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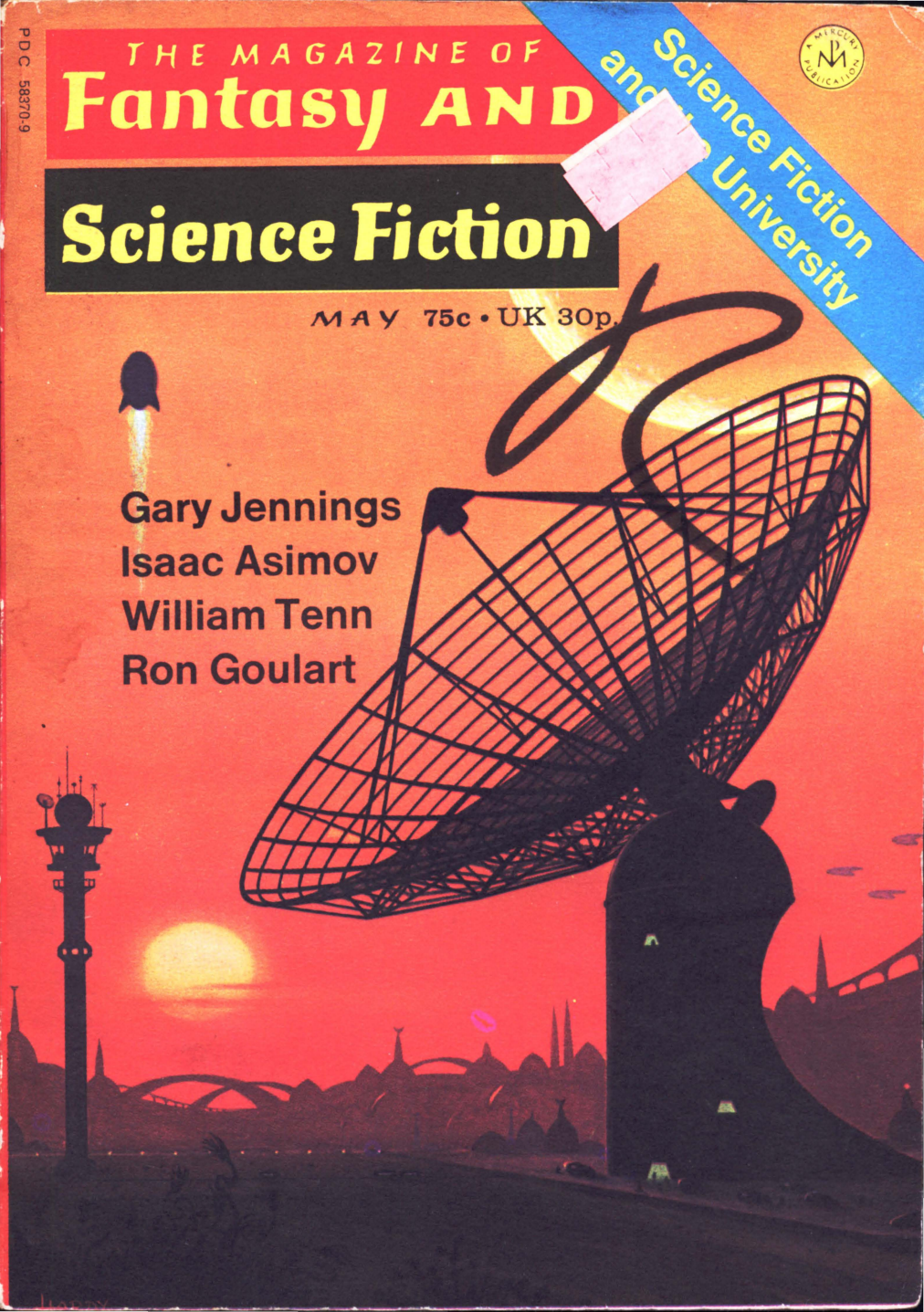

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Gary Jennings' author's card is in front of us; it lists eight stories published here during the past ten years. Not a large lot, but it occurs to us that it would be difficult to find another card with such a wildly diverse, high-quality listing, ranging from the horror-filled "Myrrha," (September 1962) to the delightfully absurd "Tom Cat," (July 1970).
We guaranteed last month that this new Jennings entry would be the funniest story you're read in a long time, and we're not backing off one bit.

Sooner Or Later Or Never Never

by GARY JENNINGS

"The Anula tribe of Northern Australia associate the dollar-bird with rain, and call it the rain-bird. A man who has the bird for his totem can make rain at a certain pool. He catches a snake, puts it alive into the pool, and after holding it under water for a time takes it out, kills it, and lays it down by the side of the creek. Then he makes an arched bundle of grass stalks in imitation of a rainbow, and sets it up over the snake. After that all he does is to sing over the snake and the mimic rainbow; *sooner or later the rain will fall.*"

—Sir James Frazer
The Golden Bough

The Rt. Rev. Orville Dismey
Dean of Missionary Vocations
Southern Primitive Protestant College
Grobian, Virginia

Most Reverend Sir:

It has been quite a long time since we parted, but the attached Frazer quotation should help you to remember me—Crispin Mobey, your erstwhile student at dear old SoPrim. Since it occurred to me that you may have heard only a sketchy account of my activities in Australia, this letter will constitute my full report.

For instance, I should like to refute anything you may have heard from the Primitive Protestant Pacific Synod about my mission to the Anula tribe having been less than an unqualified success. If I helped a little to wean the Anulas away

from heathen sorceries—and I did—I feel I have brought them that much closer to the True Word, and my mission was worth its cost.

It was also, for me, the realization of a lifelong dream. Even as a boy in Dreer, Virginia, I saw myself as a future missionary to the backward and unenlightened corners of the world, and comported myself in keeping with that vision. Among the rougher hewn young men of Dreer I often heard myself referred to, in a sort of awe, as "that Christly young Mobey." In all humility, I deplored being set on such a pedestal.

But it wasn't until I entered the hallowed halls of Southern Primitive College that my previously vague aspirations found their focus. It was during my senior year at dear old SoPrim that I came upon Sir James Frazer's twelve-volume anthropological compendium, *The Golden Bough*, with its account of the poor deluded Anula tribe. I investigated, and discovered to my joy that there still was such a tribe in Australia, that it was just as pitiably devoid of Salvation as it had been when Frazer wrote about it, and that no Primitive Protestant mission had ever been sent to minister to these poor unsaved souls. Unquestionably (I said to myself) the time, the need, and the man had here conjoined. And I began agitating for a Board of Missions assignment to the overlooked Anulas.

This did not come easily. The Regents complained that I was dismally near failing even such basic ecclesiastic subjects as Offertory Management, Histrionics and Nasal Singing. But you came to my rescue, Dean Dismey. I remember how you argued, "Admittedly, Mobey's academic grades tend toward Z. But let us in mercy write a Z for zeal, rather than zero, and grant his application. It would be criminal, gentlemen, if we did *not* send Crispin Mobey to the Outback of Australia."

(And I believe this report on my mission will demonstrate that your faith in me, Dean Dismey, was not misplaced. I will say, modestly, that during my travels Down Under, I was often referred to as "the very picture of a missionary.")

I would have been perfectly willing to work my passage to Australia, to claw my way unaided into the Outback, and to live as primitively as my flock while I taught them The Word. Instead, I was surprised to discover that I had at my disposal a generous allocation from the Overseas Mission Fund; overgenerous, in fact, as all I intended to take with me was some beads.

"Beads!" exclaimed the Mission Board bursar, when I presented my requisition. "You want the entire allocation in *glass beads?*"

I tried to explain to him what I had learned from my research. The Australian aborigines, I had been given to understand, are the most primitive of all the peoples living on earth. An actual remnant of the Stone Age, these poor creatures never even got far enough up the scale of evolution to develop the bow and arrow.

"My dear boy," the bursar said gently. "Beads went out with Stanley and Livingstone. You'll want an electric golf cart for the chief. Lampshades for his wives—they wear them for hats, you know."

"The Anulas never heard of golf, and they don't wear hats. They don't wear anything."

"All the best missionaries," the bursar said rather stiffly, "swear by lampshades."

"The Anulas are practically cavemen," I insisted. "They don't even have spoons. They have no written language. I've got to educate them from ape on up. I'm just taking the beads to catch their fancy, to show I'm a friend."

"Snuff is always appreciated," he tried as a last resort.

"Beads," I said firmly.

As you have no doubt deduced from the invoices, my allocation bought a tremendous lot of colored glass beads. I really should have waited to buy them in Australia and avoided the excessive transportation bill; they filled one entire cargo hold of the ship which took me from Norfolk that June day.

Arriving at Sydney, I transferred the beads to a warehouse on the Woolloomooloo docks, and went to report immediately to PrimPro BisPac Shagnasty (as Bishop Shagnasty likes to style himself; he was a Navy chaplain during the war). I found that august gentleman, after some search and inquiry, at the local clubhouse of the English-Speaking Union. "A fortress, a refuge," he called it, "among the Aussies. Will you join me in one of these delicious Stingarees?"

I declined the drink and launched into the story behind my visit.

"Going to the Anulas, eh? In the Northern Territory?" He nodded judiciously. "Excellent choice. Virgin territory. You'll find good fishing."

A splendid metaphor. "That's what I came for, sir," I said enthusiastically.

"Yes," he mused. "I lost a Royal Coachman up there on the River Roper, three years back."

"Mercy me!" I exclaimed,

aghast. "I had no idea the poor heathens were hostile! And one of the Queen's own chauf—!"

"No, no, no! A trout fly!" He stared at me. "I begin to understand," he said after a moment, "why they sent you to the Outback. I trust you're leaving for the North immediately."

"I want to learn the native language before I get started," I said. "The Berlitz people in Richmond told me I could study Anula at their branch school here in Sydney."

Next day, when I located the Berlitz office, I discovered to my chagrin that I would have to learn German first. Their only teacher of the Anula language was a melancholy defrocked priest of some German Catholic order—a former missionary himself—and he spoke no English.

It took me a restless and anxious three months of tutorage in the German tongue (while storage charges piled up on my beads) before I could start learning Anula from the ex-priest, Herr Krapp. As you can imagine, Dean Dismey, I was on guard against any subtle Papist propaganda he might try to sneak into my instruction. But the only thing I found odd was that Herr Krapp's stock of Anula seemed to consist mainly of phases of endearment. And he frequently muttered almost heartbrokenly, in his own language, "*Ach, das liebenswerte schwarze Madchen!*" and licked his chops.

By the end of September Herr Krapp had taught me all he knew, and there was no reason for me to delay any longer my start for the Outback. I hired two drivers and two trucks to carry my beads and myself. Besides my missionary's KampKit (a scaled-down revival tent), my luggage consisted only of my New Testament, my spectacles, my German-English dictionary, a one-volume edition of *The Golden Bough*, and my textbook of the native language, *Die Gliederung der australischen Sprachen*, by W. Schmidt.

Then I went to bid farewell to Bishop Shagnasty. I found him again, or still, at the English-Speaking Union refreshment stand.

"Back from the bush, eh?" he greeted me. "Have a Stingaree. How are all the little blackfellows?"

I tried to explain that I hadn't gone yet, but he interrupted me to introduce me to a military-looking gentleman nearby.

"Major Mashworm is a Deputy Protector of the Aborigines. He'll be interested to hear how you found his little black wards, as he never seems to get any farther Outback than right here."

I shook hands with Major Mashworn and explained that I hadn't yet seen his little black wards, but expected to shortly.

"Ah, another Yank," he said as soon as I opened my mouth.

"Sir!" I said, bridling. "I am a *Sou*therner!"

"Quite so, quite so," he said, as if it made no difference. "And are you circumcised?"

"Sir!" I gasped. "I am a *Chris*tian!"

"Too right. Well, if you expect to get anywhere with a myall abo tribe, you'll have to be circumcised or they don't accept you as a full-grown bloke. The abo witch doctor will do it for you, if necessary, but I fancy you'd rather have it done in hospital. The native ceremony also involves knocking out one or two of your teeth, and then you have to squat out in the bush, twirling a bullroarer, until you're jake again."

Had I heard about this when I first heard of the Anulas, my zeal might have been less. But having come this far, I saw nothing for it but to submit to the operation. Still, someone might have told me earlier; I could have been healing while I was studying languages. As it was, I couldn't delay my start North. So I had the operation done that very night at Sydney Mercy—by an incredulous doctor and two sniggering nurses—and got my little caravan on the road immediately afterward.

The trip was sheer agony, not to say a marathon embarrassment. Convalescence involved wearing a cumbersome contraption that was a cross between a splint and a truss, and which was well-nigh impossible to conceal even beneath a mackintosh several sizes too large for me. I won't dwell on the numerous humiliations that beset me at rest stops along the way. But you can get some idea, reverend sir, if you imagine yourself in my tender condition, driving in a badly sprung war-relic truck, along a practically nonexistent road, all the way from Richmond to the Grand Canyon.

Everything in the vast interior of Australia is known roughly as the Outback. But the Northern Territory, where I was going, is even out back of the Outback, and is known to the Aussies as the Never Never. The territory is the size of Alaska, but has exactly as many people in it as my hometown of Dreer, Virginia. The Anula tribal grounds are situated in the far north of this Never Never, on the Barkly Tableland between the bush country and the tropical swamps of the Gulf of Carpentaria—a horrible 2,500 miles from my starting point at Sydney.

The *city* of Cloncurry (pop.

1,955) was our last real glimpse of humankind. By way of illustrating what I mean, the next town we touched, Dobbyn, had a population of about 0. And the last town with a name in all that Never Never wilderness, Brunette Downs, had a population of minus something.

That was where my drivers left me, as agreed from the start. It was the last possible place they might contrive to hitchhike a ride back toward civilization. They showed me the direction I should take from there, and I proceeded on my pilgrim's progress into the unknown, driving one of the trucks myself and parking the other in Brunette Downs for the time being.

My drivers said I would eventually come upon an Experimental Agricultural Station, where the resident agents would have the latest word on where to find the nomadic Anulas. But I arrived there late one afternoon to find the station deserted, except for a few languid kangaroos and one shriveled, whiskery little desert rat who came running and whooping a strange cry of welcome.

"Cooee! What cheer? What cheer? Gawdstrewth, it's bonzer to see a bloody newchum buggering barstid out here, dinkum it is!"

(Lest this outburst has horrified you, Dean Dismey, allow me to explain. At first, I blushed at the apparent blasphemies and obscenities commonly employed by the Australians, from Major Mashworm on down. Then I realized that they use such locutions as casually and innocently as punctuation. And, their "Strine" dialect being what it is, I never knew *when* to blush at their real deliberate cusswords, because I couldn't tell which they were. Therefore, rather than try here to censor or euphemize every sentence uttered, I shall report conversations verbatim and without comment.)

"Set your arse a spell, cobber! The billy's on the boil. We'll split a pannikin and have a real shivoo, what say?"

"How do you do?" I managed to get in.

"What-o, a Yank!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"Sir," I said with dignity, "I am a Virginian."

"Strewth? Well, if you're looking to lose it, you've come to one helluva place for gash. There ain't a blooming sheila inside three hundred mile, unless you're aiming to go combo with the Black Velvet."

This made no sense whatever, so to change the subject I introduced myself.

"Garn! A narky Bush

Brother? Should of known, when you announced you was cherry. Now I'll have to bag me bloody langwidge."

If he "bagged" his language, it was to no noticeable degree. He repeated one obscene-sounding proposal several times before I interpreted it as an invitation to have a cup of tea ("go snacks on Betty Lee") with him. While we drank the tea, brewed over a twig fire, he told me about himself. At least I suppose that's what he told me, though all I got out of it was that his name was McCubby.

"Been doing a walkabout in the woop-woop, fossicking for wolfram. But my cuddy went bush with the brumbies and I found meself in a prebloody-dicament. So I humped my bluey in here to the Speriment Station, hoping I'd strike a stock muster, a squatter, anybody, even a dingo-barstid jonnop. But no go, and I was bloody well down on my bone when you showed your dial."

"What do you do out here?" I asked.

"I toldjer, I was fossicking for wolfram."

"Well, you've got so many unfamiliar animals here in Australia," I said apologetically. "I never heard of a wolf ram.'

He peered at me suspiciously and said, "Wolfram is tungsten ore. Fossicking is prospecting."

"Speaking of Australian fauna," I said, "can you tell me what a dollar-bird is?"

(The dollar-bird, you will recall, sir, is the totem agent mentioned in Frazer's account of the rain-making ceremony. I had come this far without being able to find out just what a dollar-bird *was.)*

"It ain't no fawn, Rev," said McCubby. "And you can be glad it ain't. That was a dollar-bird which just took a dump on your titfer."

"What?"

"I keep forgetting you're a newchum," he sighed. "Your titfer is your hat. A dollar-bird just flew over and let fly."

I took off my hat and wiped at it with a tuft of dry grass.

"The dollar-bird," McCubby said pedantically, "is so called because of a silvery-colored circular patch on its spread wings."

"Thank you," I said, and started to explain how the bird had inspired my mission to the aborigines—

"To the abos! Strike me blind!" blurted McCubby. "And here I thought you was out to preach at the buggering snoozers up at Darwin. I presoom the whole rest of the world is already gone Christian, then, if Gawd's scraping the barrel for blackfellow converts."

"Why, no," I said. "But the

abos have as much right as anybody else to learn the True Word. To learn that their heathen gods are delusive devils tempting them to hell fire."

"They're looking forward to hell fire, Rev," said McCubby, "as an improvement on the Never Never. Ain't they got enough grief without you have to inflict religion on 'em?"

"Religion is a sap," I said, quoting William Penn, "to penetrate the farthest boughs of the living tree."

"Looks to me like you're bringing the Bingis a whole bloody cathedral," said McCubby. "What kind of swag you got in the lorry, anyway?"

"Beads," I said. "Nothing but beads."

"Beans, eh?" he said, cocking an eye at the huge truck. "You must be more than meejum fond of flute fruit."

Before I could correct his misapprehension, he stepped to the rear of the vehicle and unlatched both gate doors. The entire van was loaded to the ceiling with beads, dumped in loose for convenience. Of course he was instantly engulfed in a seething avalanche, while several more tons of the beads inundated about an acre of the local flatlands, and rivulets and droplets of them went twinkling off to form a diminishing nimbus around the main mass. After a while, the mound behind the truck heaved and blasphemed and McCubby's whiskery head emerged.

"Look what you've done," I said, justifiably exasperated.

"Oh my word," he said softly. "First time beans ever dumped *me*."

He picked up one of the things, tried his teeth on it and said, "These would constipate a cassowary, Rev." He took a closer look at it and staggered through the pile toward me, dribbling beads from every fold of his clothes. "Somebody has give you the sweet but-all, son," he confided. "These ain't beans. They're glass."

I'm afraid I snapped at him. "I know it! They're for the natives!"

He looked at me, expressionless. He turned, still expressionless, and looked slowly around the glittering expanse that spread seemingly to the horizon in all directions.

"What religion did you say you're magging?" he asked cautiously.

I ignored him. "Well," I sighed. "No sense trying to pick them all up before nightfall. Mind if I camp here till morning?"

I was awakened several times during the night by a hideous crunching noise from the perimeter of our glass desert, but, since McCubby didn't stir, I tried not to let it perturb me.

We arose at sunup, our whole part of the world gleaming "like the buggering Land of Hoz," as McCubby put it. After breakfast I began the Herculean task of regathering my stock, with a rusty shovel I found in a tumbledown station outbuilding. McCubby left me for a while, to go slithering across the beads to their outer reaches. He came back beaming happily, with an armload of bloody scraps of fur.

