos who want to pick on us? So it's a question of honor, in a way, for us to get as many *amigos* as we can out to the Caballero games and show those *cabrónes* that we can beat them any time, no matter how drunk we are. In fact, the drunker we are, the better it is, "*¿tu sabes?*"

Baby, I don't know what it is, maybe it's just a chance to get it all out. It's a unique trip, that's all, there's no other way to get that particular high, that's why I go to Stompers games. Man, the games don't mean anything to me as games; games are like *games*, dig. But the whole Combat is its own reality.

You take some stuff—acid is a groovy high but you're liable to get wasted, lots of speed and some grass or hash is more recommended—when you go in, so that by the time the game starts you're really loaded. And then man, you just groove behind the violence. There aren't any cops to bring you down. What chicks are there are there because they dig it. The people you're enjoying beating up on are getting the same kicks beating up on you, so there's no guilt

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hang-up to get between you and the total experience of violence.

Like I say, it's a unique trip. A pure violence high without any hang-ups. It makes me feel good and purged and kind of together just to walk out of that stadium after a Combat football trip and know I survived; the danger is groovy too. Baby, if you can dig it, Combat can be a genuine mystical experience.

Hogs Win It All, 21-17, 1578(23)-989(14)!

Anaheim, October 8. It was a slam-bang finish to the National Combat Football League Pennant Race, the kind of game Combat fans dream about. The Golden Supermen and the Hog Choppers in a dead-even tie for first place playing each other in the last game of the season, winner take all, before nearly 60,000 fans. It was a beautiful sunny 90-degree Southern California day as the Hogs kicked off to the Supermen before a crowd that seemed evenly divided between Hog Lovers who had motorcycled in all week from all over California and Supermen Fans whose biggest bastion is here in Orange County.

The Supermen scored first blood midway through the first period when quarterback Bill Johnson tossed a little screen pass to his right end, Seth West, on the Hog 23, and West slugged his way through five Hog tacklers, one of whom sustained a mild concussion, to go in for the touchdown. Rudolf's conversion made it 7-0, and the Supermen Fans in the stands responded to the action on the field by making a major sortie into the Hog Lover section at midfield, taking out about twenty Hog Lovers, including a fatality.

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The Hog fans responded almost immediately by launching an offensive of their own in the bleacher seats, but didn't do much better than hold their own. The Hogs and the Supermen pushed each other up and down the field for the rest of the period without a score, while the Supermen Fans seemed to be getting the better of the Hog Lovers, especially in the midfield sections of the grandstands, where at least 120 Hog Lovers were put out of action.

The Supermen scored a field goal early in the second period to make the score 10-0, but more significantly, the Hog Lovers seemed to be dogging it, contenting themselves with driving back continual Supermen Fan sorties, while launching almost no attacks of their own.

The Hogs finally pushed in over the goal line in the final minutes of the first half on a long pass from quarterback Spike Horrible to his flanker Greasy Ed Lee to make the score 10-7 as the half ended. But things were not nearly as close as the field score looked, as the Hog Lovers in the stands were really taking their lumps from the Supermen Fans who had bruised them to the extent of nearly 500 take outs including 5 fatalities, as against only about 300 casualties and 3 fatalities chalked up by the Hog fans.

During the half time intermisson, the Hog Lovers could be seen marshaling themselves nervously, passing around beer, pot and pills, while Supermen Fans confidently passed the time entertaining themselves with patriotic songs.

The Supermen scored again halfway through the third period, on a handoff from Johnson to his big fullback Tex McGhee on the Hog 41. McGhee slugged his way through the left side of the line with his patented windmill attack, and burst out into the

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Hog secondary swinging and kicking. There was no stopping the Texas Tornado, though half the Hog defense tried, and McGhee went 41 yards for the touch-down, leaving three Hogs unconscious and three more with minor injuries in his wake. The kick was good, and the Supermen seemed on their way to walking away with the championship, with the score 17-7, and the momentum, in the stands and on the field, going all their way.

But in the closing moments of the third period, Johnson threw a long one downfield intended for his left end, Dick Whitfield. Whitfield got his fingers on the football at the Hog 30, but Hardly Davidson, the Hog cornerback, was right on him, belted him in the head from behind as he touched the ball, and then managed to catch the football himself before either it or Whitfield had hit the ground. Davidson got back to midfield before three Supermen tacklers took him out of the rest of the game with a closed eye and a concussion.

All at once, as time ran out in the third period, the 10-point Supermen lead didn't seem so big at all as the Hogs advanced to a first down on the Supermen 35 and the Hog Lovers in the stands beat back Supermen Fan attacks on several fronts, inflicting very heavy losses.

Spike Horrible threw a five-yarder to Greasy Ed Lee on the first play of the final period, then a long one into the end zone intended for his left end, Kid Filth, which the Kid dropped as Gordon Jones and John Lawrence slugged him from both sides as soon as he became fair game.

It looked like a sure pass play on third and five, but Horrible surprised everyone by fading back into a draw and handing the ball off to Loser Ludowicki,

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his fullback, who plowed around right end like a heavy tank, simply crushing and smashing through tacklers with his body and fists, picked up two key blocks on the 20 and 17, knocked Don Barnfield onto the casualty list with a tremendous haymaker on the 7, and went in for the score.

The Hog Lovers in the stands went Hog-wild. Even before the successful conversion by Knuckleface Bonner made it 17-14, they began blitzing the Superman Fans on all fronts, letting out everything they had seemed to be holding back during the first three quarters. At least one hundred Superman Fans were taken out in the next three minutes, including two quick fatalities, while the Hog Lovers lost no more than a score of their number.

As the Hog Lovers continued to punish the Superman Fans, the Hogs kicked off to the Superman, and stopped them after two first downs, getting the ball back on their own 24. After marching to the Superman 31 on a sustained and bloody ground drive, the Hogs lost the ball again when Greasy Ed Lee was rabbit-punched into a fumble.

But the Hog fans still sensed the inevitable and pressed their attack during the next two Superman series of downs, and began to push the Superman Fans toward the bottom of the grandstand.

Buoyed by the success of their fans, the Hogs on the field recovered the ball on their own 29 with less than two minutes to play when Chain Mail Dixon belted Tex McGhee into a fumble and out of the game.

The Hogs crunched their way upfield yard by yard, punch by punch, against a suddenly shaky Superman opposition, and all at once, the whole season came down to one play: with the score 17-14 and

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twenty seconds left on the clock, time enough for one or possibly two more plays, the Hogs had the ball third and four on the 18-yard line of the Golden Supermen.

Spike Horrible took the snap as the Hog Lovers in the stands launched a final all-out offensive against the Supermen Fans, who by now had been pushed to a last stand against the grandstand railings at field-side. Horrible took about ten quick steps back as if to pass, and then suddenly ran head down fist flailing at the center of the Supermen line with the football tucked under his arm.

Suddenly Greasy Ed Lee and Loser Ludowicki raced ahead of their quarterback, hitting the line and staggering the tacklers a split second after Horrible arrived, throwing them just off balance enough for Horrible to punch his way through with three quick rights, two of them k.o. punches. Virtually the entire Hog team roared through the hole after him, body-blocking, and elbowing, and crushing tacklers to the ground. Horrible punched out three more tacklers as the Hog Lovers pushed the first contingent of fleeing Supermen Fans out onto the field, and went in for the game and championship-winning touchdown with two seconds left on the clock.

When the dust had cleared, not only had the Hog Choppers beaten the Golden Supermen 21-17, but the Hog Lovers had driven the Golden Supermen Fans from their favorite stadium, and had racked up a commanding advantage in the casualty statistics, 1,578 casualties and 23 fatalities inflicted, as against only 989 and 14.

It was a great day for the Hog Lovers and a great day in the history of our National Pastime.

The Voice of Sweet Reason

Go to a Combat football game? Really, do you think I want to risk being injured or possibly killed? Of course I realize that Combat is a practical social mechanism for preserving law and order, and to be frank, I find the spectacle rather stimulating. I watch Combat often, almost every Sunday.

On television, of course. After all, everyone who is anyone in this country knows very well that there are basically two kinds of people in the United States: people who go out to Combat games and people for whom Combat is strictly a television spectator sport.

For the past few years, there has been a lot of worry about the air we breathe. It's polluted, unfit for human lungs, and despite all the talk, it seems to go on getting worse. Will men in the future do any better? Will they even learn, in time, to take the most hostile atmosphere and make it sweet and fit for men to breathe?

COGSWELL THOMAS

Paradise Regained

When Petro Anthos stepped out of the matter transmitter on the planet Hel, the guards promptly surrounded him and searched him for weapons. It was the one thing they did well. As long as the condemned man reached Hel free of weapons, there was little to worry about from him. So they searched him, found nothing, and turned him over to a resident work group. Jennings took him in charge, snarled at him in front of the guards, and then put his arm around his shoulders when they had him in the barracks dome.

Jennings said, "You're in luck."

Anthos looked at him; this was a thing he had not known, that Hel was peopled with lunatics. Fifty light-years from Earth; a vicious penal colony where one breath of the atmosphere brought choking, gagging, painful death; hard labor seven days a week; a trickle of survival food supplements from Earth in

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exchange for a daily quota of coal; a place so deadly that its mere existence all but eliminated crime from the populations of Earth. Here he was in the first five minutes of a twenty-year sentence, and a work gang chieftain put an arm around his shoulders and told him he was in luck. Anthos looked at him.

Jennings was a short stocky man with a potbelly that did not jiggle the slightest bit when he walked. He was dirty and grimy and his clothes were in tatters, but he had a calm air of authority about him that could be felt. Now that he thought about it, Petro Anthos realized that having the arm around his shoulders had probably kept him from screaming. Jennings said, "You're a gas chromatographer, aren't you?"

Anthos nodded numbly.

"Okay. Now, we don't have enough time for you to think much about this, but we have to include you in on an escape plan we've worked out."

Anthos' heart lurched. He choked and stammered, "Escape? I thought . . . Through the matter transmitter? I saw the other end just now. You can't possibly. . . ."

Jennings impatiently waved him quiet. "Not through the matter transmitter. That's impossible. We've found a place on this planet where we can live outside. I know, I know"—he waved again as Anthos started to talk—"you've heard that no human being can live outside the domes or outsuits on this planet. Well, you're almost right. But we've found a place, a small valley, that's barely livable. Once we get to it, we can make it more livable in time. We need a good group to do it, though, and we need a gas chromatographer. We had one, Al Chertsey, but he got a little careless last week and inhaled one good

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breath of white damp. Burned out his lungs. God, he died hard. You know what it's like?"

Anthos nodded. They had made it all too clear to him before they had sentenced him to Hel. The atmosphere would not support life, nor did it screen out the harmful solar radiations. Men had to wear outsuits equipped with back tanks to hold air, special breathing apparatus, protective helmets to keep out radiation and cold. Even the flora and fauna of Hel wouldn't support human life; they did not contain the vital trace compounds. The local foodstuffs were one of the secrets of Earth's hold on Hel. Supplemental nutrients were passed in through the matter transmitter only in response to the quotas of coal that were passed out to Earth. And the ultimate irony was that Earth did not even need the coal, although it had none of its own. Coal was a status symbol, something to be burned in little pots in the living rooms of the very wealthy. Anthos nodded. He knew what it was like.

Jennings said, looking around at several other men and women gathered near, "It won't be easy, in the valley, not for a while. But if we're going to work twelve hours a day, seven days a week, we might as well be doing it for ourselves, not a bunch of sybarites back on Earth." He looked at Anthos. "You with us?"

Anthos hesitated. He was thin and frail, and the thought of hard physical work appalled him. But he was a tough-minded chemist, a good gas chromatographer who called the shots as he saw them, which was why he was here in the first place. In the year A.D. 2688 on Earth, one simply does not, as Anthos had done, give analytical results flatly opposed to the analytical results of the Federal Horse Racing Board

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of Analytical Examiners concerning a urine analysis of a certain Derby winner. Despite all the changes of men and animals on Earth, it was still possible to spike a horse and chemically induce an extraordinary burst of speed.

Jennings noted the hesitation and said, "Let me introduce you to our people. Ed Jackson, mechanical engineer. So is Frank Stand over there." Anthos nodded to two grimy people. "Milly Franks and Lenore Meyers are chemists." Anthos would not have known they were women. "Sy Smith, electrician; Willy George, nothing much but a hard worker; Ernie Hilgard, biologist; Pete Standage, historian; Lex Parker, teacher." Jennings named a few more, and Anthos had the definite feeling that this was the cream of the penal colony.

Anthos said, "I'm in."

"Great," said Jennings. "Now, here's the plan. We go back into our tunnel in half an hour. The coal is almost exhausted, and the tunnel is due to be sealed off in another month. We've found that five kilometers down the tunnel it reaches almost to a bend in a sealed tunnel from the old workings, and we've cut a small tunnel to it and stored explosives and food and equipment and some air tanks and even an air compressor. The tunnel has a lot of white damp in it, but we think we can get all of us through it okay. And at the other end we got a small tunnel to the surface."

Anthos looked at him and said, "So you go up to the surface and die."

"No. It opens into the damndest valley you ever saw, kind of sealed off from the rest of the planet's surface. We can live there. It won't be easy, but we can stay alive and work to make the valley more liv-

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able. We figure in five years we can convert the valley to a place even better than Earth. That's why we need all the skills of all these people." Jennings waved at the group around him. "See what we do? We blow up the tunnel we're working in, right to the surface so it fills with white damp. But we're in the abandoned tunnel, which we've blown shut. The guards will just take a look in the working tunnel, and when they find it filled with white damp they'll figure we're all dead and just seal it off and forget about us. Life's cheap here. What do the guards care for a few dozen prisoners? So we go on to our valley and make it livable."

Anthos' hand shook as he smoothed his mustache, but he nodded and said, "You need me to monitor the atmosphere, and things like that, I suppose. You have the makings for a gas chromatograph?"

Jennings, noting the shaking hand, put his own hand on Anthos' shoulder and said, "We've got a good supply of equipment. We'll make out." He looked around and said, "In fifteen minutes we move out. Take everything you can stuff in your clothes."

The group scattered, leaving Anthos standing alone. He felt very much alone as he looked for the first time at the dome that served as living quarters for the prisoners. It was dark and smelly, and quiet, with a tang in the air that he knew was a trace of the white damp, seeping into the dome from outside. Bunks with webbing for mattresses formed a circle around the outer perimeter of the dome, sticking straight out from the walls. Everything was smudged gray to black from the ubiquitous coal dust. He put his hands in his pockets, and as he felt how empty they were and realized he had absolutely nothing in the world except the dirty clothes he stood in, de-

pression welled up inside him so strong he began to gasp. In an instant Jennings was at his side, arm around him again, saying nothing. Anthos forced himself to breathe normally. He said to Jennings, "How do you stand the noise level in here?"

"You get used to it. Okay. Time to go." The group went out the lock to the sealed vehicle which took them to the lock at the mouth of the workings. They entered and rode for an hour to the end of the tunnel and got to work with pick and shovel. The guards got back on the tram and left. What happened then was a nightmare of unreality for Anthos.

With practiced speed the group moved a mile back down the tunnel and planted a series of explosives. They littered the floor with unusable junk from the mining gear, even including a blown air tank. They opened the small side tunnel and planted a charge in it. Climbing over the charge, they all crawled into the side tunnel, panting from the exertion, choking on the foul air, taking turns breathing from the tanks. Dimly, Anthos heard the roar of the explosion and cowered from the wave of coal particles and rock dust that engulfed them and threatened to suffocate them all. In the sealed tunnel the dust was better but the white damp was worse. The group shouldered all the equipment they could carry, and took turns pulling and dragging the air compressor. Every hour they stopped, fueled the compressor with powdered coal, recharged the air tanks and went on. The buzzing in Anthos' ears grew louder until he could no longer hear the harsh panting from his companions. Everything grew blurred and his muscles began to twitch and refuse to obey his will. He reached the point where he could barely stand. He put a hand on the cold wall to steady himself. He felt someone

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ease him to the floor of the tunnel and hold the face-piece of an air tank to his nose. Slowly his twitching muscles stilled and his breathing became normal. In five minutes he was able to sit up and look around. Jennings said to him, "The others are opening the tunnel to the valley."

Anthos found his voice and said, "At least we're out of prison."

"We'll miss it, but we'll manage. We'll miss it. But we'll get back there a few years from now."

Anthos had started to turn away, but then Jennings' words sank in. He turned back. "What?"

"Oh, yeah. I didn't mention it before. Once we get the valley in shape, we'll take over the whole planet. Not many guards. With the matter transmitter out of commission it will take Earth fifty years to get a ship here. We'll be ready for them by then."

Anthos heaved himself to his feet, indignant protests forming in his mind, but a call from the darkness said, "Tunnel's through. Let's go."

Jennings patted Anthos on the shoulder, saw that he was able to walk, and went into the small mouth of the tunnel and worked his way up. Anthos had to follow, and then he stepped out onto the surface and looked around.

He was standing near one edge of a giant, natural saucer measuring some six kilometers in diameter. A ring of mountains enclosed the saucer, and the shaft through which he had just emerged lay near the base of the south rim. Scattered around the rim of mountains were spots of orange light, marking the raw throats of active volcanoes. Plumes of steam and smoke poured out of fissures all over the floor of the valley. The entire valley was filled with a light haze that almost obscured the sun overhead. Yet Anthos

knew that without the haze the valley would be unlivable under the unfiltered, harsh radiation of the sun. And he could breathe. He could stand on the surface of Hel and breathe. When he inhaled deeply, he coughed, for there was the barest trace of white damp in the air. But he could breathe. He looked at the floor of the valley more carefully. A great, clear lake lay in the center, measuring perhaps three kilometers in diameter. It was fed by a wide, rushing stream that sprang from the rocks halfway up the east rim. And bordering both the stream and the lake was a broad belt of greenery. Anthos was too far away to see the nature of the green things growing, but some of it stood higher than the rest and looked very much like trees.