"Dingo scalps," he chortled. "Worth a quid apiece in bounties. Rev, you may have spragged the curse of this whole blunny continent. Out there's just heaped with the corpses of dingos, rabbits and dunnikan rats what tried to make a meal off your bijous. Oh my word!"

He was so pleased at the sudden windfall that he hunted up another shovel and pitched in to help me scoop beads. It was night again by the time we had the truck loaded, and, at that, half its content was topsoil. The territory around the Experimental Station still looked like Disneyland.

"Oh, well," I said philosophically. "Good thing I've got another truckful waiting at Brunette Downs."

McCubby started, stared at me, and went off muttering in his beard.

The next morning I finally set forth on the last lap of my mission of mercy. McCubby told me he had encountered the Anula tribe on his trek in to the station. They were camped in a certain swale of acacia trees, he said, scratching for witchetty grubs and irriakura bulbs, the only available food in this dry season.

And it was there I found them, just at sundown. The whole tribe couldn't have numbered more than seventy-five souls, each of them uglier than the next. Had I not known of their crying need of me, I might have backtracked. The men were great broad-shouldered fellows, coppery-black, with even blacker beards and hair bushed around their low foreheads, sullen eyes and bone-pierced flat noses. The women had more hair and no beards, and limp, empty breasts that hung down their fronts like a couple of pinned-on medals. The men wore only a horsehair rope around their middles, in which they stuck their boomerangs, music sticks, feather charms, and the like. The women wore *nagas*, fig newton-sized aprons of paperbark. The children wore drool.

They looked up dully as I brought the truck to a halt. There was no evidence either of welcome or hostility. I climbed onto the truck hood, waved my arms and called out in their language, "My children, come

unto me! I bring tidings of great joy!"

A few of the tots crept closer and picked their noses at me. The women went back to rooting around the acacias with their yamsticks. The men simply continued to do nothing. They're all bashful, I thought; nobody wants to be first.

So I strode boldly into their midst and took a wizened, white-bearded oldster by the arm. I leaned into the truck cab, opened the little hatch that gave access to the van, and plunged the old gaffer's resisting hand inside. It came out grasping a fistful of dirt and one green bead, at which he blinked in perplexity.

As I had hoped, curiosity brought the rest of the tribe around. "Plenty for everybody, my children!" I shouted in their language. Pulling and hauling, I forced them one by one up to the cab. They each obediently reached through the hatch, took one bead apiece and drifted back to their occupations as if thankful the ceremony was over.

"What's the matter?" I asked one shy young girl, the last of the procession and the only one who had taken *two* beads. "Doesn't anybody like the pretty-pretties?" She flinched guiltily, put back one of the beads and scurried away.

I was flabbergasted at the lack of enthusiasm. As of now, the Anulas had one tiny bead apiece, and I had about six hundred billion.

Beginning to suspect what was amiss, I went and stood among them and listened to their furtive, secretive talk. *I couldn't understand a word!* Horrors, I thought. Unless we could communicate, I had no hope of making them accept the beads. . .or me. . .or The Gospel. Could I have stumbled on the wrong tribe? Or were they deliberately misunderstanding me and talking in gibberish?

There was one way to find out, and that without more ado. I turned the truck around and drove pell-mell back for the station, hoping mightily that McCubby hadn't left yet.

He hadn't. The wild dogs were still committing suicide en masse by dining on my beads, and McCubby wasn't about to leave until the bounty business petered out. I reached the station at sunrise again, when he was out collecting the night's scalps. I leapt from the truck and blurted out my problem.

"I don't understand them and they don't understand me. You claim you know most of the abo tongues. What am I doing wrong?" I reeled off a sentence and asked anxiously, "Did you understand that?"

"Too right," he said. "You offered me thirty pfennig to get my black arse in bed with you. Cheap barstid," he added.

A little rattled, I pleaded, "Never mind what the words *said*. Is my pronunciation bad or something?"

"Oh, no. You're mooshing perfect Pitjantjatjara."

"What?"

"A considerably different langwidge from Anula. Anula has nine noun classes. Singular, dual, trial and plural are expressed by perfixes in its pronouns. Transitive werbs incorporate the object pronouns. The werbs show many tenses and moods and also a separate negative conjugation."

"What?"

"On the other hand, in Pitjantjatjara, the suffixes indicating the personal pronouns may be appended to the first inflected word in the sentence, not merely to the werb root."

"What?"

"I don't like to bulsh on your linguistic accomplishments, cobber. But Pitjantjatjara, although it *has* four declensions and four conjugations, is alleged to be the simplest of all the bloody Australoid langwidges."

I was speechless.

"How much," McCubby asked at last, "is thirty pfennig in shillings and pence?"

"Maybe," I murmured thoughtfully, "I'd better go and minister to the Pitjantjatjara tribe instead, as long as I know their language."

McCubby shrugged. "They live way the hell the other side of the Great Sandy. And they're no myall rootdiggers like these Anulas. They're all upjumped stockriders and donahs now, on the merino stations around Shark Bay. Also, them boongs would prob'ly wind up converting *you*, and that's the dinkum oil. They're staunch Catholics."

Well, that figured. And I was beginning to suspect why Herr Krapp had been defrocked.

My next move was obvious: to hire McCubby as my interpreter to the Anulas. At first he balked. My expense fund was so depleted by now that I couldn't offer enough to tempt him away from his booming business here in dingo scalps. But finally I thought to offer him all the beads in the second truck—"Enough to kill every dingo in the Outback." So he rolled up his swag and took the wheel (I was dead tired of driving), and we headed again for the Anula country.

On the way, I told McCubby how I intended to introduce the blackfellows to modern Primitive Protestantism. I read aloud to him Sir James Frazer's paragraph on rainmaking, which concludes, " 'After that all he

does is to sing over the snake and the mimic rainbow. . .' "

"*All* he does!" McCubby snorted.

" 'Sooner or later the rain will fall.' " I closed the book. "And that's where I step in. If the rain doesn't fall, the natives can plainly see that their sorcery doesn't work, and I can turn their clearer eyes toward Christianity. If the rain *should* fall, I simply explain that they were actually praying to the true, Protestant God without realizing it, and the rain-bird had nothing to do with it."

"And how do you cozen 'em into doing this rain-bird corroboree?"

"Heavens, they're probably doing it all the time. The good Lord knows they need rain. This whole country is burned crisp as paper."

"If it do come on to rain," McCubby muttered darkly, "my word, *I'll* fall down on me knees." What that signified, I (unfortunately) didn't surmise at the time.

The reception at the Anula camp was rather different this time. The abos swarmed to greet McCubby; three of the younger females in particular appeared to rejoice at his arrival.

"Ah, me cheeky little blackgins," he said affectionately. Then, after a colloquy with the tribe's elders, he said to me, "They want to offer you a lubra, too, Rev."

A lubra is a female, and I had expected this hospitality, knowing it to be a custom of the Anulas. I asked McCubby to explain my religious reasons for declining and went to work to set up my tent on a knoll overlooking the native camp. As I crawled into it, McCubby asked, "Going to plow the deep so early?"

"I just want to take off my clothes," I said. "When in Rome, you know. See if you can borrow one of those waist strings for me."

"A nood missionary?" he said, scandalized.

"Our church teaches that the body is nothing," I said, "but a machine to carry the soul around. Besides, I feel a true missionary should not set himself above his flock in matters of dress and social deportment."

"A true missionary," McCubby said drily, "ain't got the crocodile hide of these Bingis." But he brought me the horsehair rope. I tied it around my waist and stuck into it my New Testament, my pocket comb, and my spectacles case.

When I was ready, I felt very vulnerable and vaguely vulgar. For one as modest and introverted as I, it was painful to think of stepping out there—especially in view of the

females—in my stark white nakedness. But after all, I consoled myself, I wasn't quite as stark as my flock. On the Sydney doctor's orders, I would have to wear my bandage contrivance for another week.

I scrambled out of the tent and stood up, dancing delicately as the ground stubble jabbed my bare feet. My, all those white eyeballs in all those black faces! McCubby was staring just as intently and unbelievingly as everyone else. He worked his mouth for a while before he spoke.

"Crikey! No wonder you're virginian, poor cove."

The abos began to crowd around the point and babble and measure the apparatus as if they contemplated getting copies to wear. Finally, a trifle annoyed, I asked my still-goggling interpreter why they were making so much fuss.

"They think you're either bragging or humbugging. Dinkum, so do I."

So I told him about my operation, that I had endured it because it was an Anula custom. McCubby repeated this to the mob. The blackfellows nodded knowingly at each other, jabbered even more furiously, and came one by one to pat me on the head.

"Ah, they approve, do they?" I said with great satisfaction.

"They think you're crazy as a kookaburra," McCubby said flatly. "It's supposed to bring good luck to fondle a zany."

"What?"

"If you'll take a pike at the men of your flock," he suggested, "you'll note that the custom of circumbloodycision must of went out of style some time back."

I looked, and it was so. I found myself mentally composing some un-Christian remarks to make to Major Mashworm. So, to elevate my thoughts, I proposed that we try again to distribute my gift of beads. I don't know what McCubby told the blackfellows, but the whole tribe trooped off eagerly to the truck and came back with a double handful of beads apiece. Several of them made two or more trips. I was pleased.

The brief tropical dusk was on us now; the Anulas' cooking fires began to twinkle among the acacias. I wouldn't be able to accomplish anything more today; so McCubby and I set our own billy on a fire. We had just settled down to our tucker when one of the abos came up smiling and handed me a slab of bark heaped with some kind of native food. Whatever it was, it quivered disgustingly, and, looking at it, so did I.

"Emu fat," said McCubby. "Their favorite delicacy. It's in return for them beads."

I was ever so delighted, but the dish was nauseatingly difficult to get down. It was like eating a bowlful of lips.

"I'd wolf the stuff if I was you," McCubby advised, after a visit to the natives' fires. "They're likely to come and take it back, when they give up on the beads."

"What?"

"They've been boiling 'em for two hours, now, and it seems they still taste gritty."

"They're *eating* the *beads?*"

He saw my consternation and said, almost kindly, "Rev, all these boongs live for is to eat for to live for to eat. They don't have houses and they don't wear pockets, so they got no use for propitty. They know they're ugly as the backside of a wombat, so they got no use for pretties. In this crook country, finding food is cruel hard. If anything new comes along, they try it for food, in hopes."

I was too weary even to worry; I crept into my tent desiring only to "plow the deep," in McCubby's phrase. As it turned out, though, I got precious little sleep. I had to keep evicting a procession of young black girls who, I presume, had a childish desire to sleep under canvas for a change.

I arose quite late in the morning, to find all the Anulas still huddled, groaning, in their *wagga* rugs. "You won't see any rain-debbil corroboree today," McCubby told me. "Them rumbustious beads has got 'em all just about keck-livered."

Now I *was* worried. Suppose they all died like the dingos!

"I wouldn't do this for any ruggerlugs but you, Rev," said McCubby, digging into his swag. "But I'll squander some of my lollies on 'em."

"What?"

"Chawnklit. It's what *I* use for trading and bribing the Bingis. They like it a buggering sight better than beads."

"But that's Ex-Lax!" I exclaimed when he brought it out.

"That's what they like about it. A pleasure at both ends."

The events of the rest of that day are indescribable. But the setting sun picked bright glints from little heaps of beads here and there throughout the rolling land in the locality. And I was having troubles of my own; I had begun to itch intolerably, all over. McCubby wasn't surprised.

"Meat ants," he theorized, "or sugar ants, white ants, buffalo flies, marsh flies, blow flies. We also got anopheles mosquitoes. I tell you, Rev, missionaries ain't got the hide for cavorting bare arse." Not too regretfully, I abandoned my idea of living as primitively as my horny-skinned flock and

went back to wearing clothes.

That day was not an entire waste, however. I reminded McCubby that we required a pool of water for the upcoming ritual, and he led me to the Anulas' tribal oasis.

"T'ain't much of a billabong in the Dry," he admitted. The waterhole was respectably wide and deep, but it contained only a scummy, fetid expanse of mud, through which meandered a sullen greenish trickle of water, the thickness of a lead pencil. "But come the Wet and it'd faze Noah. Anyhow, I figure it must be the one in your Golden Bow-Wow. It's the only water inside a hundred mile."

I wondered how, if Frazer's hero had been desperate enough to try conjuring up a rain, he had been provided with a pool to do it at But I muttered, "Well, dam it, that's all."

"Rev, I'm surprised at your intemperate bloody langwidge!"

I explained. We would throw up a temporary dam across the lower end of the billabong. By the time the Anulas recovered from their gastrointestinal malfunctions, the water should have attained a level sufficient to our purpose. So that's what we did, McCubby and I: hauled and stacked up stones, and chinked their interstices with mud, which the fierce sun baked to an adobe-like cement. We knocked off at nightfall, and the water was already as high as our ankles.

I awoke the next morning to a tumult of whoops, shrills and clangor from the direction of the Anulas' camp. Ah, thought I, stretching complacently; they've discovered their new and improved waterworks and are celebrating. Then McCubby thrust his bristly head through my tent flap and announced excitedly, "War's bin declared!"

"Not with America?" I gasped—his report had sounded rather accusatory—but he had as suddenly withdrawn. I dragged on my boots and joined him on the knoll, and realized he had meant a tribal war.

There were about twice as many blacks down there as I had remembered, and every one of them was ululating loud enough for two more. They milled about, whacking at one another with spears and yamsticks, flinging stones and boomerangs, and jabbing brands from the cooking fires into each other's frizzy hair.

"It's their neighbor tribe, the Bingbingas," said McCubby. "They live downstream on the creek, and this sunup they found their water turned off. They're blaming the Anulas for deliberate mass murder, so as to take over their yam grounds. If this ain't a fair cow!"

"We must do something!"

McCubby rummaged in his swag and brought out a toy-like pistol. "This is only a pipsqueak .22," he said. "But they ought to nick off home when they see white man's weapons."

We pelted together down the slope and into the fray, McCubby ferociously pop-popping his little revolver in the air, and I brandishing my New Testament to proclaim that Right was on our side. Sure enough, the invading Bingbingas fell back from this new onslaught. They separated out of the confusion and withdrew carrying their wounded. We chased them to the top of a nearby hill, from which vantage they shook their fists and shouted taunts and insults for a while before retiring, defeated, in the direction of their home grounds.

McCubby circulated through the Anula camp, dusting athlete's-foot powder—the only medicament he carried—on the more seriously wounded. There were few casualties, actually, and most of these had suffered only bloody noses, lumped skulls or superficial depilations where hair or whiskers had been yanked out. I played battlefield chaplain as best I could in dumb show, pantomiming spiritual comfort at them. One good thing. All the Anulas appeared to have recovered utterly from their bead-diet prostration. This early-morning exercise had helped.

When things had calmed down, and after some breakfast tucker and tea, I dispatched McCubby to search through the tribe for an unoccupied male of the clan which claimed the dollar-bird for its *kobong*, or totem. He did find a young man of that persuasion and, overcoming his stubborn unwillingness, brought him to me.

"This is Yartatgurk," said McCubby.

Yartatgurk walked with a limp, courtesy of a stiff Bingbinga kick in the shin, and was bushily bearded only on the left side of his face, courtesy of a Bingbinga firebrand. The rest of the tribe came and squatted down expectantly around the three of us, as if eager to see what new and individual treat I had in store for their young man.

"Now we must recapitulate the procedure," I said, and began to read *The Golden Bough's* description of the ceremony, McCubby translating phrase by phrase. At the conclusion, young Yartatgurk stood up abruptly and, despite his limp, commenced a vigorous heel-and-toe toward the far horizon. All the other Anulas began muttering among themselves and tapping their foreheads with a forefinger.

When McCubby fetched the struggling Yartatgurk back, I said, "Surely they all must be familiar with the ceremony."

"They say, if you're so buggering thirsty as to go through all that taradiddle, it'd've been just as easy to lug an artesian drill in here as all them beads. Too right!"

"That's not the point," I said. "According to Frazer, the belief is that long ago the dollar-bird had a snake for a mate. The snake lived in a pool and used to make rain by spitting up into the sky until a rainbow and clouds appeared and rain fell."

This, translated, sent the Anulas into a regular frenzy of chattering and head-tapping.

"They say," McCubby interpreted, "you show them a bird mating with a snake and they'll get you all the water you want, if they have to hump the bloody Carpentaria Gulf down here by hand."

This was depressing. "I'm quite sure a reputable anthropologist like Frazer wouldn't *lie* about their tribal beliefs."

"If he's any kin to the Frazer I used to cobber with—old Blazer Frazer—he'd lie about which is his left and right hand."

"Well," I said unquenchably, "I've come twelve thousand miles to repudiate this custom, and I won't be put off. Now tell Yartatgurk to stop that screeching, and let's get on with it."

McCubby managed, by giving Yartatgurk a large slab of Ex-Lax, to convince him that the ceremony—idiotic as he might ignorantly think it—wasn't going to hurt him. The three of us went first to check on the billabong, and found it gratifyingly abrim with repulsive brown water, wide and deep enough to have submerged our truck. From there, we headed into the endless savanna.

"First," I said, "we need a snake. A live one."

McCubby scratched in his whiskers. "That might be a wowser, Rev. The boongs have et most of the snakes within hunting range. And they sprag 'em from a cautious distance, with boomerang or spear. The wipers out here in the Never Never, you don't want to meet 'em alive."

"Why?"

"Well, we got the tiger snake and the death adder, which their wenom has been measured twenty times as wicked as the bloody cobra's. Then there's the taipan, and I've seen meself a horse die five minutes after it nipped him. Then there's—"

He broke off to make a grab for Yartatgurk, who was trying to sneak away. McCubby pointed into the bush and sent the blackfellow horizonward

with explicit instructions. Yartatgurk limped off, looking about him nervously and sucking moodily on his chunk of chocolate. McCubby didn't look any too happy himself, as we followed after the native at a distance. "I wish it was your buggering Frazer we was sending on this chase," he muttered spitefully.

"Oh, come," I said encouragingly. "There must be *some* nonpoisonous variety that will serve our purpose."

"Won't help our purpose none if we tread on one of the others first," growled McCubby. "If this ain't the most nincompoop—"

There was a sudden commotion out ahead of us, where we had last seen Yartatgurk creeping, hunched over, through the tussocky grass.

"He's got one!" I shouted, as the blackfellow rose up into view with a strangled cry. He was silhouetted against the sky, toiling desperately with something huge and lashing, a fearsome sight to behold.

"Dash me rags!" breathed McCubby, in awed surprise. "I ain't never seen a Queensland python this far west before."

"A python!"

"Too bloody right," said McCubby, in unfeigned admiration. "Twenty feet if he's a hinch."

I gaped at the lunging, Laocoön-like tableau before us. Yartatgurk was almost invisible inside the writhing coils, but he was clearly audible. I wondered momentarily if we might not have bitten off more than we could chew, but I sternly laid that specter of uncertainty. Manifestly, the good Lord was following Frazer's script.

"Yartatgurk is inquiring," McCubby said quietly, "who we're rooting for."

"Do you suppose we'll spoil the magic if we lend a hand?"

"We'll spoil the blackfellow if we don't. Look there."

"Mercy on us, he's spouting blood!"

"T'ain't blood. If you'd just et a quarter of a pound of Hex-Lax and then got hugged by a python, you'd spout, too."

We fought our way into the squirming tangle and finally managed to peel the creature loose from Yartatgurk. It took the utmost strength of all three of us to straighten it out and prevent its coiling again. Yartatgurk had turned almost as white as I, but he bravely hung onto the python's tail—being lashed and tumbled about, sometimes high off the ground—while McCubby, at its head, and I, grasping its barrel-like middle, manhandled it toward the billabong.

By the time we made it to the pool bank, all three of us were being whipped through

the air, back and forth past each other, and occasionally colliding.

"Now," I managed to gasp out, between the snake's convulsions. "He's got to—hold it under—*oof!*—the water. . ."

"I don't think," said McCubby, on my left, "he's likely to agree," said McCubby, from behind me. "When I yell *go*," said McCubby, on my right, "dowse him and the snake both," said McCubby, from overhead. "*Cooee!*—GO!!!"

At the command, he and I simultaneously swung our portions of the python out over the water and let go. It and the wretched Yartatgurk, flapping helplessly along like the tail of a kite, disappeared with a mighty splash. Instantly the billabong was roiled into a hissing brown froth.

"Pythons," panted McCubby, when he could get his breath, "hates water worse'n cats do."

The entire Anula tribe, I now noticed, had come down to cluster on the opposite side of the billabong, and were attentively following the proceedings with eyes like boiled onions.

"Was you to ask me," said McCubby, when we had rested a while, "I'd be hard put to say who was holding who under."

"I guess it's been long enough," I decreed.

We waded waist-deep into the pool and, after being knocked about a bit, managed to grab hold of the slithery loops and haul the reptile back onto the bank. Yartatgurk, we were pleased to see, came along clenched in a coil of the python's tail.

Somewhere along about here, our handmade dam collapsed. Its mud chinking had been gradually eroded as the water backed up behind it during the night and morning. Now the agitation of the billabong toppled the weakened structure, and all the collected water drained out with a swoosh. This would probably gratify the thirsty Bingbingas downstream, I reflected, if it didn't drown them all in that first grand flood-wave.

The submersion had taken some of the fight out of the snake, but not a great deal. McCubby and I sustained numerous bruises and contusions during this stage of the struggle, while we fought to immobilize the forepart of the thing. Yartatgurk was not much help to us, as he had gone quite limp and, clutched by the freely thrashing tail of the serpent, was being batted like a bludgeon against the surrounding trees and terrain.

"It's time for him to kill it," I shouted to McCubby.

As the blackfellow whisked

to and fro past us, McCubby listened to his barely audible mumblings and finally reported, "He says nothing would give him greater pleasure."

Our fantastic battle went on for a while longer, until it became apparent that Yartatgurk wasn't up to killing the monster anytime soon, and I called to McCubby to inquire what to do next.

"I'll hang on best I can," he bellowed back, between curses and grunts. "You run for my swag. Get my pistol. Shoot the bugger."

I went, but with misgivings. I feared that we white men—perhaps unconsciously flaunting our superiority—were taking too much of a hand in this ceremony and, by our meddling, might botch whatever mystical significance it held for the natives.

I came back at a run, gripping the revolver in both hands. The python appeared to have recovered from its watery ordeal and was flailing more energetically than ever, occasionally keeping both men in the air simultaneously. In all that confusing uproar, and in my own excitement, nervousness and unfamiliarity with the weapon, I took quaking aim and shot Yartatgurk in the foot.

He did not make any outright complaint (though I think he might have, if he could have), but his eyes were eloquent. I could almost have wept at their glazed expression of disappointment in me. This was a chastening thing to see, but I suppose even the most divinely inspired spiritual leader encounters it at least once in his career. None of us is perfect.

Meanwhile McCubby had disengaged himself from the melee. He snatched the pistol from me and emptied it into the serpent's ugly head. For a long time, then, he and I leaned against each other and panted wearily, while the blackfellow and the python lay side by side and twitched.

Yartatgurk's injury, I am relieved to say, was not a serious one. Actually, he had suffered more from his stay underwater. McCubby pumped his flaccid arms up and down, disgorging quite an astonishing quantity of water, mud, weeds and polliwogs, while I bound up the hole in his foot with a strip torn from my own bandages.

A .22, it seems, fires a triflingly small pellet, and this one had passed cleanly through Yartatgurk's foot without so much as nicking a tendon. As the lead did not remain in the wound, and as it bled freely, there appeared to be little cause for agonizing—though this he did, at great and vociferous length, when he regained consciousness.

I decided to let the fellow enjoy a short rest and the commiserations of his clucking tribemates. Besides, I was by now so implicated in the ceremony that I figured a little more intervention could do no harm. So I went myself to perform the next step in the rite: to set up the "mimic rainbow" of grass over the defunct snake.

After fumbling unsuccessfully at this project for a considerable while, I came back and said despairingly to McCubby, "Every time I try to bend the grass into a bow it just crumbles into powder."

"Whajjer expect," he said with some acerbity, "after eight buggery months of drought?"

Here was another verity—like the dried-up billabong—which I couldn't reconcile with Frazer's account. If the grass was dry enough to warrant rainmaking, it was too dry to be bent.

Then I had an inspiration and went to look at the muck of our recent dam-site pool. As I'd hoped, there was a sparse growth of grass there, nicely waterlogged by its night's immersion. I plucked all I could find and tied it into a frazzled rainbow with my bootlaces. This horseshoe-shaped object I propped up around the dead python's neck, making him look as jaunty as a racehorse in the winner's circle.

Feeling very pleased with myself, I returned to McCubby. He, like the Anulas, was sympathetically regarding Yartatgurk, who I gathered was relating the whole history of his wounded foot from the day it was born.

"Now tell him," I said, "all he has to do is sing."

For the first time, McCubby seemed disinclined to relay my instructions. He gave me a long look. Then he clapsed his hands behind his back and took a contemplative turn up and down the billabong bank, muttering to himself. Finally he shrugged, gave a sort of bleak little laugh, and knelt down to interrupt the nattering Yartatgurk.

As McCubby outlined the next and final step, Yartatgurk's face gradually assumed the expression of a hamstrung horse being asked to perform its own *coup de grace.* After what seemed to me an unnecessarily long colloquy between the two, McCubby said:

"Yartatgurk begs to be excused, Rev. He says he's just had too much to think about, these past few days. First he had to meditate on the nature of them beads you fed him. Then he had to mull over the Bingbingas' burning of his beard, which cost him three years to cultivate and got glazed off in three winks. Then there

was being half squoze to a pulp, and then three-quarters drownded, and then nine-tenths bludged to death, and then having his hoof punctuated. He says his poor inferior black brain is just so full of meat for study that it's clean druv out the words of all the songs."

"He doesn't have to sing words," I said. "I gather that any sprightly tune will do, crooned heavenward in a properly beseeching manner."

There was a short silence.

"In all this empty woop-woop," said McCubby under his breath, "one-eighth of a human bean to a square mile, and *you* have to be the one-eighth I cobber up with."

"McCubby," I said patiently, "this is the most important part of the entire ritual."

"Ah, well. Here goes the last of me Hex-lax."

He handed the chocolate to the blackfellow and launched into a long and seductive argument. At last, with a red-eyed glare at me, and so suddenly that I and the Anulas all jumped, Yartatgurk barked viciously into a clamorous chant. The other natives looked slightly uneasy and began to drift back toward camp.

"My word, you're hearing something that not many white coves ever do," said McCubby. "The age-old Anula death song."

"Nonsense," I said. "He's not going to die."

"Not him. You."

I shook my head reprovingly and said, "I've no time for levity. I must get to work on the sermon I'll preach at the conclusion of all this."

As you can appreciate, Dean Dismey, I had set myself quite a task. I had to be ready with two versions, depending on whether the rainmaking was or was not successful. But the sermons had certain similarities—for example, in both of them I referred to Prayer as "a Checkbook on the Bank of God." And this, of course, posed the problem of explaining a checkbook in terms that an Outback aborigine could comprehend.

While I worked in the seclusion of my tent, I yet kept an ear cocked to Yartatgurk's conscientious keening. As night came down, he began to get hoarse, and several times seemed on the verge of flagging in his endeavor. Each time, I would lay aside my pencil and go down to wave encouragingly at him across the billabong. And each time, this indication of my continued interest did not fail to inspire him to a redoubled output of chanting.

The rest of the Anulas remained quietly in their camp this night, without any moans of indigestion, combat fatigue,

or other distress. I was grateful that no extraneous clamor disturbed my concentration on the sermons, and even remarked on it to McCubby:

"The natives seem restful tonight."

"T'ain't often the poor buggers come the bounce on a bellyful of good python meat."

I cried, "They've eaten the ceremonial snake?!"

"Don't matter," he said consolingly. "The whole skelington is still down there under your wicker wicket."

Oh, well, I thought. There was nothing I could do about it now. And, as McCubby implied, the skeleton ought to represent as potent a symbol as the entire carcass.

It was well after midnight, and I had just finished the notes for my next day's services, when a deputation of tribal elders came calling.

"They say you'd oblige 'em, Rev, either to hurry up and die as warranted, or else to placate Yartatgurk someway. They can't git to sleep with him caterwauling."

"Tell them," I said, with a magisterial wave of my hand, "it will all soon be over."

I knew not how truly I had spoken, until I was violently awakened some hours later by my tent folding up like an umbrella—*thwack!*—and disappearing into the darkness.

Then, just as violently, the darkness was riven and utterly abolished by the most brilliant, writhing, forking, jagging, snarling cascade of lightning I ever hope to see. It was instantly succeeded by an even blacker darkness, the acrid stench of ozone, and a roiling cannonade of thunder that simply picked up the whole Never Never land and shook it like a blanket.

When I could hear again, I discerned McCubby's voice, whimpering in stark horror out of the darkness, "Gawd strike me blind." It seemed more than likely. I was admonishing him to temper his impiety with prudence, when a second cosmic uproar, even more impressive than the first, raged through the echoing dome of heaven.

I had not yet recovered from its numbing fury when a wind like a driving piston took me in the back, balled me up, and sent me tumbling end over end across the countryside. I caromed painfully off numerous eucalyptuses and acacias and unidentifiable other obstacles until I collided with another human body. We grabbed onto each other, but kept on traveling until the wind died for a moment.

By great good fortune, it was McCubby I had encountered—though I must say he seemed unaware of any good fortune in

this. "What in buggery have you gone and done?" he demanded, in a quaver.

"What hath *God* wrought?" I corrected him. Oh, it would make an ineradicable impression on the Anulas, when I explained that this was not really the doing of their dollar-bird. "Now," I couldn't help exclaiming, "if it will only pour down rain!"

The words were no sooner spoken than McCubby and I were flattened again. The rain had come down like God's boot-heel. It continued mercilessly to stamp on my back, grinding me into the solid earth so that I could barely expand my chest to breathe. This, I thought in my agony, is really more than I meant to ask for.

After an incalculable while, I was able to inch my mouth over beside McCubby's ear and bellow loud enough for him to hear, "We've got to find my sermon notes before the rain ruins them!"

"Your bloody notes are in Fiji by now!" he shouted back. "And so will we be if we don't do a bleeding bunk in a bleeding hurry!"

I tried to remonstrate that we couldn't leave the Anulas now, when everything was proceeding so well, and when I had such a God-given opportunity to make a splendid conversion of the whole tribe.

"Can't you get it through your googly skull?" he bellowed. "This is the Cockeye Bob—come early and worse than I ever seen it! This whole land will be underwater, and us with it, *if* we don't get blew a thousand mile and tore to rags in the bush!"

"But my entire mission will have been in vain," I protested, between the peals of thunder. "And the poor Anulas deprived of—"

"Bugger the bloody black barstids!" he howled. "They waved mummuk hours ago. We got to get to the lorry—if it ain't flew away. Make the high ground by the Speriment Station."

Clinging fast together, we were just able to blunder our way through what seemed a solid wall of water. The lightning and thunder were simultaneous now, blinding and deafening us at the same time. Torn-off branches, uprooted bushes and trees of increasingly larger size careened like dark meteors across the Never Never land. Once we ducked the weirdest missile of all—the eerily airborne skeleton of Yartatgurk's python, still sporting its natty grass collar.

I thought it odd that we encountered none of the blackfellows. But we did find the truck at last, jostling anxiously on its springs and

squeaking in every rivet as if for help. Wind-blasted water streamed *up* its weather side and smoked off its top like the spindrift from a hurricane sea. I really think that only the dead weight of the remaining beads, which still filled three-quarters of the van, prevented the truck's being overturned.

McCubby and I fought our way to the lee door and opened it, to have it nearly blown off the hinges as the wind clawed at it. The inside of the cab was no quieter than outdoors, what with the thunder still head-splittingly audible and the rain practically denting the metal, but the stiller air inside was easier to breathe.

When he stopped panting, McCubby wrung another minor cloudburst out of his whiskers and then started the engine. I laid a restraining hand on his arm. "We can't abandon the Anulas to this," I said. "Could we dump the beads and crowd in the women and pickaninnies?"

"I toldjer, they all took a ball of chalk hours ago!"

"Does that mean they've gone?"

"Soon as you sacked out. They were well clear of the low ground by the time the Cockeye Bob came down."

"Hm," I said, a little hurt. "Rather ungrateful of them, to desert their spiritual adviser without notice."

"Oh, they're *grate*ful, Rev," McCubby hastened to assure me. "That's why they waved mummuk—you made 'em wealthy. My word, they're reg'lar plutes now. Nicked off to Darwin, to peddle that python skin to a shoe-manufactory."

I could only wheeze, "The Lord works in mysterious ways. . ."

"Anyhow, that was the reason they guv me," said McCubby, as the truck began to roll. "But now I suspicion they smelled the blow coming and bunked out, like bandicoots before a bush fire."

"Without warning us?"

"Well, that Yartatgurk *had* put the debbil-debbil on you with that death-song of his." After a moment, McCubby added darkly, "I didn't savvy the boong bugger had narked me, too."

With that, he headed the truck for the Experimental Station. Neither the windshield wipers nor the headlights were of any use. There was no road, and the faint track we'd followed coming out here was now obliterated. The air was still thick with flying debris. The truck jolted now and then to the resounding blow of a hurtling eucalyptus bole, or chunk of rock, or kangaroo, for all I know. Miraculously, none of them came through the windshield.

Gradually we inched upward from the low country, along the gently rising slope of a plateau. When we achieved its level top, we knew we were safe from the rising waters. And when we nosed down its farther slope, the rackety violence of the weather abated somewhat, cut off from us by the intervening highland.

As the noise subsided behind us, I broke the silence to ask McCubby what would become of the Anulas now. I ventured the hope that they would spend their new-found wealth on implements and appliances to raise their living standards. "Perhaps build a rustic church," I mused, "and engage a circuit preacher. . ."

McCubby snorted. "Wealth to them, Rev, is a couple of quid, which is all they'll get for that skin. And they'll blow it all in one cranky shivoo. Buy a few bottles of the cheapest plonk they can find, and stay shikkered for a week. Wake up sober in the Compound calaboose, most likely, with the jumping Joe Blakes for comp'ny."

This was most discouraging. It appeared that I had accomplished nothing whatsoever by my coming, and I said so.

"Why, they'll never forget you, Rev," McCubby said through clenched teeth. "No more will every other bloke in the territory that you caught with his knickers down. Here you've brought on the Wet nearly two months early, and brought it with a vengeance. Prob'ly drownded every jumbuck in the Never Never, washed out the railroad perway, bankrupted every ringer, flooded out the peanut farmers and the cotton planters—"

"Please," I implored. "Don't go on."

There was another long and gloomy silence. Then McCubby took pity on me. He lifted my spirits somewhat—and encapsulated my mission—with a sort of subjunctive consolation.

"If you came out here," he said, "mainly to break the Bingis of conjuring up heathen debbil-debbils to make rain, well, you can bet your best Bible they'll never do *that* again."

And on that optimistic note, I shall hasten this history towards its happy conclusion.

Several days later, McCubby and I arrived at Brunette Downs. He had the truckloads of beads transferred into a caravan of Land Rovers and headed Outback once more. I doubt not at all that he has since become a multimillionaire "plute" by cornering the market in dingo scalps. I was able to engage another driver, and the two of us returned the rented trucks to Sydney.

By the time I got back to the city, I was absolutely penniless, and looking picturesquely, not to say revoltingly, squalid. I hied myself at once to the English-Speaking Union in search of PrimPro BisPac Shagnasty. It was my intention to apply for some temporary underling job in the Sydney church organization and to beg a small salary advance. But it became immediately apparent, when I found Bishop Shagnasty, that he was in no charitable mood.

"I keep getting these *dunning* letters," he said peevishly, "from the Port of Sydney Authority. A freight consignment of some sort is there in your name. I can't sign for it, can't even find out what it *is*, but they keep sending me fantastic bills for its storage."

I said I was just as much in the dark as he, but the BIshop interrupted:

"I wouldn't advise that you hang about here, Mobey. Deputy Protector Mashworm may come in at any minute, and he's after your hide. He's already flayed a goodly portion of mine."

"Mine, too," I couldn't forbear muttering.

"*He* keeps getting letters of reproach from the Resident Commissioner of the Northern Territory, inquiring why in blazes you were ever let loose to corrupt the blackfellows. Seems a whole tribe descended en masse on Darwin, got vilely intoxicated and tore up half the city before they could be corralled. When they were sober enough to be questioned, they said a new young Bush Brother—unmistakably you—had provided the money for their binge."

I tried to bleat an explanation, but he overrode me.

"That wasn't all. One of the blacks claimed the Bush Brother had shot and wounded him. Others said that the missionary had provoked an intertribal war. Still others claimed he danced naked before them and then fed them poison, but that part wasn't too clear."

I whinnied again, and was again overridden.

"I don't know exactly *what* you did up there, Mobey, and frankly I don't care to be told. I would be everlastingly grateful, though, for one word from you."

"What's that, your reverence?" I asked huskily.

He stuck out his hand. "Good-by."

Having not much else to do, I drifted down to the Woolloomooloo docks to inquire about this mysterious freight consignment. It turned out to have been sent by dear old SoPrim's Overseas Mission Board and consisted of one

Westinghouse two-seater electric golf cart, seven gross of Lightolier lampshades—that's 1,008 lampshades—and a number of cartons of Old Crone Brand burley snuff.

I was too benumbed and disheartened, by this time, even to evince surprise. I signed a receipt and was given a voucher. I carried the voucher to the sailors' low quarter of the town, where I was approached by shifty-eyed men. One of them, the master of a rusty trawler engaged in smuggling Capitalist luxuries to the underadvantaged Communists of Red China, bought my entire consignment, sight unseen. I have no doubt that I was bilked on the transaction, but I was satisfied to be able to pay off the accumulated storage fees on the stuff and have enough left over to buy steerage passage on the first tramp ship leaving for the good old U.S.A.

The only landfall in this country was New York, so that's where I debarked, about a fortnight ago. Hence the postmark on this letter, because I am still here. I was penniless again by the time I landed. But through fortuitous coincidence I visited the local Natural History Museum (because admission was free) at just the time they were preparing a new aborigine tableau in the Australian wing. When I mentioned my recent stay among the Anulas, I was at once engaged as a technical consultant.

The salary was modest, but I managed to put away a bit, in hopes of soon returning to Virginia and to dear old Southern Primitive, to find out what my next mission was to be. Just recently, however, I have discovered that a mission calls me right here.

The artist painting the backdrop of the aborigine tableau—an Italian chap, I take him to be; he is called Daddio—has introduced me to what he calls his "in-group": habitants of an homogeneous village within the very confines of New York City. He led me into a dim, smoky cellar room (a "pad") full of these people—bearded, smelly, inarticulate—and I felt almost transported back to the abos.

Daddio nudged me and whispered, "Go on, say it. Loud, and just the way I coached you, man."

So I declaimed to the room at large the peculiar introduction he had made me rehearse in advance: "I am Crispin Mobey, boy Bush Brother! I have just been circumcised and I learned my Pitjantjatjara from a defrocked priest named Krapp!"