Jennings said to all of them, "Well, there it is. May not be much but at least it's livable. And we'll make it much better. We've got almost all the raw materials we will ever need, right here. So let's not waste time. We'll break up into groups. One group will find us temporary places to live. Another will go back and finish bringing all the stuff we hid in the tunnel. Another'll start looking for anything here we can eat. Another. . . ." Jennings went on, and then picked people for the groups. Ten minutes after they arrived in the valley they scattered to start their work. They worked until they could no longer stand, and then they rested. They worked harder than they had ever worked as prisoners mining coal.

The days blended into weeks and months, and in four years they accomplished what they had thought would take them five.

Jennings called them together in their outdoors meeting place and said, "Well, I think we are ready to move on to the next step. The valley is in good,

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livable shape now, and except for one critical trace compound, we are more than self-sufficient. And we can get new supplies of that compound when we take over the main camp. We're ready to move."

Anthos said, "I'll take the group that handles the demolitions. I want to make certain that no one gets hurt. That all right with you, Colonel?"

"Wouldn't want it any other way." Jennings smiled at Anthos, smiled at the changes four years had made in him. Anthos was lean as a slat, broad as a board, all sinew and whipcord. His mustache had grown greater and rattier than ever, and his large, liquid brown eyes missed nothing as they snapped over the landscape. Anthos, the gas chromatographer, had evolved into Jennings' second-in-command. Jennings continued, "Set it up, Petro. Do it tomorrow."

The operation went smoothly. The guards were not very alert and were easily enticed out of the transmitter building. After the explosion, Anthos' men quickly went in and carefully fused all remaining components. Then, from a safe distance, Anthos explained that all of them, guards and prisoners alike, were totally marooned, and that the only salvation for any of them was to join Jennings' group in the valley. Wisely, Anthos told them not to make up their minds now, but that he would be back the next day for their answer; Anthos wanted it to sink in that there would be no more supplies coming from Earth, that the only Earth-type atmosphere existed in the valley, that even the air in the domes would slowly go bad.

When Anthos returned the next day, everybody was ready to join him in the trip to the valley. The guards were huddled with their weapons in one group, and the prisoners were in a separate group.

Anthos collected the weapons and made it clear that they were all in this together, guards and prisoners alike. It took three days to get all the people from the site of the prison domes to the valley. The guards were moved last, and Anthos stayed with them. He watched their faces as they came up out of the tunnel into the valley and looked around. Then he took them to the meeting place where Jennings was waiting to talk to them. They sat down, hundreds of them. From where they sat, they had a fine view of the valley.

Jennings waved out over the valley and said, so all of them could hear, "There it is. Almost perfect Earthside conditions." The haze and smoke in the valley were so thick the rays of the sun could no longer penetrate. Long streaks of yellow flames licked along the surfaces of exposed coal veins, burning, pouring dense clouds of smoke into the air. Jennings said, "Just inhale. Good sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxides, plenty of carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide. When we first got here, the sky was blue—think of that!—you could hardly breathe for the oxygen in the air. Why, that white damp was like the Earth's atmosphere seven hundred years ago, before our forefathers changed it. The sun shone right through here most of the time. Can you imagine what it was like? Look at the lake down there—it was as blue as the sky! Fortunately we found some phosphate deposits, so we loaded the lake with them. Just look at it now—rich, green, nutritious water." The lake was jelly-thick with algae, and bubbles of marsh gas could be seen breaking the surface here and there. Jennings said, "We even have fish in there, but we only began to extract mercury two months ago, and we haven't yet been able to bring the mercury content of the

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carp up to the point where they are edible. Another few months. Feel the temperature? We're up to one hundred degrees F. now and going up all the time. It'll soon be normal; there's plenty of carbon dioxide in the air now, and we have a greenhouse effect. We've only got one immediate problem. We can't yet make a critical compound, dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane. But it is nonbiodegradable, and there is an enormous amount in the sewage deposits of the prison camp, so we'll go back and extract the DDT and use it as a food supplement until we can make it. Like it so far?"

Guards and prisoners alike nodded and clapped. Jennings held up his hand for silence. "The best is yet to come. What we've done here we can do to the rest of the planet. We've done some exploring, and there are extensive oil pools available. We can flood the streams, rivers, lakes and oceans with oil to kill off most of the harmful oxygen-producing organisms. We'll burn open coal veins to cut off the harmful sun rays and give us carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and the sulfur compounds we need in the air. By eliminating the native flora and fauna we ought to be able to reclaim huge portions of the planet, or maybe even the whole thing. We'll spray with DDT so the plants and animals will take it up and become nutritious. It won't take too long to get a proper greenhouse effect working for the whole planet. We'll make a second Earth here. Are you with us?"

A roar of approval went up, cheers, whistles, shouting. On and on it went. A guard leaped from his seat in the front row, went up to Jennings and shook his hand and turned to the assembled crowd. They slowly quieted as they saw he wanted to say something. He shouted, "Four months ago, just four

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months ago, I came to Hel from Earth. And I want to tell you now that this place," he waved his hand out toward the valley, "makes me feel more at home than any place I've been since I left New York City. I say we make the whole planet livable."

The cheers were deafening.

The galaxy in which we live contains hundreds of millions of stars, and we're sure now that many of those stars have planets. We also know that life is inevitable on the right type of planet. Probably there are a million worlds that hold life. Why then have we never been visited by beings from other worlds more advanced than we are? Well, maybe we have been—and are being!

KATE WILHELM
Whatever Happened
to the Olmecs?

Tony looked up impatiently at a tap on her shoulder. She was splicing film that had to be ready by eight, and she was behind.

"I'll take over," Morris said. "Your old man is here, says it's important."

"Don't you touch it," she said rising. "My father? Here?"

"He says he's your father, sweetheart. What'm I, the FBI, I should ask for identification or something?"

"I'll be back in a couple of minutes. Leave that film alone!" Morris shrugged and walked to the door with her. Her office opened onto the cluttered studio where half a dozen people in jeans were working on sets, lounging, waiting for the eight o'clock showing.

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At the far side of the room she saw her father looking very much out of place. She crossed to him quickly.

"Dad, what are you doing in New York?"

He kissed her cheek. "Can we talk?" He was fifty, five to ten pounds overweight, with curly dark hair. He jingled change in his pocket with one hand and grasped her arm with the other. His eyes shifted constantly, uneasily.

She led him back to her tiny office and closed the door. Most of the group were watching curiously. They knew her father had won the Nobel Prize for his work with quasars; she hoped no one asked for his autograph when he left.

"Tony, I . . ." He sat down heavily and got out a cigarette, looking at her, at the office.

"There is something wrong. I thought you were on the coast."

"I'm going right back. I came to talk to you."

Tony sat down, too. She could feel herself getting tight; the more he fidgeted, the quieter she became.

"It's about Justin. Tony, I'm worried sick about him. I need your help."

Justin? Tony felt her jaw and cheeks clamp. Very deliberately she lighted a cigarette before she asked, "What's wrong with him?"

"Honey, he's gone. He left almost three months ago. Just walked out one day and never came back. And now there's some talk about a security risk." He fumbled with the ashtray. It was nearly covered with film and papers and assorted junk; she knew precisely where everything was on her desk.

"Dad, start over. Three months ago? And you're just now wondering about it? Is it connected to Nancy's death?"

"It must be. He was off on sick leave for a month

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or so; then he came back and worked for ten weeks, and then he left. He cleaned out everything in his office, burned heaps of papers, didn't leave a scrap of anything, and walked away. Period."

Tony waited. Her father had been Justin's teacher some years ago; now they worked together.

"Honey, do you understand what it means when a man is given the backing of the Clark Institute for independent studies?" She shook her head. "Well, I'll put it this way. I never got such a grant. And he has had it for two years now. He's thirty-four and he can write his own ticket. He has unlimited use of the computer! That's what it means."

"What was he doing?"

"Can't tell you. He sat in on the spitball sessions, we all do, but other than that he was completely on his own. And when he left, he cleaned the files out so thoroughly that no one could pick up where he left off." He lighted another cigarette and snubbed it out again, almost instantly. "They want him back. Or they want him in a hospital if he's having a breakdown."

"You said security risk. In astronomy? Justin?" She stared at her father in disbelief.

"I know that and you know it, but the security people are getting nasty. A man doesn't walk away like that if he's quitting. He hands in his resignation and leaves in an orderly fashion."

"They're looking for new lows to sink to," she said.