The people in the room, who had been desultorily chatting among themselves, were instant-

ly silent. Then one said, in a hushed and reverent murmur: "This Mobey is so far in *we're* out. . ."

"Like all of a sudden," breathed another, "*Howl* is the square root of Peale. . ."

A lank-haired girl arose from a squat and scrawled on the wall with her green eyebrow pencil, "Leary, no. Larry Welk, si."

"*Naked Lunch* is, like, Easter brunch," said someone else.

"Like, man," said several people at once, "our leader has been taken to *us!*"

None of this conveyed any more to me than had the arcane utterances of McCubby and Yartatgurk. But I have been accepted here as I never was even among the Anulas. Nowadays they wait with bearded lips agape for my tritest pronouncement and listen, as avidly as no other congregation I have ever known, to my most recondite sermons. (The one about Prayer being a Checkbook, etc., I have recited on several occasions in the tribe's coffeehouses, to an accompaniment of tribal string music.)

And so, Dean Dismey, I have been divinely guided—all unwittingly but unswervingly—to the second mission of my career. The more I learn of these villagers and their poor deluded idolatries, the more I feel certain that, sooner or later, I can be of Help.

I have applied to the mission headquarters of the local synod of the Primitive Protestant Church for proper accreditation and have taken the liberty of listing you, reverend sir, and Bishop Shagnasty as references. Any good word that you may be kind enough to vouchsafe in my behalf will be more than appreciated by.

Yours for Humility Rampant,
Crispin Mobey

ABOUT THE COVER: Whether or not men are ever able to visit the planets of other stars physically, there is one method, even today, by which we could communicate with their inhabitants — or discover if they are trying to contact us. . . This is by means of radio. It has been suggested that an ideal frequency would be 1420 megacycles, or 21.1 centimetres, since this is the wavelength of the emission sent out by hydrogen atoms in space, and would be under scrutiny from any alien radio astronomy station — perhaps like the one shown here, on a planet slightly more advanced than our own. — *Excerpt from caption written by David Hardy for* CHALLENGE OF THE STARS *by David A. Hardy and Patrick Moore, Mitchell Beasley, 1972 (to be published in the U.S. by Rand McNally) from which the cover painting is one of about 40 illustrations.*

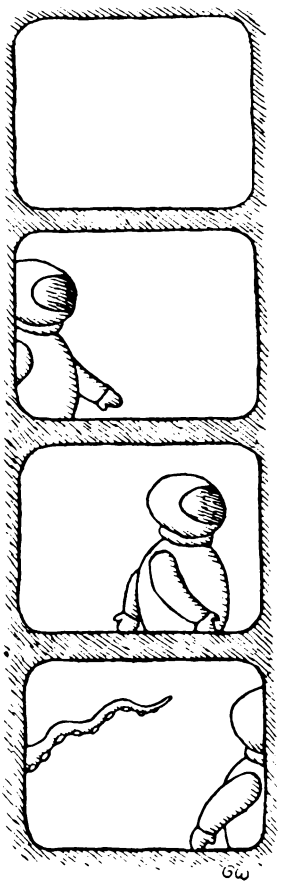
BAIRD SEARLES

FILMS

THE PEOPLE ON THE TUBE

I COMMENTED SOME months back that made-for-TV-movies were almost unwatchable so far as I was concerned, because of their lack of style and look of having been made to meet the deadline. Essentially, they are not movies, but expanded TV dramas of about the same quality of any series episode, and a thesis on the esthetic differences between an hour and a half drama made for TV and one made for theater showing would be enlightening, but this isn't the place for it. I have been forced to pay some attention to the TV movies, however, because about mid-season every other one seems to be sf or horror. The networks are really jumping aboard the bandwagon.

Of first consideration, of course, is ABC's **The People**, an adaptation from the series by Zenna Henderson which started in this magazine way back in 1952 with "Ararat." All too seldom do we get film adaptations of works from within the genre, and when it does happen, it's usually mucked up. I had not read the stories of the People for some time and decided not to reread them in advance of the film's showing in order to get the full impact



of how it would work as a drama. The screenplay is from that first story, and I'm happy to say that it came across nicely.

For those who have not read the original, it concerns a teacher who goes to a remote rural community to teach in the one room schoolhouse there. The people are curiously indrawn, though not hostile, and it turns out that they are refugees from another planet; they possess powers of telepathy and teleportation which they have learned by bitter experience to keep hidden from xenophobic mankind. The mutual breakthrough, from teacher to People and vice versa, is made through the children.

The major quality of Ms. Henderson's story was a kind of sweetness, a humanism rare in sf when it was published and rare in mass media sf today. The film retained that quality and resisted the temptation to show special effects for their own sake. Only once, when the teacher had been literally left up in the air by one of the kids, was there an excess of lighting and mystical gesture as one of the adults brought her down. Otherwise, the powers of the People were shown only by the children learning to levitate objects and themselves; and one scene, in which two of the children daringly decide to stop shuffling their feet and hesitantly skip and then fly, was vastly touching, a prime example of where a dramatization is more effective than the original scene in print.

Kim Darby, one of the more vapid of the younger actresses around (is there any other kind, come to think of it), was OK as the understandably confused teacher. Diane Varsi, returned from self-imposed exile after the film of Peyton Place (for which who could blame her) had a nice quality as Valency, the wisest of the people. William Shatner was wasted in a bit part, but I guess they thought his name would be valuable on a sf project. The children were out and out wonderful, especially Chris Valentine as the musical Francher.

A fellow viewer commented during a commercial that he wondered what the average Sat. Night Movie of the Week viewer was making of all this, since remarkably few concessions were being made to the standard image of the alien and its sinister powers. It is indeed a far cry from *The Thing*, but I've learned to beware of being hopeful.

Most of the TV movies will be rerun during the summer, so I'll mention a few more to watch out for (one way or another). **The Night Stalker** was a thrill-a-minute account of a

vampire in modern Las Vegas, and on that level worked just fine. The screenplay (by Richard Matheson) justified *Nosferatu* in Nevada quite logically, and also worked in some good punches against press censorship and elitist city government along the way. In fact, as I think about it, its literacy level was way above the usual bloodsucker plot. Also good was **Earth II**, which suffered from an undistinguished plot (independent space station established, unfriendly power puts armed satellite close by, space station asserts independence by disarming same), but showed life on a space station with some intelligence. The effects were straight out of *2001*, which means derivative, but also means beautiful. On the other hand, avoid **Something Evil** if they have the gall to rerun it. Sandy Dennis ("the only actress to make a career out of post nasal drip" as some unkind person said) and family being taken over by a demon on a Bucks County farm; whether the demon wanted her, the family or the farm was unclear, but red lights, wind machines, distorting lenses, and what looked like a bubbling jar of tomato paste are not terribly frightening. I'm all for being evocative, but you have to have some concrete premise to be evocative *about*.

Books on film dept. . . .Walt Lee is finishing up compiling a *Reference Guide to Fantastic Films;* it will contain 20,000 listings and from the sample pages I've seen is staggeringly exhaustive. Pre-pub price is $22.50 ($28 afterwards). Orders or info from Walt Lee, PO Box 66273, Los Angeles 90066. . . .A magazine now in its fourth issue has come to my attention belatedly. Called *Cinefantastique*, it's a slick job with damn good photos and articles. Probably hard to find on your nabe newstand; $4.00 will get you four issues from Cinefantastique, 7470 Diversey, Elmwood Park, Ill. 60635.

Things to Come dept. . . .And I mean *things*, with titles like *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde*, *Son of the Blob*, *She Was A Hippy Vampire*, and a musical version of *Lost Horizon* (Shangri La, Lalalalala?). Worst news of all. . .a fourth Planet of the Apes movie.

"This is a story of the past."—Why not? Must we always be talking of the present and the future? Aren't there any tenses other than the present and future tenses? And it is a story on a small scale. Again, why not? A small picture can be just as illustrative of an age as a large one. And so. . .a thumbnail sketch, in the past tense, of a period still within the memory of most of us.

A Passage In Italics

by WILLIAM DEAN

THIS IS A STORY OF the past.

The year was 1952. The place was a barbershop in midtown Manhattan, on what was once called Sixth Avenue. It was a very common-looking shop, really. There was the usual revolving striped pole outside the door and a rather ordinary faded awning above the large plate-glass window to keep out the morning sun. Inside the shop—to get inside one opened the glass door, on which *Tony's Barbershop* was lettered in gold paint and in large italic script, and descended three concrete steps beneath a tinkling bell to the floor—inside the shop one discovered a small but clean place of three chairs (lever-operated barber chairs, that is: there were wooden chairs spaced against the left-hand wall for waiting patrons) in what had obviously been at one time a subsidiary hallway entrance to the building housing the shop. A person seated in any one of the three chairs could look out directly across the busy avenue into an alleyway so narrow and cut between buildings so high that it was even in darkness at noon. Tony, on glancing out the window, as he frequently did, had more than once glimpsed a small pale shape scampering across the width of that dark recess. And yet it was not entirely an unpeopled alley. At rare intervals he would see someone walk out of the open street into the alley and be swallowed up (though not forever, he supposed) in its blackness—for it contained the back entrances of several shops and offices, a Turkish bath, an Italian restaurant, and at least one more sinister place of

business. But he had never given any of this much thought. Why should he? Anyone looking out the window for twenty seconds would have seen pretty much the same sort of thing he had been seeing these past twenty years. Which shows how little the most drastic political events affect our small daily lives. Tony had lived through a war and several changes of administration, and yet that scene out there had changed only in styles of dress and cars. It is still very much the same today.

At this particular noon hour the door stood open because of the heat, and the coattree at the end of the row of wooden chairs was heavy-laden for the same reason. All three barber chairs were occupied, although Tony was at work only on the man in the middle chair, who was having his hair cut as he read a magazine. The man in the first chair near the window had pulled the long cloth that had covered his body as Tony had shaved him—Tony had remarked to his present customers that he had finished shaving the man just before they had come in—up over his face, exposing his brown shoes, socks and pants, and was presumably asleep. "Presumably," because he might have been dead as far as any onlooker could have told. That arm projecting out from under the cloth with its flaccid unresisting hand, its downward drooping fingers, would inevitably have suggested to any observer that Tony had accidentally cut the man's throat and, looking guiltily around the empty shop, had pulled the cloth up over the face to conceal the evidences of his carelessness. This apparent lifelessness awakened a disquieting memory in Tony himself. Twenty years ago, when he was just starting out, his shop had been innocently the scene of a brutal killing. One of his regular customers, a very charming gentleman from Sicily, was "fingered" (as the newspaper accounts had it) while being shaved in that very chair and was shot down by a Mafia executioner on the sidewalk outside that very window. But Tony, who had unforgettably seen it all happen, lightly brushed aside the gruesome picture and went on with his work. Fortunately, that sort of thing never happened any more.

The occupant of the third chair, a black man in a white shirt and red tie, was simply waiting for Tony to finish with the customer before him. His face showed no impatience, however. Rather, it expressed amusement—but that expression seemed to be habitual; perhaps it was even "built-in." Tony, who had never seen him

before and who had glanced at him once or twice now in puzzlement, had almost decided that it was: for those eyebrows seemed to have been pitched early at a height of amused disdain and to have become stuck there in defiance of all gravity. There was a fourth customer in the shop too. He sat on one of the wooden chairs against the wall, waiting, like the third man, for Tony to finish; and, like the first man, nothing was seen of his face either, because he had picked up a newspaper and was holding it in front of him as he read. (EISENHOWER JOINS POPE IN PLEA FOR LAW AND ORDER proclaimed a visible headline.) His hat lay beside him on another chair; his pants were grey, his socks blue, his shoes brown.

The fellow in the middle chair chuckled. He was a man in his mid-thirties with blond hair and blue eyes and very powerfully built: huge chest, thick arms and legs. The good-humored placidity of his expression—and perhaps the mere fact that he was reading something—did much to soften what otherwise would have seemed gross and oppressive in so much bulk.

The man in the third chair turned his eyebrows upon him, as if to ask, "What's so funny?"

"This story," said the blond giant, as if the question had been asked aloud. "Do you ever read science fiction?"

"Never," said Eyebrows. "How about you, Tony?"

"I've got no time for reading," said Tony, turning away to whip up some lather that had been heating in an old coffee mug.

"It's called 'Conditional Tense.' It's about another time-stream—"

"Another what?" The man with the eyebrows did what would have seemed impossible and elevated them another notch.

"Another time-stream. Another world, an alternate world to this, in which things happened differently."

"How can that be?" said Tony, slapping the lather on the back of his customer's neck. "That doesn't make sense."

"That's the premise, Tony," said the reader. "You have to accept the premise, otherwise the rest of the story doesn't follow. Anyway, get this: In this time-stream, the one written about in the story, *Germany and Japan won World War II!* How do you like that?" And he chuckled again, appreciatively.

Tony, holding his customer's head steady with one hand, began scraping away at the back of the neck with the razor held in the other, meanwhile shaking

his own head doubtfully. "I don't know...You should be glad they didn't. You're Jewish, aren't you, Willy? Well, the Germans—excuse me, I should say the Nazis—the Nazis were very brutal to the Jews. You've heard about those camps discovered right after the war? Well, there you are! If the Ger—the Nazis had come to this country, they'd probably have done away with you and all your folks too. So you're lucky. Maybe we're all lucky and just don't know it."

"Well," said Eyebrows, "naturally, *you'd* think so, Tony."

Tony suspended his razor in midair, as if puzzling over the meaning of that remark. "Why, of course," he said decisively, and yet with a lingering trace of doubt, "of course, I'm glad the Nazis lost. You can believe me, *I* have heard stories of some of the things they did that'd raise the hair on your head. I think we did right, I mean England and America, in going to war with them."

"Yes," agreed Willy, "we can be thankful that Germany and Japan were ignominiously defeated. But listen to this." And he read from his magazine, which, being digest-size, was almost hidden in his large hand:

The war went in favor of the Germans. Naturally. For they were the first in the field with an Atomic Bomb. It was the Bomb which turned the tide when it seemed ready to sweep away the Third Reich. The American and Russian armies were almost at the doors of Berlin when—

"Let's see now," said Willy, skipping a paragraph or two. "Ah, yes, here we are":

The Nazi High Command actually considered sharing the Bomb with their Japanese allies and then, for obvious reasons, decided against it...

"Now, here's the good part":

One thing, however, the Germans were absolutely determined on, and that is that they were not going to share their awesome secret with their Friends to the South. Hitler was succinct: "The Italian people have no courage, no efficiency, no talent for command or the management of affairs. Their blood is impure and their souls are muddled. They are a little people fit only to rule Ethiopians. To give them the Bomb would be like handing a gun to a child. High motives, including the instinct of self-preservation, decree that they not only not be given that weapon which we Aryan peoples have so triumphantly wrested from nature, but that we should take swift and firm steps to insure that they never lay hold of any part of it."

It is said that, in his arrogance and in the flush of triumph following the Third Reich's victory, Hitler actually made these observations to Mussolini himself. Il Duce was beside himself with rage. Hitler's remark about that weapon which "we Aryan peoples have. . .wrested from nature" was particularly galling to him, for it was Hitler's acquisition—his virtual kidnaping—of the brilliant mathematical physicist Gabriello Castelli that had enabled Germany to construct the first Bomb. We can only speculate on what might have happened if Castelli had remained, as he had wished, in seclusion in his native town, working in secret. . .

"What do you think of that, Tony?" asked Willy, chuckling.

"It's crazy!"

"Hmmm," said Eyebrows. "I particularly like that line about the Italians being fit only to rule Ethiopians."

The good-natured Tony Vespucci was a trifle uncertain how to respond to such talk, but resolved his doubts with a laugh. "You forget that Italy ruled more than Ethiopia for a very long time. You've heard of the *Pax Romana?*"

"Of course," said Willy. "I'm a classical scholar."

"Well, Rome ruled most of the world for centuries. And Rome is just one city in Italy. If one city can do that, think what the whole country could do!" A New York City policeman, passing in blue in front of the large window, raised his baton to Tony in greeting. "And you know," went on the barber after he had returned the salute, "you have to hand it to those Romans—because how could they rule the whole world if any other people were braver, stronger or smarter than them?"

"*Touche*, Tony!" cried Willy, feeling the back of his neck; "I think you've drawn blood."

"No, I haven't. I haven't cut anyone since I was in barber college."

"Oh?" said Eyebrows, lowering his voice and glancing with an arch significance at the supine body in the first chair.

"Ahh, he's all right. Ask Willy here. He knows. He came by when I was shaving the gent, only he suddenly remembered something he had to do and hurried out again and—"

"Yes, yes. I can testify that he was all right *then.*"

"And besides," said Tony, gesturing with the razor, "look who's talking! It looks like somebody's just cut your throat."

"Why, he's right!" said Willy, with a sidelong glance and an expression of distaste so marked it was positively impolite.

Eyebrows glanced down at his shirt front and saw that the red tie he was wearing did indeed bear an abstract resemblance to a gush of blood downward from the jugular. "How *gauche!*" he exclaimed. "My apologies,"—looking around with a vague inclusiveness—"to all concerned." And, in a lower voice: "When you called me, I dashed out of the house so fast I didn't look at what I was snatching up to put on. . ."

Tony reached down and with one hand took hold of the tie near the knot while flourishing his razor aloft in the other. "If thy necktie offend thee, cut it off—"

"Hey!" burst from Eyebrows and "My God!" from Willy, each giving a small involuntary twitch of alarm, which considerably disconcerted Tony, who hadn't expected such a reaction. "Okay!" cried Eyebrows, comically exaggerating his start of surprise. "Okay, I take back what I said about the Italians." He laughed. All three laughed, including Tony, who suddenly found himself very embarrassed. He took a few steps to the back of the shop and awkwardly got rid of the razor—he had finished shaving Willy anyway—by dropping it on top of the small cabinet there. He saw that the man reading the newspaper beside the cabinet had taken no notice whatever of their horseplay; apparently, he had found something of greater interest in the pages of the *Times.* (A movie ad caught Tony's eye as he turned away: *Opening Today/at the RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL/Rossellini's Greatest Film/AUGUSTUS CAESAR.)*

"Now you needn't be afraid," said Tony, coming back to undo the cloth and tissue paper band from about Willy's neck. "Only freedom of speech here. Just a second while I give this a shake, and I'll start on your friend."

And taking hold of the cloth with both hands, he gave it such a vigorous shake to dislodge the hairs that it made a sound in the air like a sharp slap, or—and this was, immediately afterwards, Tony's fragmentary impression—like a magician's magisterial snap of the fingers: for it was followed by a most unexpected and startling phenomenon as another cloth was flung into the air, violently, even theatrically, from the chair to his left. And the man who had been lying there suddenly stood before them with a stern, not to say a fierce, gaze. It was as if a corpse had become impatient with all this death nonsense and had flung aside its shroud, which now—as they

stared—settled and drooped to the floor. He was a man in his fifties, with a long horse-like face and grey temples. His shirt was of a color uniform with his pants, socks and shoes—as if he were a garage mechanic or a building superintendent—and they soon saw that his coat was also; for, without taking his eyes from theirs, he stepped to the coattree and plucked down the brown coat that hung there and put it on. He completed the effect this produced by taking from his left coat pocket a brown tie which he roped and knotted about his neck with a marvelous dexterity, as if he were a skillful strangler, and by fishing out of the other pocket two small pins which he fastened just as deftly to his lapel. One showed a bundle of sticks tied tightly about an ax: the symbol of the *Fascisti.* The other was a more or less boot-shaped piece of silver, the emblem of the *Pax Romana* and, more narrowly, of the *Polizia Militare* of the Occupying Forces.

Tony, Willy, and the man with the eyebrows all gazed at this Newcomer (to call him such), and he gazed back at them with eyes as hard and dry as pieces of pottery baked in a limekiln. The other man in the room read *The New York Times.*

"I have heard talk here," said the newcomer, "insulting to Italy and its great leader."

"These boys were just playing," said Tony, with a gesture and tone that was half protest and half appeal.

Willy shrugged. "Sorry to have broken your slumbers."

"Do you know who I am?" asked the policeman.

"I think," said Willy, "—mind you, I'm not absolutely sure—but I *think* you're Colonel Giuseppe Pesca, more widely known as 'The Butcher of Coney Island.' " He glanced at his friend in the next chair, who said with a kind of supercilious gravity, as if his confirming the identification were a matter of as much importance as his eyebrows would admit: "I'd know him in a million." His manner was arch, but his voice was curiously thick and husky. And no wonder! *Pesca.* It was a name to strike terror into the hearts of children. . .and of parents too, for that matter. It may have been that the man reading the *Times* in the corner was a parent, for there was visible in the outer corners of that newspaper a faintly telegraphic vibration. Eyebrows saw that as he glanced that way. Saw also a column heading clairvoyantly leap out at him: COLONEL PESCA PREDICTS IMMEDIATE ARREST OF TERRORISTS.

"I'm glad you know who I am," said Pesca, "for then you will know that I mean what I say, *Signore Ebreo* and *Signore Sopracciglio*,"—which they knew meant 'Mr. Jew' and 'Mr. Eyebrow.' "The two of you will report tomorrow at the local headquarters here," with a backward nod of his head, "at 9 a.m., sharp, for interviewing. Just routine, you understand, but we may find it necessary to send you to one of our special indoctrination classes. Be there. If you're not, we'll apply to your friend here,"—turning his scornful gaze upon the barber as he spoke—"for your names and whatever else he might know about you. . .and that might be uncomfortable for him. And *you*, Mr. Vespucci, do you call yourself an Italian?"

"No, sir," said Tony, stoutly. "I call myself an Italian-American. My family has been in this country for three generations. My two boys," and Tony cast a wistful look at the two unattended barber chairs to his right, as if he could somehow see his stalwart sons standing behind them in white jackets with black combs projecting from their breast pockets, "my two boys died fighting in Italy in the last war. But they weren't fighting *for* Italy."

Pesca's face was touched lightly by amusement. His eyes moved suggestively towards the rear of the shop. "That bare space over the cabinet there. Its blankness offends me. Get a picture of *Il Duce* and put it up. A large one. I want to see it there the next time I come in."

With another cold look all around, he turned and started up the three steps with an expression that would not have been out of place on the face of a political prisoner mounting the steps of the guillotine. But before he could step out onto the sidewalk, he seemed to be struck by a thought, for he paused a moment, silently, with one foot on the top step, the other on the second.

" 'It's a far, far better thing that I do. . .,' " prompted Eyebrows.

Pesca looked back at them, thoughtfully. " 'Willy. . . .' " he mused. " 'Willy?' Is that the diminutive for Wilhelm?"

"Nooo," said the blond man with an ingenuous smile, "I was actually christened 'Willy,' believe it or not."

"We're trying to locate a man named Wilhelm, or perhaps William, Marcus."

Willy shrugged and took up his magazine again. "William Marcus is a common name."

"True. This particular Marcus is a leader of a gang that has the audacity to call itself *il risorgimento*, after a glorious passage in our Italic history.

They prate of freedom and patriotism but," and here Pesca's eye and voice warmed somewhat, "they're no more than a gang of cutthroats, like. . . ."

"Like the Mafia," suggested Eyebrows.

Pesca eyed him with a casual contempt, his temperature dropping a degree or two back towards normal. "The Mafia doesn't exist any longer," he said complacently, turning to the open door. "*We* saw to that."

"Give us back our Mafia," murmured Eyebrows.

Pesca stepped out into the glaring sunlight. The three men inside the shop watched as he walked across the Avenue of New Rome (as it was officially called) looking neither to the left or the right—as if the cars wouldn't dare hit *him*—and towards the gaping throat of the alleyway which contained, in a kind of cul-de-sac at its far end, what was the nearest entrance to the Military Police Headquarters for this district.

There was a rustling of paper as the man reading the *Times* in the corner threw it down hastily in a crumpled heap on top of the cabinet. He grabbed up his hat and started towards the door. "I think my lunch hour's over," he muttered, with the hat held clumsily before his face as if he had unconsciously arrested it in that position in the act of lifting it to his head. Perhaps he wished to avoid their eyes; especially, thought Tony, the sardonic gaze of Eyebrows, which followed him as he went up the steps and out the door just a trifle too quickly for perfect dignity. A moment later they saw him dodging the cars in the street.

"Ahh," said Tony with a sigh, "the police are scaring away my customers. That's all I need! A lot of my old customers won't come to me any longer because. . .well,"—with a deprecatory wave of his hand—"you know. I'm glad you've never felt that way, Willy. I appreciate it. If I'd known that guy was a cop, I sure would have warned you."

Shaking his heavy head, he walked to the cabinet and picked up the newspaper to straighten and fold it. And slowed. . .congealed. He stared blankly down at the cabinet and at the bare floor in front of it. He raised his eyes, not quickly, and glanced at his two customers. Willy was shrugging on his big tweed jacket and stuffing his magazine into one of its pockets, while looking his way with a mild speculation. The other man had apparently changed his mind about having a haircut, for he too was gathering up his coat. Tony hardly recognized him for a

moment—for it would seem that that sardonic or sly amusement was not ineradicably built into his face, after all. His eyebrows were lowered, as were also his eyes; the irony was extinguished. Tony was unable to refrain from glancing past them and out the window—but what in the world did he expect to see? He saw nothing but what he had been seeing these past twenty years: the familiar shops and their signs, the dark fissure of the alley, the strangers and cars passing to and fro in the street.

He turned and dropped the *Times* onto the chair so recently vacated. He opened a drawer in the cabinet, took out a razor from the small supply he kept there, and laid it quietly on top of the cabinet, in place of the one that had disappeared. His hand trembled slightly as he did so.

Donald Moffitt is new to these pages, but he has had approximately 100 stories published. He writes: "Am currently vice president of a Madison Avenue public relations firm, and have now spent a round decade ghostwriting speeches, producing industrial movies and writing press releases on subjects ranging from computer technology to veterinary medicine. Major interests include music, astronomy, gastronomy, Assyriology."

The Scroll

by DONALD MOFFITT

FRAZER PUT DOWN THE shard of pottery he had been examining and looked up with a trace of annoyance at the man standing just inside the tent flap. "I'll be right out," he said, "but it's probably a waste of time."

"I wouldn't have bothered you, Professor," young Rice said apologetically, "but he was very insistent about seeing the head man. Wouldn't talk to any of us."

"Blasted Arabs think there's treasure in every cave now," Frazer complained. "They bring us fragments of eleventh century pottery and then curse us for cheating them when we tell them what it's worth." He drew his long legs from under the folding camp table and rose to join his assistant.

"I think he really may have something, Professor," Rice said. He was obviously impatient, and Frazer felt just obstinate enough to take his time about following. They picked their way through a confusion of tents and equipment, Rice hurrying ahead, then darting back to Frazer.

Frazer stopped beside the cook tent, putting a hand on Rice's shoulder. "Is that your Bedouin?" he said, pointing his chin at the motionless figure standing just outside the camp perimeter. "You mean he's all alone?"

Rice was almost dancing with excitement now. "That's why I'm sure it's important," he said. "This fellow's going to cut his tribe if he can. I think he has a taste for city life."

Frazer tightened his grip on the younger man's shoulder. "Now listen to me, Geoffrey," he said sharply. "He may have

something, he may not. But try to control yourself, goddamnit! If he sees you jumping around like that, he's going to jack up the price."

"Sorry, Professor." Rice blushed slightly. He was a graduate student in paleography, on his first important field trip. If he got a fairly good paper out of the expedition, he hoped for a fellowship on the strength of it.

"Just talk as little as possible." Frazer gave him a slight push and they crossed the last fifty yards at what was intended to look like a casual pace.

The Arab waited for them to speak first. He was tall for a Bedouin, and under the greasy robes there was the suggestion of a hard, powerful back and heavy shoulder muscles. But his face was what drew Frazer's attention. It was a sly, crafty face; and the swarthy complexion, the hooked Semitic nose, and the heavy-lidded black eyes held an indefinable look of cruelty. Frazer took an instant dislike to the man.

"What is your tribe?" Frazer snapped out. "Do you know any English?"

"I am of the Ta'amire," the Arab said carefully. It was a heavy, unpleasant voice, and though the man was speaking softly, it sounded as though it might be powerful.

"I understand you've brought me something. Where is it?"

"My brothers have it," the Arab said with a trace of insolence. "We will talk about it first."

"You understand I cannot offer you money without seeing what you have. It may be worthless."

"It is not worthless," the Arab said. "Others will buy it if you do not."

"Then why come to me?" Frazer said. His mounting irritation was fed by the sight of Rice, obviously dying to signal him to go easy. He plunged on brutally. "Why not sell it elsewhere?"

The man hesitated. "...*Illi hajah bi derdhim alyum*...I need money now...I cannot wait for Kando."

"Show me what you have," Frazer persisted. "Then we will talk about money."

Unexpectedly the Arab smiled then, as if he had won a point. Frazer shook his head angrily, to rid himself of the impression that the man was amused at him.

"You know any finds of this sort are supposed to be reported to the authorities?" Frazer said spitefully.

But the Arab had already moved away. He passed as lightly as a puff of smoke across the blasted landscape, his robes

hiding the workings of his limbs. It seemed no time at all before Frazer saw the man's head and shoulders silhouetted for a final moment above a ridge, then disappear.

"What's that he gave you, sir?" Rice was saying.

"What. . .oh. . ." Frazer glanced down at his hands. The Arab had pressed something into them so swiftly that it hadn't registered for a moment. He examined what he was holding: a few shreds of stiffened linen, a fragment of pottery, and what seemed to be part of an iron adze head, pitted with extreme age.

"Run and get Father Laurent," said Frazer. "I think he should be in on this. Hurry, boy, hurry, before that fellow gets back."

Rice scurried off. While he waited, Frazer systematically scanned the horizon, from the flat leaden surface of the Dead Sea at his right to the tumbled foothills directly in front of him, a forearm shielding his eyes from the fierce garish ball of the sun. At last he located the Arab high up on the baked cliffs that rose beyond the camp. There, beside a wrinkled outcropping of limestone, he saw him, a tiny figure apparently talking to another Arab. A donkey, toy-like with distance, waited nearby.

"Father!" Frazer called, "Geoffrey!" He juggled the objects in his hand impatiently. After an interval, Father Laurent came puffing up, still holding the tripod of a theodolite, followed by Rice. Perspiration was trickling down the priest's face into his beard, and his khaki shirt had dark patches spreading from the armpits. "Too hot for this excitement," he began. "Are those what the fellow gave you?" He grabbed at Frazer's hand. "These could be parts of linen scroll wrappings, like the ones we found at the Qumran caves. The pottery's ordinary enough. How about that?" He snatched at the lump of iron. "First century?"

"It might be," Frazer said testily. "And it could just as easily be tenth century, B. C. We'll know when we see the rest of the Bedouin's goods. That's why I especially wanted you here. Philology isn't exactly my dish." Catching sight of Rice's stricken expression, he added, "—Nor paleography. I'll want your opinions before I decide whether or not to get involved in this."

"But, Professor," Rice protested. "What if it's important? It might be as big as the original excavations at Qumran."

Frazer exploded. "Our job is excavating a perfectly good Bronze Age mound. That's what the foundation grant was

meant for. I don't want to get this expedition mixed up in a lot of theological squabbles. Or trouble with the Jordanian government."

"We'll soon know," Father Laurent said. "Here's your man now."

The Arab was coming toward them across the rubble-strewn ground of the camp. On his shoulder he carried a bulky cylindrical object which resolved itself into a wide-necked clay jar. He turned it upside down and shook. A blackened object tumbled out at their feet.

"It's a scroll all right," Rice whispered. "And in good condition."

"Shut up, Geoffry," Frazer said. He turned to the Arab. "Where did you find this?"

The man shrugged. "A cave. I know the way."

"Which means," Father Laurent said, "that he's not telling."

"I'll handle this, Father," Frazer said. He squatted down and poked indifferently at the cracked dry leather. The Arab stiffened. "Not worth much," Frazer drawled, "but I might pay something for it. If I like it, I might buy more. What else have you?"

"Many jars," mumbled the Arab. He struggled for a word, pointed at the scroll, and said, "*Fatwa. . .?*"

"I'll give you five pounds for it," Frazer said. "That's a lot of money, but I don't feel like arguing."

"No," the Arab protested. "A thousand pounds. I am a poor man. You are robbing me."

Then the bargaining started in earnest, while Rice and Father Laurent looked on. In the end, they settled on thirteen pounds. Frazer counted out the sum in crumpled dinar notes.

"Come back tomorrow, if you have anything," Frazer said.

Without a word, and before anyone could stop him, the Arab stooped, picked up the jar, and dashed it to the ground. It shattered into a dozen pieces.

"That was valuable!" Frazer said. But the Arab was already out of earshot. Frazer stared after him, then turned to Father Laurent. "Ugly brute," he said. "Well never mind, it can be patched together. But a perfect specimen would have been nice."

Father Laurent said: "You had me worried for a while there. You were too hard on him. I thought he'd leave in a huff and take the scroll with him."

"Not a chance, Father. And that money came out of my own pocket, I want you to know."

Rice was already clawing at the scroll. "Be careful, Geoffrey," Father Laurent said. "You'll flake off the leather. We'll want to get that in a humidifier before we examine it, maybe soften it up with petroleum jelly."

"Look, sir," Rice cried, "I've got it unrolled a little. It's very supple, considering."

Father Laurent bent down. "Don't try to unroll it any further. Let's see what you've got there." He pushed his glasses up on his nose. "It's a fairly early Aramaic script—about second century, B.C., Geoffrey, don't you think?"

"Later than that, Father. About first century, A.D., I'd say. See those ligatures? And here. . .the scribe's used the medial form of the *Mem* to end a word, just like in the Isaiah scroll. . ."

Frazer pushed in between them. "Before you go giving it a first century date, let's study it a while. It needs a radio-carbon test, for one thing; the Chicago boys can do that for us. And I want to examine what's left of that jar."

"Of course, sir." Rice's face was a livid red.

"I think the boy will turn out to be right, Professor," Father Laurent put in. "Come now, couldn't that jar be first century?"

"It could," Frazer admitted reluctantly. "But I'm not going to rush ahead and make a fool out of myself. For one thing, this scroll's in a remarkable state of preservation for a first century specimen."

"That's true," Father Laurent said. "But that's because somebody went to a remarkable lot of trouble to preserve it. Look at this. It seems to have been coated with lacquer at one time. That accounts for the relative absence of worm holes. And did you notice the neck of the jar? It once had an airtight seal. I wouldn't wonder if that Arab wasn't the first person to break it."

"It must have been pretty important to somebody. The Essenes?"

"Perhaps. I don't think so. The script is. . .merciful Lord!"

"What is it?" Frazer and Rice leaned forward.

"Here, look! It's the name of Jesus!"

Frazer squinted. "So it is."

Rice's face was radiant. "This is fabulous! Fabulous! A direct reference to Christ by a contemporary source! An original document! And we found it!"

Father Laurent was tracing the script with his finger, his lips moving. He turned to them, tears running down his cheeks into his beard. "It's a treasure! A treasure! The missing years in

the life of Jesus! By someone who was there! Someone who knew Him!"

Frazer forgot all restraint then. He pushed his nose into the scroll. The three of them began reading aloud, shouting each other down, supplying words when someone hesitated. In a fever of excitement, Father Laurent forced the scroll too far, to expose another column of the angular script. With a brittle, cracking sound, an eight-inch section broke off, the dry leather powdering along the break.

"Father!" Frazer cried. "Don't!"

"I have to *know!*"

They all saw the sentence at once. It almost leaped out at them from the top of the exposed column.

". . .taken down from the cross," Rice read, faltering, "more dead than alive."

"No, no, Geoffrey," Frazer said. "You must have it backwards."

". . .more dead than alive. . ." repeated Rice.

"And what else is there?" Father Laurent said suddenly. He scanned the column quickly, then broke off another segment of the scroll. Frazer said nothing. The three of them read on in silence for twenty minutes. When they had finished, the scroll was broken into narrow sections which lay strewn all about them like the petals of a daisy after it has been used to answer a question.

Rice was the first to speak. "If. . .if He didn't believe. . .if He didn't. . .love. . ." He looked at them. "How could He tell *us* to? How can we believe a charlatan?"

"No, no! Not a charlatan!" Father Laurent cried in an agony. "Surely He was sincere!" The priest looked stricken and helpless; the taut lines of his face had gone suddenly flabby.

Frazer spoke, very composed. "Let me make a suggestion that seems to have escaped the both of you. What if the charlatan was the one who wrote the scroll? It's convincing, but very pat. Remember the Moabite forgeries?"

Rice said, "I'd like to believe it's a forgery. But. . .but it *feels* right. The script. . .the leather . . .you can see how old it is. The radio-carbon test will tell us, but I'm sure it's first century now." He flushed. "I'm sorry, Father."

"How close," the priest whispered, "how close I came to heresy." He crossed himself. In control of himself again, he said, "The Faith has survived many such 'revelations.' It will survive this one as well."

"I beg your pardon, Father," Frazer said, "but I don't see

how. I'm not a religious man, but I've always had the conventionally enlightened view of the historical Jesus. The Man of Good Will. The Teacher. But this scroll doesn't just blur His portrait. It demolishes it."

"It's not as simple as you may think, my son. In the course of almost two thousand years, clever men have imagined every possibility—even this one."

"I'm not conversant with the theological feuds of the past, Father."

"I am," the priest said sharply, "and I'll tell you this. This scroll, this. . .this abomination is nothing less than a grave danger to your immortal soul. Even if you don't believe you have one!"

"I'll keep an open mind, thank you," said Frazer.

Rice said desperately, "It could be first century and still be a fake. By some sect that had an ax to grind."

"I rather think," said Frazer, "that the scribe would have ranted and raved a bit more if that were the case. This is too matter-of-fact. No, if we can give it a first century date, I think it will convince me. And a couple of million other people."

"I shall pray for you," Father Laurent said. He fell to his knees.

Rice took a step in the priest's direction, then stopped. He looked at Frazer.

"It's getting late," Frazer said to him. "Better finish your work, Geoffrey. We'll have an early day tomorrow. I'm going to have a look at those cliffs. That Arab may have stumbled on his cache right near here."

They walked off, leaving the priest on his knees.

Far up in the cliffs, the solitary robed figure moved expertly over the sharp limestone rocks, sending down only an occasional shower of loose shale. He stopped once, to look down across the track of the wadi to the flat plain immediately beyond, where the minute tents of the camp were scattered like forgotten hats. At the sight he leaned out and spat, then smiled. Hitching up his garments, he continued climbing until he reached the wide ledge with its telltale outcropping of limestone.

Waiting almost motionless beside it were the donkey and the robed figure of a man, as they had been left. Seen up close, they were insubstantial. The wind blew loose grains of sand through the man's bare feet, and the cliff behind him was faintly visible through his burnoose.

The Arab pointed a finger at him and he ceased to exist.

The donkey took longer.

First it turned into a donkey-shaped puff of smoke that held its shape for a moment, then began to dissipate in the slow desert breezes.

Those props gone, the Arab pointed a finger at the face of the cliff, beside the limestone outcropping. The surface over a small area began to boil away. In a minute or two there was a perfectly natural looking cave.