"Look, Tony, he's in serious trouble. I'm not kidding about that. He is. What if he did have a breakdown after Nancy's death? My God, it was enough to bring about a collapse. He can't or won't account for where he was after that, when he took off for five weeks. He says he was just driving around the coun-

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try, and he doesn't remember where he went, where he stayed, whom he saw, if anyone. I believe him. That's what he would do. But look at it with a suspicious eye, and suddenly it does seem odd. Now this."

Tony pushed the ashtray closer to him and thought about Justin. "Was he working on something that the military got interested in? You know he would quit if he found out something like that. He always said he would."

Her father shook his head. "It was the same work that led him to apply for the grant in the first place."

"So what made you decide to fly East now? Has something turned up to make it important right now?"

He nodded. "He wouldn't talk to me before, and now I've had orders to stay away from him. They're watching him to see if anyone contacts him, or if he makes any contacts. He has been getting information about Mexico. His passport's in order; there'd be no hitch if he decided to fly almost anywhere in the world. And they can't let him do that. This morning I learned that he hired a detective agency to check into his own past. *His* past, his parents' past. Other scientists' antecedents. Tony, it looks more and more like a breakdown."

She nodded slowly. "But why me? What do you think I could do?"

"Talk to him. He would trust you."

She shook her head, and she felt her cheeks burning. Very slowly she said, "He doesn't know I'm alive. He never did."

Her father leaned forward and looked at her soberly. "Tony, you've always cared for him. It shows

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every time anyone mentions his name. Honey, they won't let him leave the country. If they decide that he's been bought, he might have an accident, a fatal accident. If they decide he's having a breakdown, they'll hospitalize him and 'cure' him, or keep him confined for a hell of a long time. If they decide that he's simply played out, that he isn't a risk, or a menace, to himself or anyone else, they might leave him alone. But they have to find out. If he decided to go to Mexico, they'll be forced to do something."

Tony felt frozen. Her father got up and put his hand on her shoulder briefly, then turned to look at her wall covered with photographs. "I've frightened you, haven't I? I meant to. I'm frightened. I'm frightened for him, Tony. He married my sister, but he couldn't mean more to me if he were my own brother, or my son. I'm frightened for him, Tony."

"I can't leave right now," she said, wanting to weep, to scream, to curse. "You can't walk in like that and expect me to grab my purse and leave, just like that. I have work to do. A film we have to have ready to show tonight. It's important to me. To those people out there." She was arguing with herself, she realized, and stopped.

"I have to fly back this evening," her father said. "No one knows I came. He wouldn't have to know I've seen you at all. He's at the beach cottage."

"Massachusetts," Tony muttered. They both knew it was settled.

"Tony," her father said then, slowly, kneeling before her, "you know I wouldn't send you to him if I didn't feel desperate."

She nodded resentfully. "And you know I'd break my back to do anything you asked."

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"Call me as often as you can," he said. "Tell me how he looks, what he's doing, everything. God knows what you might turn up that will help him."

They walked through the studio and she was thinking, they might still be able to meet the eight o'clock deadline, if she worked through, and then she could fly up. She kissed her father and turned to find Morris at her elbow. Morris was the producer and wanted to be the editor and cameraman, but she was those.

"Back up, creep," she said savagely. "Get some hamburgers and coffee, ham sandwiches, I don't care what and feed these people. And don't disturb me!" She went back to her splicing machine and forgot about her father and Morris and almost forgot about Justin.

At eleven-thirty she paid the taxi driver in front of the cottage. It was a beach cottage only because it had always been called that by her family. Her great-grandfather had built the house in 1870, and they added to it bit by bit until it looked like a child's house of blocks. It was two stories in most places, with many chimneys and odd little windows, all totally dark. The air was fresh and cold. She could smell the sea, although she could see nothing of it. The view was at the back of the house.

She felt sick with disappointment and furious with herself for the hurt the empty house forced on her. It would be cold and damp, maybe no electricity, certainly no phone. She hoped there was firewood.

She opened the door and got her suitcase in and gave the door a kick. It slammed and the lights came on. She dropped her suitcase.

"Tony? Is that you?"

"Who's there? Justin?" She could see nothing for

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a minute; then he came in from the dark hallway, into the light. "Justin, I thought no one was here. You scared the hell out of me."

"Sorry, Tony. I might add that you're a surprise, too." He was even thinner than he had been the last time she had seen him, at Nancy's funeral. He had brown hair and eyes, and a complexion that suggested Spanish or Mediterranean descent. He was six feet tall, alarmingly thin.

"What are you doing here?" they asked at the same time. They both laughed, and she hugged her coat tighter to her. "I'm freezing. Is there anything to drink? Coffee?"

"I'll give you an Irish coffee. How's that?" She followed him to the kitchen, their steps echoing through the house. The braided rugs that usually covered the floors were religiously lifted and stored over Labor Day weekend each year.

As she sipped the steaming Irish coffee, she began to warm up. "Are you all right, Justin? You look sick."

"I'm okay," he said. "But what are you doing here? You know it's almost twelve-thirty?"

"Justin, listen. You know I make films? I talked an agency into letting me do a segment on speculation. And I spent everything I could rake together to make it just exactly the way I wanted it. And they liked it, Justin! I'm getting a contract to make a twenty-minute film for them. Justin, you wouldn't believe what it means to me! I just couldn't stand it. I had to get away for a while, until I get the contract. Ten days to two weeks, they said. Then I can pay people, pay rent. . . ." She stopped abruptly and took a deep breath. "Sorry," she said, more quietly. She had forgotten, she thought with disbelief. She

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had actually forgotten that her father had sent her here, that she hadn't simply come. She felt her face burn and lifted her cup.

"That's great, Tony. Really fine," Justin said. "Your father must be proud of you."

"He doesn't know yet. I'll call him in a day or two," she mumbled. He was regarding her with a faint smile, but as if he was not paying very much attention to her and her news, but was listening for something else. "Do you mind that I'm here?" she asked hesitantly. "I mean, you were here first. Do you want to be alone?"

"It doesn't matter," he said, and then he looked at her and really smiled. "It doesn't matter. I'm glad you're here and that something good happened to you."

In bed later, under a thick, light-as-snow comforter that was warm and lovely, she thought again of that smile, how it illuminated his face. Justin was introverted, serious; he seldom laughed, but when he did, it was thoroughly uninhibited. When he paid attention, he paid more attention, more closely, than anyone else. She drifted to sleep, the Irish dulling her senses, the bed warm and soft, and she thought once or twice that she heard his footsteps echoing in the old house.

She slept late and woke to find her room sun-flooded and warm. Justin was on the back porch looking at the ocean when she went down. "What a gorgeous day!" she said. "Good morning."

"It is nice, isn't it? I was going down to the village for some eggs and milk. I thought you might want something, so I waited. Anything I can get you?"

"Let me come too."

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"Don't you want to eat first?"

She shook her head. "I'll just put on a sweater, or will I need one?"

"I don't think so."

She walked happily at his side, and in her fantasy life she was his girl, his bride, his wife. She wished she could reach out and take his hand. She wished she was only twelve, or not Nancy's niece, or just a woman he had picked up somewhere along the way. But she wished all those things fleetingly. It was enough that the morning sun was warm and the air brisk and that they walked side by side. He stopped and pointed at a small orange sail that seemed to be flying over the water. They watched it, then walked again.

"I've been thinking about having you up here," Justin said finally. "I guess you should leave today."

"Why? People might talk, something like that?"

"I hadn't thought of that," he said. "It is a point. But what really alarms me is that you might be picked up for questioning. And if there is trouble, you'll be in the middle of it."

"Picked up? Who would do that?"

"I'm being watched," he said.

Tony kicked a pebble and watched it arc into a patch of raspberry bushes. "Who's watching you, Justin? And why?"

"They probably think I'm a spy," he said. "Or if not a spy, a defector or something."

Tony's hands clenched, and she forced them to relax again. "Are you in trouble, Justin?"

"Not really. They won't do anything. I don't think, as long as I stay here quietly. But if the others come, then there will be trouble. How long did you plan to stay?"

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"A week maybe. I didn't have any plans, actually."

"Maybe they won't come that quickly. I had thought by mid-October at the earliest. I don't know." He frowned, and his pace quickened until she was almost running to keep up with him.

"Justin, I can't stand it. Who will come? And why will that mean trouble?"

"My parents," he said. "I thought I told you. I'm expecting Mark and Cora Wright."

Tony stopped and stared at him. He took a step or two, then turned to see why she was no longer keeping up. "What do you mean?" she whispered. "Your parents are dead!"

"Oh, no. At least not yet. They'll come to kill me, you see, and if you are here, you might be in danger. That's why I wondered how long you intend to stay."

They were standing about four feet apart. Tony took a step toward him, feeling a knot spreading through her stomach up into her chest. He was looking at her openly, frankly, a good-natured patient expression. "They are dead!" she said again. "You're an orphan."

He shook his head. "They aren't dead. When they come, I'll have to kill them, of course. If they come. You see, they might suspect a trap and stay the hell away." He took her arm and started to walk again. "You're pale. It wasn't a good idea to walk a mile before breakfast after all. Come on, I'll feed you at the coffee shop in the village."