The Arab stepped inside and stared with fierce majesty at the far wall of the cave. Nine clay jars sprang into being, traced with the cracks of centuries, resting amid broken shards.

His fingers moved in an intricate fluttering pattern. Within the jars appeared leather scrolls bearing a squarish script, wrapped in coarse linen, and brittle with age.

He studied his handiwork with a critical eye, then made a last pass in the air. At that, the scrolls, jars, linen and shards glowed briefly, as they gave up in one extravagant instant the radioactive particles that should have taken nineteen centuries to die.

He smiled cruelly, and his robes burst instantly into flame. The consuming fire cast a ruddy glow over the fabled barbed tail, the split hoofs, and the leathery wings that were folded tightly over that muscular back.

He waited, basking in the heat, until the last flame flickered and died, and the last charred bit of fabric fell free from his horny body. Then he winked out and was gone.

The little puff of yellow smoke that was left behind would, of course, have smelled sulfurous to anyone who had been there. But no one arrived until the next day.

SF WRITERS' WORKSHOP

The "Clarion" writers' workshop in fantasy and science fiction will be sponsored this coming summer by the Justin Morill College of Michigan State University. Fees for the six week course are $250.00. Enquiries to: Professor R. Glenn Wright, Justin Morrill College, East Lansing, Michigan.

Apart from being a writer, Robert J. Tilley is a jazz musician (tenor clarinet), an interest that figured in his memorable story "Something Else," (October 1965). His latest story also concerns music, in the form of a totally absorbing report from a time-travelling jazz buff.

"Willie's Blues"

by ROBERT J. TILLEY

Thursday, September 17th, 1936
Room 24, Taylor House Hotel, Florence, South Carolina

The drive here gave me my first real chance to see rural America, 1936 style. Incredibly restful, almost too much so. I found myself dozing at the wheel a couple of times, a highly dangerous thing to do. The car has behaved itself pretty well, but I still can't get used to actually having to steer the damn thing myself.

Florence is nothing special, what I've seen of it so far; could be any small town. The Freemont hall where they're playing tonight is right down the street from here, half a block away on the other side. They've got posters outside, confirming the date I got from the booking agency, so at least I'll be spared hanging around here any longer than I have to.

Not much traffic down there at the moment, certainly no band buses in sight, so it looks as though they're still on their way from Portland.

Come on, Willie baby.

Friday, September 18th, 1936
Room 24, Taylor House Hotel, Florence, South Carolina

It's a little after 2:00 a.m., and I've just finished re-writing history.

I still can't grasp it. I thought I was coming here to plug the gaps in our own records, but instead I've been finding out just what they mean at the transfer center when they talk about the past, present and future being interlinked in ways that we haven't even begun to understand yet.

I feel drunk. I suppose the whisky has something to do with it, but it's more emotional than alcoholic. To find out that you're a part of something like this, a *real* part—

Good God. Can it really mean that without my intervention he would have spent the rest of his life skulking around in musical vacuums like Curry's crowd? Surely it couldn't be! A talent like that would be bound to get kicked out into the open by *something.* It just isn't—

But—what *else* could have done it?

I must get this down in detail now, before I go to bed. I might have lost some of it by morning if I don't. Hell, my head feels as if it's one ambition is to float up and nestle against the ceiling. I shouldn't think my chances of getting hold of any coffee are very bright, either. This place is like the rest of the town, lights out by one o'clock at the very latest. Better try walking around. I only hope the fellow underneath is asleep by now—*and* that he sleeps heavy.

First impressions. A small man, who looks like an apologetic version of his photographs, playing in a pretty bad band. The acoustics were abominable, but even so it was possible to tell that the records made at the time hadn't lied. The whole thing was a scrappy echo of what the Curry band of five or six years earlier had done so well, and the crowd knew it, too. This is only a medium-sized country town, but even a semirural bunch like that listen to the radio and know the difference. They applauded, but it was more good manners than enthusiasm.

He took no solos. All the tenor breaks were handled by Claude Perry, playing a thin pastiche of what Joe Pitman was doing with them before he went off to make it on his own. And Turnhill just sat there, blowing when the sheets told him to; a musician doing a job. I really wanted to scream. The whole thing was insane, with something uniquely unreal about it; ghosts, mimicking echoes from a glorious past, with the only real talent there confined to section work. Ludicrous. I'd been running the machine, but I didn't waste thread when it became obvious that Turnhill wasn't going to be given any space at all.

It finished just after twelve and I went outside with the rest of the crowd, fetched the car, and parked it across from the front of the hall. It was raining, something that I thought of at the time as a lucky break, but I see it a little differently now, of course. It was an ingredient, in exactly the same way that I was; a scheduled event that

could no more have failed to happen than I could have prevented myself from being here right now, talking into this microphone.

Anyway, he came out on his own, the last one to leave. The rest of them had already beat it to different parts of town, towing local girls with them. He was wary when I hailed him and offered him a lift, but he didn't have a topcoat and it was raining pretty steadily by then. He got in the back, gave me directions, and off we went.

To put him at his ease, I went straight into my electronics engineer/jazz buff from Baltimore routine; how I'd been passing through town when I'd seen the posters advertising Jerome Curry and his Famous Band, and decided to stay over for the night, and so on. I went on to say that I'd heard him once or twice with Benny Case when I'd been in Michigan a couple of years before, and couldn't understand why he wasn't getting any solo space with Curry.

He said his style hadn't fitted in too well, and I didn't find that too hard to believe. Curry had been good about it, though, he said, keeping him on the while he worked on his tone. He'd bought a new mouthpiece to help him thicken it up a little, the way they'd specified he should.

I felt an uncomfortable prickling around the scalp at that point, the first hint that things weren't as I'd expected them to be. The statement itself was bad enough, of course, but what really worried me was the offhand way that it was delivered. Here was the man who was going to have more influence on the distilling of the music than anybody else in its entire history, placidly telling me that he was in the process of mutilating the most sublime instrumental tone I ever heard, and talking about it in the same way that he might have discussed wearing a different kind of hat.

The conversation died completely for maybe half a minute while I digested this, or tried to, and then I asked him what his plans were, whether he intended sticking with Curry or perhaps trying his luck in surroundings that might offer him a little more scope.

I'd expected at least a glimmer of discontent in his answer, some small hint of restiveness, but again, nothing, and this time my hair really rose. He made some vague remark about New York, a new co-operative band, but it was obviously a straight lie, prompted by what was left of his vanity. He didn't really want to try his luck in New York, or anywhere else. It was impos-

sible to imagine a more ludicrous candidate for revolution, but there he was; a man who honestly seemed to think that he'd found his slot and was staying in it as long as he could, thickening up his tone the way they'd told him to and glad of the chance to commit such a crime.

We reached where he was staying, and I stopped the car, wondering what the hell was going on. Although I still had no inkling that I was in any way essential to the pattern of events, I did have the feeling at that point that to let him go without trying to work on him in some way, soften him up a little, would be a mistake. So, on the spur of the moment, as he was getting out of the car, I asked him if he'd like to come on over here for a drink.

He didn't dither too much this time. I'd more or less established my credentials by then, and the place he was booked into was a drab, unwelcoming hole. He said thanks, sat down again, and we headed back into town.

His relief at my invitation had been pretty obvious, and I began to get a bit more of the picture. He was twenty-six years old, a professional musician for ten of these, but despite that he was still a small-town boy from Oklahoma, still painfully shy, and the fact that his head had gradually filled with ideas and sounds like nobody else's had proved to be no asset in his present employment. It must have been an almost traumatic experience in some ways, after painfully building himself a minor reputation in territory bands; the chance of playing with a name band on the skids when Curry found himself stuck for a tenor in midtour, the reactions of the older, relatively established musicians, gradually corroding what little confidence he'd ever had, until finally this; a small, confused, tired man, gratefully snapping up the stale crumbs that they threw his way.

It was murder, pure and simple. But somewhere along the way I knew that he was going to hear the Sam Lacey band, and that was to be the turning point. I sweated with relief when I remembered that, knowing it for a solid fact that had been entered in the history books a long, long time before I was even born, something that, no matter what was said and done prior to the event, had actually happened.

Feeling better, I asked him if he'd heard the Lacey band, and he said he hadn't. He'd met Lacey, though, had gigged with him a few times around Scranton, but he didn't know anything about him getting his own group together.

It was right then when it hit me, and I still don't really know why. It was as though I'd turned a page in an until then incomprehensible story and suddenly found myself looking at the key to the whole thing, the piece of the puzzle around which everything else fitted and without which none of what was happening right then would have made any sense at all; my actual trip back to this time, the two days in Kansas City, when I'd visited the Blackjack Club, our meeting that evening, my choice of "profession"; all of them slipping smoothly into place and making beautiful sense, without a seam showing anywhere.

What had happened up until then had shaken me, but this was something else again. It frightened me then and it frightens me now, because it's confirmed a suspicion that I've had all my life and which I've deliberately avoided thinking about too much, for the simple reason that I didn't want to run the risk of convincing myself that it really was so. But it's happened, and there's no going back. In short, what it means is that free will is just an expression, a myth founded on vanity and wishful thinking; that every single mote in the universe is committed to exist in time and space only according to the specification. The interaction of time that they talked about at the transfer center is even more of an involved fact than they perhaps dream, and my mind is still blundering along after the concept, unable to get more than an occasional and all too brief grip on it. Dear Jesus—every step that I take around this room, every movement that I've ever made, every syllable that I'm saying right now; all of it indelibly printed on the circuit, each inflection a response that it's impossible to break or even bend, just a little.

Where did I get to? Fetched him back here, right. I sat him down and poured drinks and gradually got him to open up about himself, prompting him every time he started to slow down and crawl back into his shell. It's on thread, and it'll make an interesting exercise in sifting fact from fiction when I get around to working on it. He was a pretty pathetic character in a lot of ways at that point, but I can't honestly say that I spent a lot of time feeling sorry for him. After all, how do you feel pity for a god that you know is standing on the threshold of his kingdom? If he'd been given the choice, I don't think he would have hesitated for a minute in choosing the way that he was destined to go, and I doubt that there are many people who

would really want to trade long-lived anonymity for that kind of glory, however brief.

We drank and talked for about half an hour, and then I went over to my suitcase and fooled around, making it look as though I had the recorder in there instead of my jacket pocket. I dug out the thread with the Lacey band on it, changed it with the one I'd been using during the evening, and then showed it to him. I told him it was something I'd been working on for a while, an experimental model, but I hadn't been able to iron out a few bugs just yet so that it would be marketable. I stuck it between us on the carpet, switched on, and then sat back, confidently waiting for the big awakening.

It didn't take long for it to dawn on me that his reactions were hardly those of a man who was at long last seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. I hadn't expected him to leap to his feet shouting "Eureka!" anything like that, but all I was getting was guarded approval, completely in character with what had gone before. He drank and tapped his foot, and every so often he would smile a little and say that this or that was OK. He did criticize the tenor player—he said he thought he was a little busy for that kind of outfit—but even this came out as a kind of apology, as though he thought I might bounce back at him for having the nerve to put down somebody that I personally might think was pretty good.

Again, I couldn't believe it. I sat there, staring at him, my piece of history shriveling like a deceptively bulging paper bag that had been holding nothing but air after all. The situation had degenerated into pure nightmare this time. There might have been the faintest shadow of wistfulness somewhere in his eyes, but it didn't disturb the other things that I saw there. He was still small, still frightened; too smart to take any real notice of siren songs like the one he was hearing then, too battered by experience to consider venturing from his small corner to add his own voice to it.

After a while, there was a knock on the door. It was the manager, asking me to cut the noise down in response to a complaint from the room underneath. I apologized, and when he'd gone I switched off the machine and sat down again, feeling like the biggest damn fool in all creation.

It seemed to be a total impasse. I thought that I'd stumbled across the real facts as opposed to the inevitable distortions of historic records, but now it looked as though I'd

simply jumped to the wrong conclusions, probably steered there by some childishly vain part of my subconscious. But the records had been wrong, anyway. He'd heard Lacey now, and if he was all fired up to race off to Kansas City, he certainly had me fooled. It's always been common belief, supposedly backed by his own testimony, that he'd heard the band on the radio and straightaway wired them, offering Lacey his services. But the moment of encounter had come and gone, and he was still the same vaguely shifty nonentity that he'd been before; liking what he'd heard, that had been obvious enough, but showing not the slightest sign that he'd been stirred sufficiently to even consider leaving Curry of his own volition.

He hadn't been fired, that was pretty certain. There's an interview that Curry gave to *Downbeat* magazine in the nineteen-forties, where he confirmed that Turnhill had walked out on the band during a tour, this tour. So *something* had yanked him up out of his rut and set him running, but whatever it was it wasn't Lacey's music. There was another ingredient that hadn't shown itself yet, lurking somewhere just along the way; something so potent that it had reached right down through the fear and shattered confidence and ignited what was buried somewhere there underneath it all. And then I got it, my second and conclusive flash of realization, and my immediate reaction was "My God, I can't possibly do it."

The reason for this was simple enough. I've broken a cardinal rule laid down by the transfer people, and at that moment the fear of possible resulting restrictions being placed on the rest of my program if it was found out was all that concerned me. But gradually I began to get it in proportion, because it was obvious that this was going to be the only possible way to stir him from the awful apathy that was pinning him down. And again, I saw that this was further evidence that the transfer people still don't really appreciate what they're tampering with. The rule itself is clear and on the face of it perfectly reasonable and logical, but only because the workings of time still aren't understood and probably never will be completely. When they say that apart from essential equipment absolutely nothing originating further along the time-line must be taken back, their reasoning is just plain wrong. The rule is pointless, because any such action and its results have already happened. The pattern

is set, and if some lunatic, in a misguided attempt to benefit humanity long before it's due, is going to bring back the formula for curing cancer a hundred years before it's found, then it's simply not going to work. It couldn't. Something would be bound to stop it, even if the ingredients for peridu-cium were available now, which I guess they are; lab equipment that hasn't been invented yet, or maybe something even more obvious. But whatever it was, the line would break down somehow, because everything has its place in the sequence, and there it stays.

I'm starting to ramble again. Walk and concentrate, that's all I must do right now.

My cancer cure was on thread, tucked away at the bottom of my suitcase, but this one was on schedule, I knew it. My reasons for compiling it and bringing it along had been simple enough, or so I'd thought at the time. By putting the absolute cream on one spool, the very best of the music that had ever been issued commercially, I felt that I was taking along the equivalent of a favorite book, one that you can pick up and reread any time you feel the need for something familiar in an alien place. But now I knew the real reason, and I almost laughed out loud at the sheer contrary poetry of it.

The visit of the hotel manager had shaken him quite a bit. There'd been no one at the desk when we'd come in; so I'd helped myself to my key, and although I'd instinctively had the sense to hold the conversation in the doorway so that he hadn't been seen, the simple fact of his being there at all, a Negro in a white man's hotel room late at night, the setting for a disturbance even as minor as the one we'd made, had stirred him to a kind of fear that only people of his time and circumstance could really understand.

Thanks to my prolonged silence, he was on his feet and muttering that he had to go by the time I'd more or less sorted out my own confusion. I poured him another drink and said there was just one more thing I wanted him to hear, get his opinion on. I kept the conversation going while I dug out the spool, saying that I'd picked it up on a K.C. waveband on a recent trip and thought it pretty fine, but didn't have any idea who it could be. Maybe he'd know. He fidgeted and sneaked glances at his watch and the door, but he obviously didn't want to cause offense by beating it out of here in too much of a hurry. I reset the spool, taking the tone control right back so that the sound would be a little muddy

and, I hoped, more authentic, put the recorder on the dresser this time, turned the volume down a little, and switched on.

It got him, almost from the first bar; not hooking him completely, but enough to stop his dithering around, as though he'd had most of his motor reflexes switched off. It's a track that I've probably played more than any other and it's never failed to electrify me, but the circumstances then were magnifying its power to a pitch that it had never reached before. Lacey's opening solo, the simplest and probably the most effective one he ever recorded, with that filigree of single notes in the fifth and sixth bars and the final bump he gives to the chord in the tenth; in a way, it was hitting me as hard as it was hitting him. And when the tenor came in with that sublime descending figure, laying it across the twelfth bar and then pushing into the second chorus, it was as though he'd suddenly been kicked in the solar plexus.

He bent at the knees and sank back onto his chair again, leaning forward the whole time. He looked almost sick, jaw hanging, sweat showing around his nose and mouth. His feet stayed still to start with, but then they began to move; gently, barely lifting off the floor, but he could no more have kept them still than he could have flown. It was the moment of revelation, all right; a kind of aural surgery that was showing him his own piece of genius underneath all the muck that had accumulated around it and stifled it to near-extinction.

My own feelings at this juncture were pretty mixed, and they still are. "Willie's Blues" was the finest thing he ever committed to record, but I couldn't help remembering that it had been his last recording, too, made when he must have been a pretty sick man. To be his savior, that was fine. But what would have happened if I hadn't been? Would he have lived longer? Would he have ever gotten started on his notorious overindulgence in just about every single thing that it doesn't pay to overindulge in, after diving straight into the deep end of the pool that he'd been scared to even dip his toe in all those years? He might have married, raised a family, got out of the music business altogether; found a less demanding slot for himself somewhere, a life where he might even have been happy in the low-keyed way that most people are at least a part of the time.

I'm just being maudlin about this, I guess. He could just as easily have been knocked down by a car or got himself killed in

the war, anything at all, really. No, I didn't exactly do him a complete disservice, and it's on the record that he'll live the time he has left right up to the hilt, something that only happens to the handful who find themselves deified in that special way.

The music finished, and he sat there like a statue for maybe ten, fifteen seconds without speaking. Then he asked me who it was, in a gritty kind of whisper, like someone struggling to surface from a deep trance. I said I didn't know. Static, I improbably lied, had cut in just as it had finished, and in fiddling around with the station dial I'd lost it for good.

He believed me, I suppose, because he had no real choice. He got up and began pacing around, not speaking, his face still dull with shock. I said I guessed that Kansas City was throwing up a lot of good new people just then and that it must have been a tough job keeping up with everything that was happening there and elsewhere. He said he guessed so, but he hadn't really heard me. He was still listening to the music inside his head, struggling to accept the fact of something that even in his wildest dreams he'd never believed could really exist outside his own imagination.

He paced some more, and then he wandered to the door, saying that he had to go, that they had a long haul the next day and he'd better snatch some sleep before getting back on the road. I don't recall him saying anything while I drove him back to his rooming house, just thanks and so long when we got there, and then he went inside without looking back.

And that's about it. God, I'm beat. As far as he's concerned it's been like opening the door to another world, his personal vision of Paradise. For me, it's different, and simply knowing the finish while I went through all those incredible preliminaries hasn't made it the kind of experience that I'm in any hurry to go through again.

And how about the sixty-four billion dollar paradox? Without me, would it have happened at all? Any of it, or any of the things that developed from it? Or would he have stayed right where he was, fouling up his tone until the sounds and shapes were buried for good and all, turning him into a walking graveyard for some of the most sublime music to grace a part of history that wasn't exactly notable for either sublimity or grace?

Go to bed, Palmer. Even if I had a clear head I wouldn't be able to dent that one, and right now I couldn't think my way through the alphabet.

Good night, Willie baby. The shadows aren't going to be around again for quite a while now, and you've got songs to sing. Sweet dreams, and I'll be seeing you.

Saturday, February 6th, 1937
Room 31, Brooks Hotel, Kansas City

It turns out that the great night was cold and misty, and I mean cold. This room has a radiator that makes a hell of a lot of noise but works well enough in its own way; so I'm getting this down while I thaw out.