She tried to draw away from him, but he held her arm firmly. After several minutes he said, "Did you ever study any archaeology? I've been reading about the Olmecs. You know they carved giant heads, nine, ten feet tall, and then abandoned them, and the jungle

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covered them over. Apparently they had no metal, stone against stone. It keeps fascinating me all over again. Why? Are the rest of the figures there, too? And what do you suppose ever happened to the Olmecs?" He continued to talk about vanished civilizations in Central America, all the way to the post office where he collected a dozen or more letters, to the coffee shop where he ordered blueberry pancakes and sausage for both of them, to the grocery store, and all the way home.

All over town the villagers greeted Tony warmly as one of them. They accepted Justin, but he was still on probation and would be for the next twenty years. He seemed unaware of the difference. He talked on about the South Americans, and she thought he must have read every word ever written about them.

"They built pyramids," he said, about another of the lost civilizations. "The biggest man-made structure in the world is there. The pyramid of Cholula. And there's a statuette, a woman with two faces. Picasso's *Dora Maar* might have been copied from it. Except, the artifact was found after he did his. They had a myth, or legend, that a bearded god would return one day. He did, and he was Spanish." He paused thoughtfully. "There were the ziggurats. And Egyptian pyramids. Then came the telescopes and finally platforms in the sky for observations of the stars. Why do you suppose man always has looked to the stars? With the idea of communicating with other beings?"

"I don't know," Tony said meekly, not able to keep up. "Most people don't really give a damn, though, do they?"

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He smiled at her again, the same illuminated smile that transformed him completely. "Exactly!" he said with satisfaction.

Home again, Justin excused himself and went upstairs with his mail. Minutes later Tony heard a typewriter, and she wandered out to the back where the high granite rocks overlooked the ocean. The sun was very warm now. Later, when the tide went out, she would wander on the tiny beach that would appear. The strip was about fifteen feet wide, with pools and natural dams that protected a multitude of life forms from one high tide to the next. Tony had loved that tiny, isolated beach as a child.

She looked up at Sailors' Inn and knew that was where the observers would be; it was the only spot where the house could be kept under surveillance. At one time the inn had been for sailors, but it had been turned into a roadhouse that specialized in New England seafood and dancing, with rooms to let upstairs. Traveling salesmen, a sleepy family that had driven too far to find a real motel, a couple off for a weekend, those were the kind of people who made up its clientele now. And FBI men, or CIA, or whatever the bureau was that thought Justin was a risk, she thought soberly.

She thought of Justin with an ache that was distant, having existed nine years earlier when she had been sixteen and he had become engaged to her aunt, and that was present now as a deeper ache, one that she knew could never be relieved. Then she had believed right up until the wedding that Justin would suddenly see her, Tony, and he would forget Nancy completely. She hadn't believed, she told herself firmly, she had wanted to believe that. And he never once had seen her, except as Nancy's niece. If he

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hadn't known, Nancy had. Tony moved uneasily thinking about how Nancy had looked at her one day, shortly before the wedding, how suddenly she had put her arms around Tony and had kissed her gently on her cheek. And she, Tony, had jerked away and had flung herself at the house, blinded by tears of fury and mortification and despair.

She picked at lichen in the wall at the top of the bluffs. The lichen was red and blue and purple, insane colors for plants, as if they hadn't discovered chlorophyll in all their long history.

She started when Justin spoke close by her. "Do you want to swim?" he said, obviously repeating it. He was in his bathing trunks, and again she thought how painfully thin he was.

"I'll watch," she said. "That water's too cold."

The beach was appearing, dark with wetness, hard-packed sand that didn't give a bit underfoot. Justin swam vigorously for a few minutes, then towed himself hard. He was very pink.

"Are you working on something?" she asked. "I heard you typing."

"Letters." He picked up a smooth stone and studied it. "Look, you can see garnet in it. And quartz crystals. Think of its long journey. Maybe two hundred miles, three hundred. I'm not very good at geology," he said apologetically. "There was a mountain, and the glaciers came and broke up great chunks of it and rolled them about here and there. Then the glaciers receded and the forests came back. The earth rose here and fell there. The ocean level rose, fell. A new glaciation period. Over and over, through thousands of years, the ice, the forests, more ice. And finally our little stone ends up on a beach that lives only twelve hours a day. The grinding proc-

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ess will go on. A fragment here, a bit there. It will be reduced to grains: quartz, garnet, and the final separation will have come about. A tremendous storm will sweep the coast one day, and it will be carried out to sea along with tons of sand and dirt, trees, houses. The heavier grains will lie on the ocean floor, and the never-ending snow of sediments will cover them. The quartz grains will be virtually immortal, the final goal, after a history that could well extend over several millions of years." He put the stone down almost reverently and gazed at the water. "The problem of man is that he can see only his own span, and that in a distorted shape. If it didn't happen in his yesterday, it didn't really happen at all. If it doesn't happen in his tomorrow, he has no faith in its ever happening."

Tony shifted to look at him. "Will you tell me what you meant when you said your parents will come here? I don't understand. They really are dead, aren't they?"

He shook his head. "They never die," he said harshly. "I sent them a message, in the personal columns of the major newspapers all over the world. They'll see it eventually, and they'll know that I found out about them. They'll come. Those letters I had today, they're in response to my ads. But they're not what I'm waiting for. That hasn't come yet. The letters had been opened and read," he said, suddenly cheerful. "*They* know I'm getting crank mail from nuts all over the world. It must worry them." He nodded towards Sailors' Inn, and then stood up. "Let's go up, I'm cold."

"But you haven't explained a thing," Tony said helplessly. "I'm worried about you, and you talk in riddles."

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"You're worried about me? Why?"

"Because . . . because you're in trouble. And you're my uncle."

He smiled at her gently and reached for her hand to pull her to her feet. "You're a very pretty young woman now, Tony, and a hell of a liar." He started the climb up to the house. "I'll tell you about it later. I have to sleep now. I don't dare sleep after dark, but they won't come by daylight. They'll know I'm being watched." He looked over his shoulder at her and grinned a boyish, teasing grin. "So you just bite your tongue and don't say whatever bad word has come to mind. I'll get up at eight or so."

"When do you eat?"

"When I remember," he said, climbing again. "If you have more regular habits, don't wait for me."

The house was very quiet, and Tony found that she was tiptoeing so that her steps wouldn't sound so loud. She took off her shoes. There was little food, none of it dinner fare; later she would walk to the village again. Lobster, she thought. And salad stuff. She wasn't a very good cook, but she couldn't have grown up in that family without knowing about seafoods. She took a book to the back porch and stared at the ocean. The incoming tide was swelled by a fresh northeastern wind; it would get colder that night.

She shopped and she didn't call her father. Not yet, she thought. Just not yet.

The lobster was good, the wine was not, but neither of them cared. They put it aside and drank coffee and watched the rainbow-colored flames the burning driftwood made.

"Justin, now?" she asked contentedly. Her fantasy

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life was full and rich, she thought, and didn't try to push it away at all.

"Now. Nancy and I went camping that weekend. It seemed that the answers I had looked for were all there suddenly, and I had to get away, or start talking to your father, or someone. And I wasn't ready. Nancy understood about things like that," he said. "We always went camping when nice things happened. Not in a tent. Sleeping bags under the stars. All my life," he said, glancing at her for the first time, "I've known exactly what I was going to do. Talk to the stars. There never was a second's doubt. Anyway, they jumped us in the middle of the night. They hit me and tied me to a tree and they raped Nancy and killed her. I watched them do it. Stoned out of their minds, of course. I began to curse them, scream at them, described them in great detail, everything I could think of to get them to kill me, too, but they never touched me after that one rock on the head in the beginning."

Tony was trembling too hard to try to lift her coffee, to light a cigarette, anything. She stared dry-eyed at the fire and waited.

"I stayed there for two days," he said. His voice was emotionless, as if he were describing a movie plot he had seen many years before. "And during those two days, for most of the time, I think I was out of my mind. When those kids found me and cut me down, I was out completely. I didn't remember much of what happened when they took me in and questioned me. I left for a few weeks, and that's a blank, most of it. Driving, day and night, sleeping in the car, eating when I felt faint, or just because I remembered that I hadn't for a long time. And one night, I was driving and ran out of gas and walked

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to the nearest town, ten, fifteen miles, out under the stars, and I remembered what I was supposed to be doing. Why I was living at all. And I went back to work." He got up abruptly and left the room. Seconds later he returned and sat down again. "The wind," he said. "It's pretty strong now." Earlier he had gone over the entire house, checking windows, doors. He had left the front door unlocked. They were in a small room her grandfather called the study. From it they could see the front door, but he had said he didn't expect anyone this soon, and certainly not this early in the evening.

"Have you ever had an obsession, Tony?" he asked suddenly. "A real obsession?"