It *was* a great night, and not just because of its historical significance. The thread I made has done it even less than justice, I'm sure, but I guess that was inevitable. The place was jammed to the doors; great atmosphere, but it meant that the music suffered, and I was only able to pick them up from one side of the room, right next to a particularly vocal bunch of customers who'll have come over loud and clear, I imagine.

But what a band it is now! It could be argued that they're still rough—collectively, that is—but that would be finicking for its own sake. It was incredible, like the pulse of the universe. And Willie—

I'm going to be hearing him under better conditions than this, of course, but even through all that damned extraneous racket there was something special there tonight. It was the sheer poise of the man and what he could produce in a hectic setup like that which impressed me so much. Smoke and noise all around him, people yelling in his face, and it was as if he really was off in a world of his own. He had to be, I guess, or else it just wouldn't have been possible to create that kind of subtly intricate and beautifully controlled line. I don't know whether or not he was high, or even if he's really on anything much yet, but I suppose it was likely, with Clay there and so much hinging on the way he reacted.

But how he *swings!* Across the beat, behind it, juggling it like a man with six hands and all the time in the world; the most beautiful natural of them all, now that he's found his way. It makes me sweat, just thinking about it. A touch of parental pride, no doubt.

The Blackjack hasn't changed since my first visit, despite the increase in business. It's the usual kind of trap; longish and thin, and with a crowd in there you can't really hear much of what's happening if you're at the back of the room. The band was still jammed up in the top left-hand corner, and if there'd been more than nine of them the

management would have had to chop a piece out of the bar, something I don't imagine they'd have seriously considered doing.

I got as close as I could, up against the side wall about four or five yards away, and with just enough clearance to get some kind of fix on them. It was an exhausting business, though, and I've got a pretty good idea now what it must feel like to be a sardine caught up in an earthquake, if such a thing is conceivable. I didn't actually see Clay until I was leaving, but the bunch hovering around the table nearest to the band and laughing too much and too loud gave me a pretty good idea of where he was.

Most of the time, of course, I kept my eye on Willie. It's hard to believe that this poker-faced, totally assured man is only five months older than he was at the time of our first meeting; difficult, in fact, to believe that he's the same person at all. The telescoping of the two occasions has underlined it, of course, but even so it's an almost ludicrous transformation. He generates the kind of detached arrogance that only a few people ever really achieve; complete and utter self-confidence, the kind that's impregnable because its foundations are built on a virtually unshakable belief in what they can do. In actual physique he's hardly altered at all, but I have the impression of someone twice the size he was. It's Lacey's band, and in a deceptively self-effacing way he has the aura of a leader about him, but the spotlight is almost exclusively reserved for Willie, and already he's pretty close to being infallible, the personification of all that's good and right in the music.

The evening ended a little differently to what I'd expected. It certainly hadn't been part of my plans to actually meet up with him again, not at this stage, but that's what happened. The session had finished, and Clay, all smiles, was buttonholing Willie as I squeezed my way out; so it came as something of a surprise when I found him grabbing my arm, fifty yards or so away from the club.

He told me he'd spotted me in the crowd just before the close, and asked what I was doing in K.C. I said hello, and told him I'd been passing through on my way from Baltimore and had made a point of looking in at the Blackjack because I'd heard from a local acquaintance that he was playing there with Lacey, news, I said, that had come as something of a surprise after what he'd said at our first meeting.

It didn't rattle him one bit. He just gave me an appraising kind of look, and then he told me about Leonard Clay showing up from New York that evening and how he was back there at the club talking business with Lacey at that moment; so I'd been right there on the spot when the big break had come. I congratulated him, saying that it had obviously been a smart move whichever way you looked at it, his leaving Curry, and that in that case I'd certainly be seeing him again soon as the company I worked for had just opened a New York office, and I hoped to fix things so that I spent a fair amount of my time there.

He said that would be fine, and then he asked the question that had been his sole reason for following me outside and which had kept him standing there in a thin band-jacket in a temperature that couldn't have been too many degrees above zero, the way it felt to me. He asked if I'd ever got a lead on the tenor player on that last thing I'd played him, the one that I said I'd picked up on a Kansas City station.

I said I hadn't, acted surprised, and asked him if he'd drawn a blank, too. He stared at me for a moment before answering, the only outward trace of uncertainty that he showed, and then he said, no, he hadn't been able to locate him, either. But what he couldn't understand, he said, was that nobody else in the region had even heard of anyone who was playing along remotely similar lines to his own, let alone the caliber of musician that he'd described to knowledgeable locals. Was I sure it had been a K.C. station, or could it have been coming from somewhere else?

I felt I had to let him off the hook a little at this point. I could see that the situation had reached a stage where its plausibility was rubbing a little thin, and some sort of explanation, at least a possibility, was needed to bolster it up again. He'd already given me a suitable opening, but I didn't want to appear too eager to go along with the first suggestion that was made; so I said I was pretty sure it had been local, although it had been too long ago to swear with absolute certainty. Maybe, I suggested, it had been some kid who'd managed to get himself a little air time before he got knocked down by a truck, something like that.

He wouldn't buy that one at all. He said, no, that kind of playing was too mature for any kid to have produced, and besides, if anything like that had happened it would have been talked about. What we'd

heard, he said, had been music with a lot of years and experience behind it; adult music, that consisted of a lot more than just technical virtuosity and an individual sound. I said that in that case it must have come from somewhere else, that I must have misread the dial setting at the time, which in turn had probably been the reason why I hadn't been able to relocate the station. In all probability, I said, he'd be turning up in New York one of these days if he hadn't already; so they'd be almost bound to meet eventually.

He said he supposed so. He was shivering quite a lot by then; so I said I had to go, that I'd look him up in New York when I was there and maybe we could have a drink sometime. He said OK, we shook hands, and I came back here, not too sorry that the conversation was over. Quite apart from finding myself in a situation where I'd had to come up with some convincing lies at extremely short notice, something that I'm not normally too good at, this whole business is beginning to make me uneasy, almost squeamish in a sense. The effect of that business in Florence, when he was virtually shown his own soul—how did it really hit him? It must have been a pretty cataclysmic encounter, stirring up echoes of a very special kind; from the future instead of the past, showing him not just what might have been, but what in fact *could* be.

It's a relief to know that he's at least going to hang onto his sanity, because no crazy man could have cut "Willie's Blues." But although this whole thing is out of my hands and I'm only going through motions that have been delegated to me, I'm still having trouble with my conscience. Stupid, really.

Every time I start thinking like this I get a headache, and it isn't to be wondered at. At least it can't be as bad as the one they're suffering from at the transfer center, ever since I turned in my report on my first trip. I must say they took it quite well, considering that it came from a layman, but it's obviously given them a lot of rethinking to do.

My headache isn't going to improve if I stick by this radiator. It sounds as though there's somebody inside the damned thing, trying to break out with a hammer. Home, James, and I hope the climate there is the same as it was when I left, 70° in the shade.

Wednesday, May 12th, 1937
Room 104, Spicer's Hotel,
New York

One more for the books, and

this one qualified for the battle of the century, all five solid hours of it. Just watching and listening is exhausting enough, but that's the amazing thing. They thrive on it; not exactly unaided in a lot of cases, admittedly, but the level of coherence rarely seems to suffer.

Pitman got back from France today, and it was obvious from the way he walked into the place—Cummings' Playhouse—that he was out to get Willie. The word must have got around, because the crowd was a little different; quite a lot of older faces, and some familiar ones that hadn't been seen too much lately, I gathered; Petey Small, Jay Collins, Edgar Brown, all the people that Willie's blown down during the last month or so.

I have to hand it to Pitman, though, it was hardly a no-contest. Like a lot of other people there, I imagined that his European trip would have slowed him down a little, especially after playing with some of those rhythm sections, but he's a genuine giant, no question about it. The stuff comes steaming out in a torrent, and his control is really quite superlative, but the sheer power that he puts into it was what undid him tonight. It was bull versus panther; direct energy spending itself against subtlety and fantastically judged pacing, and I guess the result was inevitable. Five hours of blowing the way Pitman did would have decimated a mastodon, and to be fair he hasn't had any real competition to speak of for the past year or so.

But even if he'd been physically up to it, I doubt that it would have ended any other way. The ragged edges were really beginning to show towards the finish—"Blue Lou" especially—and there's an element of frustration about his last few choruses. He played the last hour with his coat off and his shirt open right down to his trousers. and it was like a wet rag. Even his pants were soaked. By the time he quit, he was drained, blown out.

I can't find words for Willie right now. I've never really believed that it was possible for any of these people to actually produce the kind of sustained virtuoso performances that they were credited with, but at this particular point in time I have to accept that, on occasions at least, it did happen. He genuinely does seem to have no limits; not only that, his sense of form and continuity is absolutely incredible at this stage. One thing is becoming very obvious: "Willie's Blues" might have been the greatest thing he ever put on a commercial recording, but in

fact he matched it time and again, and at far greater length.

He's still showing no real signs of wear, although the stories about his private doings are pretty hair-raising, some of those I've heard. I had a drink with him afterwards, and I was amazed at his condition. He wasn't even sweating, and Pitman had gone out of there like a wet sponge. Every time we meet I expect him to mention "the other guy," but he never does. But he's still waiting for him, I can tell. He has that look in his eye, the one that says that there's still one more mountain out there somewhere, and he won't really feel that he's made it until he stuck right up there at the top with no company in sight. Pitman was a milestone, but to Willie he's still well short of the peak, and after tonight I guess he won't be alone in thinking that.

Thus are the mighty fallen, for the time being, at least. But Pitman's lucky, if only he knew it. Another twenty-six years for him, another fifteen months for Willie. It's a strange, hard world.

Tuesday, June 14th, 1938
Room 88, Spicer's Hotel,
New York

A complication of a kind; not drastic, but it's something that I've been expecting for a long time, and I'm only surprised it didn't happen sooner.

He played a radio date with the band last night, and I met him afterwards in a bar called Sutton's, a place where musicians generally go after broadcasts. He had a cold, and he asked if he could come over here to put his feet up for an hour or so instead of going on to play somewhere. He said his throat was pretty sore, but he didn't want to go home just then.

Right off I had an idea of what he was really after, but there would have been no point in stalling. We came back here and had a couple of drinks and talked, and after a while he asked if I still had the gadget, as he called it.

I said that I didn't, that I was still having trouble with it and I'd left it back in Baltimore until I had a chance to really work on it, get it right before I tried to market it again. He didn't like that. He stared at me, the kind of stare that suspects all kinds of nameless subterfuge but can't make up its mind exactly what it could be. I tried to get the conversation going again, but he didn't want to talk. He hadn't even wanted my company, and now that he'd failed to get what he came for he wasn't going through any more pretense that

he did. He finished his drink without speaking, and said he was going. I said I hoped the cold would clear up soon, and that I'd be seeing him. He replied in just about as noncommittal a way as it's possible to without actually spitting in your eye, and went.

As I say, it wasn't too much of a surprise. He's been very withdrawn with me on my last couple of trips, and it isn't hard to see why. He thinks of me now as the one person who'll be able to say who's the original and who's the plagiarist when "the other guy" does eventually turn up! What a tangle. I suppose it's almost tragic in its way, but I must admit that it has its funny side as well.

It would be interesting to know just how closely he actually connects me with what's been happening to him, though. The fact of our always meeting at the really crucial times and in such widely spaced locales must have got him speculating by now, surely. He suspects something, but whether or not it goes beyond some kind of sleight-of-ear, for God only knows what bizarre purpose, I can't imagine. He certainly doesn't think I'm his fairy godmother, anyway.

Bad joke. Less than four weeks to go now. It's too bad about his cold, which is genuine enough. If he knew how precious time was to him, he'd have spent the whole evening blowing somewhere instead of wasting it on an abortive business like his call here.

For the thousandth time I'm almost tempted to shoot the works and tell him. Almost, but not quite. I stretched the rules once, but only because there was no other way. He's on his own, and that's how it'll have to stay.

Friday, September 10th, 2078
Lewiston, Maine

It won't ever be possible to record this in a truly objective way, but I can't put it off forever. I suppose I've been hanging onto the hope that time would at least blunt the edges before I tackled it, but if it does then it's an imperceptibly slow process. It's been over two months now, and the details are still as sharp and clear as if it was only yesterday. Maybe this will help to clear my thinking, which is still very confused. It may even help me to find answers of a kind, although this seems less than a possibility at the moment.

I'll try to keep off the why's and wherefore's this time, too. I still can't make up my mind just how much sense my speculations on the first couple of threads made, if they made any at all. This thing is so complex that it only empha-

sizes our inability to understand even our own time and place, if such an expression means anything any more. If only—

I'm getting bogged down already. Straight facts, inasfar as that's going to be possible.

He still didn't look really sick during the last few days, not even particularly tired. I'd expected to find him showing real signs, but even after the marathon at the Joyland, when he took on all the big guns and shot them to pieces like a flock of sitting quail, he looked pretty much as he had ever since K.C.; a little more pouchy under the eyes, maybe, but nothing more. But I was still of two minds how to wind things up. The actual product of the Consort session was on record, which was all that really counted, and the idea of actually witnessing his collapse had always been distasteful, really nothing more than an exercise in morbid curiosity that I'd already pretty well decided I could do without.

In the event, I went to West 44th Street on the evening of July 8th, stationed myself in a hamburger joint opposite the studios, and waited there; a half-hearted gesture of farewell, I admit, but one that I felt compelled to make. On the aural evidence he'd been in complete control at the session, and yet he'd died almost immediately afterwards. So it was curiosity that pulled me there; really, a partial resurgence of the unhealthy inquisitiveness that I'd rejected earlier, but which I found didn't repel me in quite the same way in its modified form.

It was a long wait, almost an hour and a half. I got a couple of mildly curious looks from the counterman after a while, but every so often I bought a fresh coffee and carried on checking the traffic across the way while it gradually got dark outside. Cee Hall arrived first and unloaded his kit from a cab, and Charlie Williams turned up with his bass ten minutes or so afterwards. Willie and Lacey and a couple of girls arrived twenty minutes later, sharing a cab.

It wasn't really possible to gauge his complexion in that light, but if anything he looked more relaxed and cheerful than he normally did as he paid off the cab while Lacey and the girls went on inside. He had good reason to be happy, I suppose; his first recordings under his own name, with just about the best supporting talent available, and he must have been particularly pleased about getting Lacey to duck his Swingtone contract and play the date. He always was the perfect accompanist for him, and they never jelled better

than on the two tracks that they were going to cut that night.

I sat there for a minute or two after he'd gone into the studio, wondering about it, but more relieved at that moment than curious. It really did look as though it was going to be as clean as could be reasonably expected, which at least meant that there would be no gradual enfeebling decline to be borne and fretted over, the kind of ending that had no place in the existence of a comet as bright as he had been.

Cheered, in a bleak kind of way, I left and walked back to the hotel; a longish pull, but I wanted to take a final look at the town by night, because this was the place and the time that for me summed up most of the attractions of the era. But my principal feeling when I finally walked in off the street was one of relief. I'd suddenly become obsessed with the idea that I had no right to be there at all; that despite the facts of history the setting and myself were two different kinds of incompatible shadow, intermingling only to the extent that oil and water do; touching at the surface, but nothing more. It's a contradiction, I know, but it was very real to me just then, and it has at least a suggestion of logic on its side. Different kinds of experience and thought and feeling, all born of the circumstances of their time; how can such things ever do more than just show their skins to the stranger? The concept of such a fusion has an unreal quality about it, one that I somehow think I shall never be able to accept completely.

I settled my account with the usual excuse that I'd probably have to leave at very short notice in the morning, and went up to my room. I got rid of excess clothing down the laundry chute at the end of the corridor, packed, and put on the transfer suit.

As I checked and set the power packs on the suit and my case, I had this nagging thought that the thing was finishing all wrong, that a flat ending simply didn't fit in with the spirit of what had happened during the past few weeks. The dying fall is the right close to lots of encounters, but not this one, I was sure. It had been excitement and discovery right from the start, the kind of experience that demanded a statement summarizing all that was best in what I'd found.

I dug out the spool with "Willie's Blues" on it, fitted it, and ran it back to the program number, put the recorder back in the case and switched to play. Then I activated both power packs, sat down on the edge of the bed, and listened.

It's music that I've heard God alone knows how many times, and it's one of the few pieces that has stood the test of frequent repetition, the only real test as far as I'm concerned. I must know every note, almost every nuance of what's played, and yet it always sounds as though it's being created right at the very moment of my listening to it. It's a genuine miracle of a kind, dovetailed so perfectly that there isn't a note or a beat that isn't an essential part of its structure. But it was sad music then, despite its buoyancy, because it was a requiem, shadowed by the things I knew about its creation.

I had my head lowered; so I didn't see the door open as they were working through the final bars. But then the latch clicked shut, and I looked up, and there he was, leaning against it and staring at me with wide, blank eyes. And then the music cut out, and the only sound in the room was his breathing; a ragged, grating, desperate noise that filled my head and choked off my own breath as if my heart had suddenly been grabbed by a huge, cold hand.

I can't for the life of me imagine what he thought or felt at that God-awful moment. I can list my own reactions easily enough—disbelief, fear, and then pity and remorse when the truth of what must have happened and was happening right then hit me. But as for him, I simply don't know, and his reading of the implications of what he saw is going to remain a mystery that I have no particular desire to solve.

How was it possible for me to have been so completely blind for so long? I've always thought of myself as a reasonably intelligent person, but intelligence is the ability to think past the surface of events and see the reality that lies underneath. I hadn't done this at all. I'd been too flattered by the importance of my role as catalyst to see that I wasn't simply showing him the road to tragically short-lived glory and enduring legend. In effect, what I'd done was implant something in his mind; something that, when the time came for him to create that particular pattern of sound, would strike through him with all the awful force of an internal explosion, devastating his reason and triggering the physical disaster that his abuse of his body had already paved the way for.

The clues had all been there. The detailed reports of his death told how he'd recovered from the initial attack sufficiently to leave the building on his own, brushing aside all offers of help, and had finally

been found in an alley an hour or so later, where he'd apparently collapsed for the last time. Remembering these things now was like the revelatory moments I'd experienced when we first met, the sudden flashes of insight that showed the puzzle neatly interlocked, a beautifully tooled exercise in cause and effect. But until that moment I'd seen no link, no unifying thread to tie them all together and show the whole picture. Like any scavenger, or dumb, brainless bird, I'd seen only the bright side of the coin, all the time blind to the shadows on its reverse. But even when it isn't out in plain view, the balancing factor is never really absent, always there, always visible to eyes with thought and imagination behind them.

He was already far gone when he came into the room; wet, greying face, weak movements that he couldn't co-ordinate properly any more. Whatever it was he'd expected to find there, it couldn't have been what was actually waiting for him; a man dressed in a black, skintight suit, with a control-box of some kind strapped to his chest; a crazy, unbelievable portrait in smoke that was fading even as he watched it. It was like kicking a man who's already three quarters of the way over a cliff edge, providing the final impetus to his fall. As I moved away, with everything breaking up into the extraordinary grained effect that occurs during the period of actual transfer, dots and flecks that dance and multiply and hurt your eyes, I saw him reach out a hand; whether to try and grab me and hold me there or to push me away I've never been able to decide.

He was posed like that, shrinking and dying and dissolving into a billion pieces when the blackout pulled me under.

He didn't actually die right then, not in the true physical sense. He must have had just enough strength left to scramble away from the nightmare, only to find himself in a dark, grimy place where he fell again and escaped from it forever. But even without my unwitting final assistance, it would still have happened, not right then, but soon. He was sick, possibly without his even knowing it, and the way he pushed himself, squeezing life for all it was worth, meant that there was only one possible ending.