She shook her head, unable to look at him.

"Well, it isn't pleasant. Something that haunts you day and night. It was an obsession with me to communicate with other intelligent beings in space. I always knew we could, that they were there, and that our technology was advanced enough to make it possible. Every class I took in school, except those they forced on me, every book I read, it was all directed to that one goal. And I was ready to publish, to announce what I had found, what we must do. I had it all six months ago. That's what was waiting for me when I went back to work. And I looked at it, and I knew that I had been used."

Tony closed her eyes hard, the glare had hurt them. They burned as if the fire that remained on her retinal image was from the tissues of her eyes. She wanted to stop him, but she couldn't speak.

"I had been used just like others had been used in the past," he said, and now emotion was creeping into his voice, charging it with undertones and hurrying his speech. "I must have worked it all out when

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I was tied to that tree and when I drove those weeks. I didn't have to think it through at all when I went back to work. I sat at my desk for days after that, fitting the pieces together, taking them apart again to see if I could find flaws. It all belonged. I'm a plant. There have been others, and if I fail there will be others after me."

Suddenly Justin jumped up and began to pace rapidly, his voice was very low and almost too fast now for her to distinguish the individual words. "They planted me at birth," he said. "With one fixed idea, to talk to the stars. And I can. I could tell the world how tomorrow. They know it, that's why they're watching me. They're afraid to move against me because they don't know what I might do. I might decide to kill myself and leave them out in the cold. That's what they think. I might have sold out already. They suddenly classified my work," he said. "No reason. They knew I would publish, so they got out their stamps." He laughed and then sat down at Tony's feet, on the floor, and looked up at her. "You don't have to believe me," he said gently. "You don't have to pretend you do or you don't. It's all right."

"But I . . . it isn't that I don't believe you," she said. "I don't understand you. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Those people listed as my parents, they weren't recovered, you know. No bodies. A convenient crash into the river and one unmarked infant. He was supposed to have been a mechanic, she a housewife. They had had an apartment for two weeks only. They had come from California to Kansas City only two weeks before. No one remembered them at all. They appear out of nowhere, produce one obsessed child and vanish. My parents."

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Tony looked down at him helplessly, wanting desperately to take his hands, to put her hand on his hair, to touch him in some way, as if by the assurance of her touch she could bring him out of this nightmare. She didn't dare touch him. "Justin, that's unusual, but not the way you think. You made such a great leap from that to thinking that you were planted, that they were not what they seemed. Don't you see that?"

"Of course. And I decided to let an independent investigator prove me wrong, if he could. I spent the next weeks putting names in the computer, everyone who had published in my field. I got fourteen names of others whose births were very much like my own, two of them in this same generation. One a Russian, one an Israeli. The Israeli was killed in the Six Day War, and the Russian was killed in a plane crash. That leaves me." He grinned at Tony and said, "You know how I'm going to lure them here? I sent them condolences. I put ads in newspapers all over the world. Japan, Hong Kong, England, France, Israel. My ads said: 'My sympathy for your tragic loss of Alexei and Simon J.' I think they'll see it eventually and they'll know."

Tony moistened her lips and asked slowly, "And if no one comes? Then what?"

"Then I'll know I'm suffering from a paranoid persecution complex, and I'll get help," he said.

She touched him then; she put her fingers on his cheek and asked, "Justin, can I stay with you and wait? Please."

He removed her fingers and put her hand back in her lap, his touch very gentle. "I'd like for you to," he said. "For a while." He stood up and stretched. "You go on to bed now." He looked down at her and

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smiled softly. "You're a nice kid, Tony. You haven't asked me why they did it. Who they are. Nothing. You don't believe a word of it, do you?"

"I don't know," she said. "I guess I don't."

"Thanks for that," he said. "There's a race out there who put couples on planets to produce babies now and then in order to get in touch with the home world when they are able to do it with their own technology. I have to assume that I would be the means to bring them here, and I don't think they would like what they would find. I think they would treat Earth and its people exactly the same way we would treat an island in the Pacific that we discovered housed a contagious and virulent virus that we couldn't cope with. We would exterminate it, the vectors, all life, if necessary, without a moment's hesitation. And I know how to call them, how to bring them to this island of ours."

Tony rose then, her eyes fastened on his face. "How long will you wait?"

"Two months. I don't think I'll have to wait that long. I think they'll come as soon as they read my ads. Because I know about them. They'll know that I'll try to find them to kill them."

Tony nodded and left it. She took their cups to the kitchen to rinse them and then went to bed. It took her a very long time to fall asleep.

The next day was cold and windy and brilliantly clear. They walked to the village where she left him to call her father.

"He's just tired, dad. Make them give him a few weeks without being harassed, and he'll be all right. I'll stay with him that long."

Her father was nervous about her staying more than a day or two, and he wanted details about Jus-

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tin, but she cut him off. "I have to go now. He's coming. Make them leave him alone, dad. I promise he won't try to leave."

Tony hung up feeling guilty. She and her father had always been very close. When he and her mother separated, she had been ten; she had chosen to remain with him, and they had let her do that. She couldn't recall ever lying to him before.

She and Justin were walking home when a horn sounded close behind them. It was the village mechanic, Dougherty, pulling up to stop by them in a Volkswagen."

"Want a ride? Going right by your house."

Justin shook his head, and Tony answered, "No, thanks. We need the exercise. Whose car?"

"Young couple at the inn. Broke down on the highway couple nights ago. Damn Kraut car, can't find a thing wrong with it, but soon's they start, fool thing stops on them."

"Young?" Justin asked. "How young? Kids?"

"Not that young," Dougherty said. "Thirty. Why?"

"Curious, that's all," Justin said. But he was more than just curious, Tony knew. He had a new excited tone in his voice. Dougherty waved to them and started the car again and went on by them.

"They're here!" Justin said exultantly. "I wasn't at all sure they would take the bait. But they're here!"

Tony looked at him miserably. "They're thirty, he said. How could they be thirty?"

"Of course. They'll never get older, good child-bearing age, nothing to attract attention." He was walking too fast, and she said nothing more until they got back to the cottage.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, in the kitchen. He had flung down his mail and was pacing.

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"Justin, what are you going to do?" Her voice was edging over toward hysteria. She began to put away the food, forcing her hands to be steady, and not until she put paper towels in the refrigerator did she admit that it might be better to leave everything alone for a while.

The kitchen was large, with a table in the center and room enough for half a dozen people to move about. She sat down and watched Justin.

"I couldn't get near them, not over there with that place crawling with operators," he said, as if thinking out loud. "After you leave, I'll vary my routine, walk on the beach, scramble among the rocks, let them see me doing things out in the open."

"I'm not leaving," Tony said quietly.

"They'll come up with a plan to accost me then."

"I'm not leaving," she said again, more emphatically.

"It's like a chess game now," he said. "We've both castled and we are perfectly safe, but the game can't end in a draw. I'll make the move to break the deadlock, see if they refuse my gambit."

"Justin, listen to me!" Tony cried. "We could go out more. You and I. That wouldn't seem suspicious, but if you just begin to expose yourself after all this time, that wouldn't be natural at all."

He looked at her and frowned. "You won't be here."

"You need someone here so you can sleep," she said, trying to still the desperation that her voice revealed. "Now that you know they're so close, you don't dare just go to sleep." He continued to pace. "Besides," she cried, "I won't go! If you make me leave, I'll go to the inn and stay there!"

He looked at her then, a strange, remote look that

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was more frightening than his silence. He sat down at the table and studied her. "You should leave now, Tony. Go back to New York and your film making. Your friends." She shook her head. "Tony, you're going to be terribly hurt." He reached out and stroked her hair once and then stood up again. "You're a dear person to me, Tony. Nancy loved you very much. We both always did. I don't want you hurt."

"I can stay then?"

At the doorway he turned and looked at her, and again his face was set and remote. He nodded and left her sitting there.

He was the one who would be hurt, she knew. They didn't understand his gentleness, his real concern for people. Even in his delusions his worry was for others. He was willing to sacrifice his career, his life, to save the world. And they would never understand that.

While he slept, she paced and tried to think. Now, she knew, she had to call her father. At eight when Justin got up, she said, "I'm going to the inn to call Morris and see if there's anything new about the contract. Okay?"

"Sure. I'll put on some dinner."

She nodded. The inn was less than a city block away. She looked down on the house from it and wondered if Justin realized how exposed he was there. Every time anyone walked on the porch, in the yard, along the stone wall, he was completely in the open. A high-powered rifle . . . She shook as the thought surfaced, and she wanted to weep for him. She called her father then, dialing with stiff fingers; her voice was hard and fast.

"Listen, Daddy, you have to do something. There's a couple at old Sailor's Inn, and they have to get

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out of there." She listened a moment and then said, "Yes, it's part of his delusional system! It's too complicated to explain. If they leave and if no one bothers him for a month, until late October, he'll be all right. I swear he will."

"That's too damned late!" her father said sharply. "He has to come back sooner than that. By the first of the month! Or he won't have a project to come back to, and it won't make a god-damned bit of difference!"

She cried, "I thought we were concerned about him, not the project he's working on!"

"Calm yourself, Tony. For God's sake, keep calm!" He was silent a moment, then said, "Look, I have to think, get in touch with security about that couple. Call me tomorrow."

She nodded at the phone and hung up slowly.

She remembered about Morris and dutifully made the call. There was no news, except general bitching about her absence.

She walked back vaguely disquieted, not knowing why. It was as if she had turned on a switch, she thought, and she didn't know what the machine might produce, or how long it would take, or even what to look for to see if it was operating.

After a late dinner Tony and Justin sat before the fire and talked quietly. "One of our spitball sessions was concerned with the coming crisis in food production," he said. "Someone is going to have to make the decisions about which nations we feed, and which ones we let die of famine, and the choices will be completely political, leading humanity more and more into homogeneity. Those who adapt to our system, our philosophies, our methods will survive,

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the others will die. And we are becoming the most destructive force this planet has ever seen."

And he talked about the joys of looking at the stars through a big telescope. And about pollution, and once more about the Olmecs. And about freedom and meaningful choices. At twelve he told her to go to bed.

She heard his steps and, later, rain, a hard-driving rain that beat at the house all night. It continued into the next day, and when they walked to the village, they looked like a couple of spooks, she thought, all wrapped up in slickers from head to toe. He slept in the afternoon, and she read until five when she put on coffee. While she waited for it to perk, she heard a tapping on the back door and opened it to see her father on the porch. The rain was slanting in from the sea, hitting her full on. It was very cold.

"Daddy!" she cried in relief. "I'm so glad to see you! I have to talk to you." She pulled the door closed and stood in the rain.

"He's asleep?"

She nodded.

"Get something on and come out. We don't want to wake him."

In her slicker again, wet underneath it, she stood on the rainswept porch and said, "Daddy, are they gone? That couple?"

"Not yet. Now tell me why. They're just drifters."

"He thinks he has to kill them!" Swiftly she told him. "You see, if they leave now, and if those people just leave him alone, he'll be all right. He said he would get help then. He suspects that it's a delusion; if nothing happens, he'll accept that and he'll be all right."

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"But the project will be over," her father said. She couldn't see his face under the broad-brimmed hat that he wore.

"What difference does it make? He can do it over again when he's well!"

"There won't be any money for it by then. I've fielded for him, run interference for him, cut through red tape by the ton for him. It's *our* work that he wants to scuttle. Because he got a touch of xenophobia. That's what it is. And I won't let him ruin a life's work over it!"

"He needs time!" Tony cried.

"Balls!" her father said explosively. "He's scared of the dark!" He looked at the inn, at the shadow that rose from the rocks. "Keep him here. Don't let him leave."

"They can't make him work for them! And he'll resist if they try to break in here."

Her father grasped her arm and shook her. "You listen to me, Tony. You're in something that you don't know a damn thing about. Six months ago he found what he was looking for. There are intelligent signals coming in; they've been coming in for a thousand years, maybe more. He has proved it. He knows where they are coming from, and he had the computer working on deciphering them. He knows how to send a signal that will be intelligible to those people, whoever they are. All that I know. Damn it, I was working with him! I know what he has. He didn't burn his papers. They analyzed the ashes, scrap paper, all of it. He has his work hidden somewhere. I saw it, Tony. I know what's in those papers. And on the basis of what I know, I sold a bill of goods to some people in the government. Whoever contacts that race will be given information that will be in-

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valuable. New weapons. Health cures. New energy sources. Immortality." His face was very close to hers, and he spoke rapidly, almost feverishly. His hand was hard on her arm. "And that's all true, Tony! Every word of it is true. Think what we've gained in the past hundred years and multiply it by a hundred, two hundred! Knowledge that we couldn't acquire for a thousand years. They gave me six months to produce proof. And after that, no limits! We don't have time to wet-nurse him now."

She yanked free and backed away from him. "You'll kill him if you try to force him now."

"We don't have the goddamn time! Don't you understand what I've been telling you! The project will close, and it won't be revived in my lifetime, not soon enough for our message to go and be answered. I won't give it up! Those men up at the inn, they won't give it up, either. We'll get him a doctor, take care of him, but he has to come back now."

"They can't force him to work," she repeated.

Her father regarded her for a moment and then pulled his hat down lower. "Keep him here," he said again, and left.

Tony went inside and threw her slicker onto the chair. She went upstairs to change, but instead she went to Justin's door and opened it. He sat up instantly, one hand under the covers. Probably pointing a gun at her. She wished he had simply shot.

"Justin, oh, Justin!" She threw herself at him and knelt on the floor, her head buried in the blanket, weeping wildly. "My father came here and I thought he wanted to help you. Justin, I thought he would help. I told him everything. I'm sorry, Justin. Please forgive me. I'm sorry." She sobbed until she was exhausted.

"It's all right, Tony," he said. "It's all right."

She took a deep breath, then another. "I always loved him so much," she said finally. "I trusted him. I admired him. I thought he was perfect for so many years. I was so proud of him, to be his daughter, to have people recognize him."

Justin's hand was warm on her head. He lifted her face and looked down at her. "You're freezing," he said. "Go get dry and I'll come down. We'll talk."

They took coffee to the study where he had made a fire. Tony felt very tired and depressed. She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. "Couldn't you go back and just pretend to work?"

"You know I can't, now. Your father will monitor everything from here on out. He'd spot it in an hour. Besides I have to kill my parents."

She didn't open her eyes. Of course.

"Be right back," he whispered. Tony felt tears under her lids and kept her eyes tightly closed. She tried not to hear his soft steps through the hallway, to the kitchen. A door slammed, and there were voices, and then impossibly, incredibly loud, there were shots. She screamed and ran to the kitchen. Justin was at the side of the door holding a small gun. A man and a woman lay on the floor.

It seemed that the house exploded with noise and confusion. Men ran in from the porch, and others from the front of the house. Tony's father was there, trying to pull her away from Justin.

"They're dead," a man said, on the floor next to the woman's body.

"Tony, for God's sake, come here," her father said.

"Leave her alone," another man said in a voice of authority. He glanced down at the bodies. "You killed them," he said to Justin.

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He was still holding the gun, pointing it straight ahead. He was paler than she had ever seen a person. Even his lips were white.

"I'll have that now," the man in authority said and went to Justin and took the gun from him. Justin didn't move. "Now you'll go back to work," he said.

"No."

"Yes. You will. We need you, sonny boy. You can talk to them, can you? You will, Justin Wright. For this government. And when they answer, they'll answer for this government. Our questions. No one else is going to know a damn thing about them and how to contact them until we're ready. We're in a deadlock, but whoever talks to the races out there will break that deadlock. You know it, and we know it, and the Russians and the Chinese and every other goddamn country on Earth knows it." Slowly the gun he had taken from Justin rose until it was pointing at him. "And if you don't agree right now, no more games, we'll put you in a hospital as a homicidal psychopath. You'll tell us where the papers are, Wright. You'll tell us anything we ask, and you know it."

"No."

"Justin, don't be a fool!" Tony's father said. "Come back of your own free will and finish the work you started."

Justin looked at Tony, who was staring at the gun like one hypnotized. He reached out and touched her hair gently. She broke her stare and turned to him. He had a soft smile on his face that was not like any expression she had seen there before.

She shook her head. "No, Justin! You don't have to go back now! They're dead, there won't be any others! You can't let them do this to you!" His ex-

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pression didn't change. She looked at her father and cried, "You used me! You planned this! You had to find out how to reach him, didn't you? I love him!"

"Puppy love," he said. "Don't be a child, Tony."

"You don't know what you're doing!" she screamed. She pointed to the bodies on the floor. "What about them?" She stared at the bodies and then turned to look with horror at her father. "You brought them," she whispered. "You knew! I told you! So he won't have to keep looking for them now."

"We'll take care of them," the man with the gun said. He looked at Justin, who was pale, but less so now. He still smiled faintly.

"Tony," Justin said, "it's all right. It isn't your fault. Always remember that. I want to go back. Do you understand what I'm telling you?" He looked at her with that strange, remote, very frightening smile, and he continued to watch her until she nodded in despair. "You understand. They deserve it, Tony. Remember that! They deserve it!" Then he turned to the man with the gun. "I must have known. I guess six months ago I knew. Okay. Let's go."

The man hesitated, glanced from Tony to her father. "She'll need a long rest."

"I'll take care of my girl," her father said.

Justin and the man walked out of the kitchen, the other three men following.

"NO!" Tony screamed. "NO! NO!" Someone yanked her arm hard and pulled her through the doorway, into the hall, toward the stairs, and she continued to scream.

The Science Fiction Yearbook

1973 was unquestionably the most successful year for science fiction in terms of statistics, if not in all other ways. The number of books published was nearly double that of the previous year, and there was an increase in other areas, though not as spectacular as for books.

The magazines again showed an increase in total circulation, but it was only 2.5 percent greater than in 1972. *Galaxy* returned to monthly publication toward the end of the year; and the new West Coast magazine, *Vertex*, published five issues. This brought the number of issues up to 55 as compared to 48 for the previous year. Indications are that 60 issues may be published during 1974.

However, there is little cause for optimism in the magazine field. The two lowest-circulation magazines showed no gain over their previous marginal sales. This fact, coupled with rapidly increasing prices for paper and higher postal rates, poses a serious threat to their existence. So far, like *Analog*—the leading magazine—they have clung to a price of 60 cents per issue; a rise to the 75-cent price charged by others might offset the higher costs to be expected, but whether it would further decrease circulation is uncertain.

My personal feeling is that the magazines are all grossly underpriced! In the past, softcover books and magazines usually sold for similar prices. Yet today most softcover books are priced at from 95 cents to \$1.25 per copy, with indications that the higher price will soon be standard. (Hardcover books have also

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increased by an average of about \$1.00 per copy.) Surely \$1.00, then, is not an unreasonable price in the current market. But most publishers are afraid of such an increase, and may even choose to cease publication rather than to risk it.

In the science fiction book field, the most reliable survey comes from *Locus*,* the bi-weekly newspaper of science fiction, whose editors are certainly competent to recognize the category, whether or not it is so labelled. According to this survey, 346 new science fiction books were published in 1973, representing a 50 percent increase over last year. There were also 315 reprints, yielding a total of 661 books—a spectacular increase of about 90 percent above the previous year. The editors estimate that of all copies of books of fiction sold during the year, 13.5 percent were science fiction—better than one book out of eight! This is an amazing record for a category that was hardly ever published in book form 25 years ago.

Advances paid for the leading books by publishers also set new records. Arthur C. Clarke was guaranteed \$150,000 for the softcover rights to *Rendezvous with Rama* by Ballantine Books. And prices for the re-issue of some other books have now risen to figures up to \$50,000. However, while average advances have increased, many books are still being offered for advances of under \$3000. The whole matter of authors' advances is in a state of turmoil, reflecting the confusion of the general book business.

Most of the well-known writers were active in 1973, with Robert A. Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke both having major science fiction books published.

* Box 3938, San Francisco CA 94119.

THE SCIENCE FICTION YEARBOOK

Other writers who seemed to be lost to us are returning. At present, Leigh Brackett—regarded by many, including myself, as the best pure adventure science fiction writer—is working on a series of novels for Ballantine Books. And Ray Gallun, a leading writer of the 30's, has sold a major new novel. In the magazines, a host of new names have appeared. Partly this is the result of too many older writers turning to the book field, but in many cases the stories show enough promise to make one hope that genuine new talent is again in evidence.

In the softcover field, Lancer Books has become inactive. But other publishers are moving in to fill any gap this may cause. Pyramid is planning to take an active interest in science fiction again. And Bantam Books has hired Frederik Pohl to edit one new book a month. Ballantine Books has also expanded their schedule of publication under the editorship of Judy-Lynn del Rey (who, née Benjamin, was managing editor for years of *Galaxy* and *If*).

There's a strange contrast of policies between softcover and hardcover houses. In the softcover group, many of the editors are men and women with long experience and wide familiarity with the major field of science fiction, as exemplified by the two mentioned above. But many of the hardcover houses—including some of the most prestigious—still seem to consider science fiction as something not quite nice; editors generally have no science fiction experience worth mentioning (often coming from the unrelated mystery field). As a result, some strange books are listed as science fiction by highly respectable publishers, many of them appealing to small cliques within the field. In some cases, it seems as if the standard

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rules of good fiction writing were deemed not to apply to science fiction and that incomprehensibility was regarded as a desideratum.

In general, the quality of science fiction published during the year was uncertain. There were some excellent novels, and a good many fine novelettes, but the short story length still continues to suffer. The newer writers haven't always mastered their skills—though some show promise of quick improvement; and the older and more reliable writers have mostly turned to the longer lengths, where the payment is greater.

It is increasingly hard to find the good shorter stories, because they are scattered through a larger number of original anthologies as well as the magazines. I doubt that most readers in the field can hope to see more than one-quarter of the new stories being written, partly because of the expense of buying all the sources, and partly because nobody can hope to keep up with all the publishers and publications, unless he does so professionally.

On the average, I'm disappointed with most of the anthologies I've read. Even the best of them tend to have fewer really good stories than previous collections—probably because the demand is greater and no editor can corner a majority of the best. Also, many of these anthologies are concerned with a single theme, which means that the writers are limited in what they do, and may not write their best and most original ideas. Many more show indications of inadequate editing, of too much eagerness to get enough stories rather than good stories.

As a reader, I find the best values in the magazines and the reprint anthologies. A good many of the original anthologies have only one (or sometimes

less!) good story. And the average level strikes me as little better than that in a randomly-selected magazine—at a price for an anthology that might cover a year's subscription to a magazine.

Academic interest in science fiction is still increasing, though nobody seems to have any certain knowledge of how many high-school and college courses are given, nor even how many symposia on the subject are being sponsored by colleges. There is also a strong movement toward re-issuing the historically important books of the field for college libraries and serious students. Hyperion Press has undertaken a program of 23 books selected by Sam Moskowitz as classics of early science fiction. They are also reprinting seven books by Moskowitz dealing with the history of science fiction. Another publisher has approached me for a list of some 60 books which are out-of-print in hardcover, to be issued in a format that should last for more than two centuries without turning yellow or decaying. Apparently he anticipates long-lasting interest in science fiction!

The first of the histories of science fiction designed to make potential teachers at least partly aware of the background has also appeared. This is entitled *Billion Year Spree*, by Brian W. Aldiss. It traces the field back to its beginnings, and attempts to cover the history in the magazines. There will certainly be many more such books, as well as chapbooks for teachers and students.

On a more commercial aspect, New York City has been given its first bookstore devoted to nothing but science fiction, under the guidance of Baird Searles, long a commentator on science fiction books and films. Early reports indicate it is doing excellently. A television offshoot of science fiction, *Star Trek*, has

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been given a new life as a cartoon feature for younger viewers, and its episodes are being novelized by Ballantine Books, along with the standard series of *Star Trek* books issued by Bantam Books.

Among the less happy events of 1973 was the death of Philip Wylie. Back in the prehistory of 1932, he and Edwin Balmer wrote *When Worlds Collide* and a sequel; these were among the few science fiction novels to be given book publication at that time, and their success undoubtedly helped establish science fiction as something for the general reader. Wylie later wrote a number of other books which combined science fiction techniques with his often controversial outlooks on the world. And his final novel, published just before his death, was also a story of our uncertain future.

Death also came to Prof. J. R. R. Tolkien. Tolkien's great masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*, wasn't science fiction, but it was a fantasy that most science fiction readers accepted for the marvelous view of another world it presented.

The announcement of Tolkien's death came to sadden many fans during the 1973 World Science Fiction Convention at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto, which was generally considered the finest World Convention to date. A new record was set, with about 3000 fans attending during Labor Day Weekend.

The Hugo awards presented at the world conventions are voted on by the attending members and other readers who purchase memberships, a broad sampling of general readers and writers. This year the awards were: Best Novel—*The Gods Themselves*, by Isaac Asimov; Best Novella—*The Word for World Is Forest*, by Ursula K. Le Guin; Best Novelette—*Goat Song*, by Poul Anderson; and Best Short Story

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—a tie between *Eurema's Dam*, by R. A. Lafferty, and *The Meeting*, by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. The Guest of Honor was Robert Bloch, who had also been Guest of Honor at the first world convention held in a city outside the United States, in Toronto in 1948. The 1974 World Convention will be held in Washington, D.C.

The Nebula Awards are given by members of the Science Fiction Writers of America, a professional organization of some 400 writers. While the categories and lengths are usually somewhat different from those of the Hugo Awards, the differences were less pronounced in 1973, and the two sets of awards may be compared more closely. The Nebula Awards were: Best Novel—*The Gods Themselves*, by Isaac Asimov; Best Novella—*A Meeting with Medusa*, by Arthur C. Clarke; Best Novelette—*Goat Song*, by Poul Anderson; Best Short Story—*When It Changed*, by Joanna Russ.

The Clarke novella was not eligible for Hugo voting according to the rules, but would have been listed for 1972 rather than 1973 awards. Of the other three categories, it's interesting that the two awards were agreed on best novel and best novelette. But for the best short story, the Hugo award winners were not even listed on the Nebula ballot. The closest correlations were for the 3rd place Hugo winner and 2nd place Nebula award—*And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side*, by James Tiptree, Jr.; and for a story that placed 2nd for the Hugo, 6th for the Nebula—*When We Went to See the End of the World*, by Robert Silverberg.

Judging by the first place winners, maybe short titles are coming back in favor! I hope so.

—Lester del Rey

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