But what was he thinking while he ran? Even if he'd had the time or the strength to consider it rationally, did he have the kind of imagination that could link the pieces together and accept a proposition as farfetched as the truth

would have seemed in his own time? I can't imagine that he would, or could. I think he died frightened and confused, after suddenly finding himself in the middle of a situation that defied everything he knew and understood, destroyed by an assault on his mind and body that it had been impossible for him to anticipate or defend himself against. Poor Willie. It must have been a terrible moment for him there in the recording studio, when time suddenly overlapped and he found himself transmitting his contribution to the echoes that had stayed in his memory ever since his one hearing of them; recognizing them, knowing them to be impossible, but committed to their completion; sounds that came from the past but were being made in the present, originating there.

I killed him. I can say it now without actually flinching, externally at least; so perhaps I've found what I was hoping to find when I started this personally prescribed therapy. The images are still there, but I think they've lost a little of their sharpness now. I suppose it means that I've learned to accept what I've known all along but, because of my final role, just couldn't bring myself to acknowledge; that the pattern was set and that my own part in it was an immutable fact that all the cursing and railing and struggling in the world wouldn't have canceled out. It's a familiar pattern, too, on reflection—not exactly exclusive to people who hear unique sounds or possess unique vision or who mold language to suit the singular rhythms that fill their minds, but they seem to fit it more easily than most. But how many of them, I wonder, have been directed by people like myself—wide-eyed, narrow-visioned trippers who blunder through time like clumsy children, totally unaware of the real effect that they are having on people and history? I daren't think of some of the possible implications, not even now.

But why *me?* Perhaps it's a kind of compensation for a total lack of creative talent, history's method of making the achievement a collective thing in an oblique and cruel kind of way. I'll just have to learn to be grateful for having been the chosen recipient of this particular apple with the shiny skin and the big dark worm inside, ignore the sugar content in my feelings and applaud the monstrous humor of the powers of creation with the wry detachment that I guess it deserves.

Not easy, but necessary, now. And I have a feeling it's something we're all going to have to learn.

A new Ben Jolson story, in which the Chameleon Corps operative poses as a guerrilla muralist. A collection of Jolson stories will be published this Spring by Macmillan under the title THE CHAMELEON CORPS AND OTHER SHAPE-CHANGERS.

Masterpiece

by RON GOULART

THE BLACK MAN POINTED at the enormous ear and asked, "Do you think you can do something like that?"

"If I have to," said Ben Jolson.

The black Booker McCrystal had converted one of his tin desk chairs into a temporary easel. He gestured at the large color print, this time pointing with one sharp elbow. "Here, you understand, we see only one section of a larger, terribly larger, painting," he said. "The original mural is, of course, over in Zombada Territory and is frighteningly large and covers endless wall space in a home for retired commandos. It's entitled 'Poetry Crushed under the Boot of Radical Liberalism.' "

"That's poetry's ear there?"

The Political Espionage Office agent said, "I assume so." He flicked through the half dozen other color prints behind the one of the painted ear. "I don't seem to have any other ears. Yes, this looks like a poetic ear, now I study it. Rather delicate and receptive. Because of the terribly enormous scale Despojo used for this mural you can't actually see the boot of Radical Liberalism in the same segment with the ear." He stood back from the mural fragment. "Actually I imagine the ear should be tilted over this way if it's being stepped on. Well, Lieutenant Jolson, you'll be sleep-briefed on the esthetics, as well as the politics, of your assignment."

Jolson, a tall lanky man in his early thirties, was slouched in an aluminum butterfly chair. "Is Despojo the man PEO wants impersonated?"

McCrystal was tilting the ear to different angles. "This is all rather like some horribly

immense jigsaw puzzle." He turned and grinned a straight thin grin at Jolson. "Yes, we have Simeon Despojo in a detention station here in Ordem Territory. We've agreed to exchange him with the government of Zombada Territory. When I say we, Lieutenant, I mean the government of Ordem. Since I work for the government of Barnum, I'm here on Tarragon purely in an advisory capacity." He grinned again. "I presume the Chameleon Corps is dreadfully exciting and stimulating."

"Then Despojo is one of the six men who are supposed to be exchanged for the kidnaped Ordem Secretary of Propaganda?"

"Have you heard about the kidnaping way back on our home planet of Barnum? I sometimes feel this planet of Tarragon is frighteningly remote." The black PEO agent took a color blow-up of a fist from the bunch propped on the chair. "Despojo does quite frighteningly nice work for a weekend painter."

"What's he do the rest of the time?"

"He's a terrorist," explained the Political Espionage man. "That's the reason he was captured and detained in the first place. Despojo is horrendously active in a Zombada group calling itself the Border Killers Phalanx. His specialty is strangling. You'll be sleep-briefed on all that."

"When was Despojo caught?"

"The Ordem Border Army brought him in three months ago."

Jolson asked, "Once I'm Despojo and back in Zombada, what does the Political Espionage Office want done?"

Carrying the fist painting up under his arm, the black espionage man walked back to his copper desk and sat on its edge. He placed the mural fragment on top of the desk. "This is a frighteningly good photo to get from a concealed camera."

"The assignment?"

McCrystal smiled. "I can never quite get used to the idea, which I find monstrously stimulating, that you Chameleon Corps agents can actually change your appearance at will. Imagine a lean, lithe and alarmingly handsome fellow like yourself turning into this big shaggy bear of a muralist Despojo."

"When I do," said Jolson, "what does PEO want done over in Zombada?"

"Yes, we must get down to business, mustn't we?" McCrystal's grin left his face. "Despojo is in the midst of doing another ominously gigantic mural in Zombada. His

capture halted that. The title is. . .where's that memo?. . . Yes, 'The Nymph of State-Oriented Reasoning Leading the Free Citizen's Mind Out of the Morass of Radical Tendencies.' "

"Do you have pictures of that one?"

"No, that's too difficult. But doesn't it sound alarmingly interesting?" said McCrystal. "I imagine you'd like to have an advance peek, since you'll be finishing it up. Well, PEO can sleep-brief you on the technique, and after that you'll have to extemporize."

"Where is the work in progress?"

"Ah, now we move closer to the nub of the assignment and the reason we haven't been able to get a look at this particular mural," grinned the PEO agent. "Despojo is doing his mural in Zombada's State Psych Center in the capital city. We're very anxious to have someone get inside that place."

"Why?"

"Because their Psych Center also quarters Zombada's Unconventional Weaponry Wing."

"And they're working on something Ordem Territory wants to find out about."

"Not only Ordem, but us. Barnum," explained the black man. "You see, while our planet Barnum supervises, unobtrusively, the activities of all the planets in the Barnum System, we don't always initiate all the advances made. The Political Espionage Office has learned that a Dr. Reisberson of the Unconventional Weaponry staff is working on something monstrously important."

"What?"

"We don't know exactly," said McCrystal. "Which is why we're jumping at this frighteningly fortunate opportunity to plant somebody over there."

"That's it then?"

"Yes. Impersonate Simeon Despojo. Work on his unfinished masterpiece in the Psych Center and find out Dr. Reisberson's secret."

"Do you have any more details?"

McCrystal was feeling things atop his desk. "I presume sleep-briefing will give you everything else, all the minutiae. Oh, I do have a photo of Mrs. Despojo you might want to see. Here it is."

"His mother?"

"No, his wife." McCrystal held up a tri-op photo portrait of a tall willowy blonde girl of twenty-five. "I suppose you'll have to perform certain domestic functions, such as sleeping with the girl. Quite astoundingly pretty, I'd say. Monstrously devoted to Despojo, too, so far as we can determine."

Jolson reached out and took

the photo. "Wives are harder to fool, with an impersonation."

"That's why I told the Chameleon Corps to send one of its horribly best men." He smiled a thin straight smile at Jolson. "I'm sure you'll succeed."

"I'll do my horrible best," replied Jolson.

Jolson scratched his crotch and then his beard. He wrinkled his broad flat nose and frowned at the pale green interior of the air bus. He was a burly man now, round shouldered and hairy. "Mother of groats," he said, rubbing his big knobby hands together. "I'm impatient to be home and back at work."

Across the aisle a small thin young man with long straight hair sighed and smiled. The air bus had been in flight less than an hour and wouldn't land in the Zombada capital for another two. "If we're lucky, the Territorial Security Office won't take more than half a day to debrief us."

"Mother of pigs," said Jolson. "I'm anxious to see Nana, too." He had the ability to change shape at will, to impersonate anyone. He was now a replica of the guerrilla muralist. The young man across the way would be Aldo D'Arcy, Public Relations Director for the Border Killers Phalanx and one of the five other prisoners being exchanged along with Despojo. Nana was Despojo's blonde willowy wife.

The slim D'Arcy hopped over and took the seat next to Jolson. "You know what your trouble is, Simeon?"

"Mother of waterfowls," said Jolson. "My only trouble is I'm three long months behind on my masterpiece at the Psych Center."

"Your trouble is you're too sentimental," said D'Arcy. "It shows in your work as well as in your life style. For instance, your recent mural 'Aspirations of Youth Impaled on the Barricades of Dogmatic Liberalism' is really much too sweet. Especially for an artwork gracing the Juvenile Interrogation Headquarters."

"Mother of groats," said Jolson and shrugged.

"You're also one of the most sentimental stranglers and muggers I've ever worked with."

"Mother of oxen, Aldo. Being an artist and a killer isn't the easiest thing."

D'Arcy continued, "You're especially too sentimental where Nana is concerned. Why do you take her back after what she's done?"

Jolson scratched his beard once again. "In me you have a big talent coupled with a big heart." The Political Espionage Office hadn't mentioned anything that Nana had done.

"Since I know how sentimental you are about her, I haven't killed Nana yet."

Jolson scowled and took hold of one of D'Arcy's thin arms. "Mother of bees, you'd kill my Nana."

"I haven't yet," replied D'Arcy. "Though, in my opinion, she's a threat to the Border Killers Phalanx. Even you, with your sentimental artist's eye, must see that, Simeon."

"How a threat?"

D'Arcy held up a small hand. "It's not that she's sleeping with Esalensky, since he's trustworthy. It's not even that she's sleeping with MacQuarrie, because he's believed to be harmless. Agreed?"

Esalensky was the Zombada Territory's Assistant Minister of Finance. Jolson didn't know who MacQuarrie was. PEO's briefing hadn't mentioned that Despojo's wife was having affairs with them. "Perhaps," said Jolson.

"I might even," resumed D'Arcy, "allow her affairs with Cassiday, Tatman and de Lanza. Since they're all in the service and hence dependable."

Jolson grunted.

"But I think she's going too far in sleeping with Walden Thurman."

"Walden Thurman, too?"

"Forgive me, Simeon. I thought you knew."

"I knew about Esalensky, MacQuarrie, Cassiday and de Lanza," replied Jolson. "I suspected Tatman. Walden Thurman, though, the man who is second in command of the State Assassination Office... That's a real surprise, Aldo. Mother of groats."

D'Arcy said, "You know well that Thurman would like to see the Border Killers reorganized, Simeon."

"Yes, yes," said Jolson, who had never heard that before.

"He'd like to be rid of both of us," said the small commando. "Our return by way of this exchange must gall him. In his position, all Thurman has to do is obtain an Assassination Certificate from his chief, and then he can arrange the death of anyone he pleases. As yet, I don't think he'd dare try to use one on us." D'Arcy leaned back, letting his little blue eyes click shut. "I didn't get a chance to tell you this before I was captured, Simeon. The stew was poisoned. Definitely."

Jolson said, "The stew was poisoned?"

Eyes still closed, D'Arcy nodded. "A rare off-planet poison that would have left little trace. Your death would have looked like just another case of enervating black fungus, and no one would have been the wiser."

"Enervating black fungus," repeated Jolson.

"There's no use trying to prove it." D'Arcy looked now at him. "She'd only claim it was airborne contamination."

"Yes, she probably would."

"See, Simeon, you still feel sentimental toward Nana. One look at your big mushy artisan's face tells me that."

"Love is strange."

D'Arcy continued, "Now about the pudding."

"The pudding?"

"Yes, the pudding wasn't poisoned," said D'Arcy. "You were wise to bring it in for testing. It did smell as funny as the stew, but it wasn't poisoned."

"Ah," replied Jolson.

"But the meat pie was." The small commando stood. "I'll go back to my seat and nap. May I give you a bit of advice, Simeon?"

"Mother of wildlife, do."

"Don't let Nana pack your lunches any more. Eat out." He smiled. "We'll have a meeting tomorrow or the next day and plan new terror. In the meantime, reflect on what I have told you."

"I will," Jolson assured him.

The long naked blonde said, "Well, that wasn't as bad as usual."

"Mother of owls." Jolson rolled over and sat up in the round bed. "You've been married to Despojo for five years and still you doubt his capabilities?"

"Six years," corrected Nana.

"Whatever." Jolson began dressing.

The lovely Nana brought her bare knees up and hugged them. "You're a great muralist, Simeon. Be satisfied with that."

"I must cut our reunion short, Nana. After the debriefing last night I was told I must drop all other activities and finish my mural at the Psych Center as soon as possible."

"I know," said Despojo's wife. "Be sure and take along the lunch I packed for you."

"I don't need it, Nana."

"But, Sim, it's all your favorite dishes. Stew, meat pie and pudding."

"Maybe I could take a little pudding."

The lovely naked blonde Nana leaped suddenly off the bed, ran and grabbed Jolson. "Oh, Sim. Why do you put up with me? You great bear-like craftsman, you know I am unfaithful to you."

Jolson tossled her long fair hair. "Big love overlooks small mistakes."

Nana hugged him tighter. "And you can forgive Esalensky, MacQuarrie, Cassiday, Tatman, Lickty and de Lanza?"

"Lickty? How'd he get on the list?"

"I forgot to tell you," said Nana. "He dropped by our house twice while you were imprisoned." She reached up and tugged at his beard. "I wept often when I thought of you there in prison in Ordem, you great caged lion."

"Lickty?"

"Yes, Lickty."

"Why did the head of the State Critics Circle want to talk to me?" asked Jolson. He made a growling noise. "Is there some criticism of my new mural? Mother of stallions, Lickty himself approved the rough sketches and the color comps of 'The Nymph of State-Oriented Reasoning Leading the Free Citizen's Mind Out of the Morass of Radical Tendencies.' "

Nana tugged randomly at his bristly beard. "That's not the title any more, Sim. Lickty says it is now called 'The Goddess of State Discipline Pulling the Mind of Free Man Out of the Swamp of Pseudo-Liberalistic Thought.' "

Jolson moved out of her embrace and slammed a big fist into his big palm. "Mother of groats, who dares to tamper with the title of Despojo's newest masterpiece?"

"Lickty."

Jolson snorted. "I'm going to the Psych Center now. At once."

"Wait, take your lunch."

"I'll eat in the center cafeteria." Jolson stalked from the bedroom.

Eight wide doors cut into the mural. Jolson came through one, carrying a container of canned paints and with a roll of sketches in his hip pocket. The unfinished painting covered three walls of the huge octagonal reception area room. Near another door a large nearwood desk was placed. At the moment two sergeants in the blue and gold uniform of the Zombada Territorial Police had a thin red-haired young man bent back over the desk. The young man's bare feet were kicking at the admissions android. "Mother of groats, Despojo cannot work with all this going on," shouted Jolson as he dropped his paint, brushes and sketches on the floor.

The android, who was finished all over in a single shade of dull silver, came quietly across to Jolson. "Welcome back to the State Psych Center, Mr. Despojo," he said. "We'll have this poet committed in a moment."

"Which poet is that?"

"Hard to tell with him upside down, I grant you," said the admissions android. "He's Jordan N. Gordon, one of our leading light-industry poets. Until he went mad."

"I didn't hear, being in

prison." Jolson knelt and began prying up paint can lids with a square-tip knife.

"Oh, he only went mad this morning," explained the silvered android. "Lickty decided."

"Lickty?"

"The State Critics Circle read Gordon's latest sonnet in the *Light Industry Review* and concluded he was dangerously insane."

"The sonnet is a difficult form." Jolson looked up at the mural and then at the rough color sketches he'd found in Despojo's studio. "Mother of baboons, who has been tampering with my masterpiece?"

The red-headed poet broke loose from the two sergeants and somersaulted to the floor. He spun and shoved the light desk into them, then ran for one of the eight doors. The door he chose opened a moment before he reached it, and three burly literary critics came up a ramp from the center cafeteria. "Ah, the mad poet," remarked one of them.

Jordan N. Gordon stopped and backed. A critic tackled him. The poet kicked him in the face with both bare feet and was up and free again. He ran for another of the eight doors.

"Oh, too bad," observed the admissions android. "That's the door to the Unconventional Weaponry Wing, and it is always locked."

The red-haired poet yanked at the door handle, and the door did not give. By then the two policemen and the three critics had caught up with him.

A fourth critic appeared from the cafeteria ramp now. A slight, wrinkled man of fifty. He smiled at Jolson, watched the struggle for a moment, then walked over to Jolson. This was a man he'd been briefed on. Morris Lickty of the State Critics Circle.

"Turn this way, Simeon, and look straight at me," said Lickty.

"Mother of sucklings, what sort of welcome back is this?"

Lickty's lips pursed and he nodded slowly. "Your eyes, especially the left, have a definitely slightly crazed appearance. Stick out your tongue."

"My tongue's not crazed."

"Stick it out."

"There."

"Ugh. What a fat shaggy tongue," said Lickty. "Put it away, Simeon." He hid his small wrinkled hands behind him and tilted his little head to study the completed sections of the giant mural. He repeated the word "Ugh" and walked off, to exit through another door.

"Oh, too bad," said the android.

"What?"

"Obviously Lickty sees dangerous tendencies in your

mural," observed the android. "Being fond of you and your work, he hopes you will be able to repaint the offensive portions of this work as soon as possible. Otherwise, he might decide you're unstable or unhinged. Which might mean a spell of time spent up on our Political Neurotics floor."

"Mother of groats," replied Jolson and started up a work ladder.

Jolson woke up flat on his back with a fat lady sitting on his chest.

"Feeling better?" asked the fat lady, who was wearing a nurse's tunic and smoking a soybean cigar.

"Mother of groats, why are you perched on Despojo?"

"You were having a fit in your sleep, Fuzzy." She swung off him and dropped to the floor.

"Who gave you permission to walk into Despojo's private home and jump upon him?"

The fat nurse chuckled and exhaled soy smoke. "You're in the goofy bin, Fuzzy. Get your bearings. This is the Political Neurotics section of the Psych Center. The order to pick you up came in last night. You, and some art materials to help while away the hours, have been here since the middle of last evening."

Jolson noticed the buff-colored metal walls and the grey water-filled plastic cot he was lying on. "Mother of hyenas," he said, rubbing his right arm. "Someone has administered drugs to Despojo's painting limb."

"All legal," answered the nurse, puffing. "Lickty took another gander at your mural last night and danced a jig. Angry. More liberalistic than ever, he thought the work. Figured you were cuckoo in the upstairs and ought to be tossed into the wacky ward here for a while." She patted his bare chest. "You're a virile-looking rascal, I'll say that for you. I'm a fool for a man with an abundance of body hair. You've even got it coming out of your ears."

"My wife?"

"Is fine and sends her love." The fat nurse pointed with her cigar toward a table next to Jolson's cot. "She even packed you a lunch to bring to the loony farm."

"My attorney?"

"He's over in the next ward. Turns out he's goofy, too," the fat nurse told him. "Cheer up. You've got a swell roommate. Whistling Andy Burden."

"Who?"

"You must have heard of Whistling Andy Burden, the wandering environmental folk singer. He went wacky about a week ago."

Jolson turned and saw a lanky blond man stretched out on another cot near the far wall. "He's awfully quiet for a roving minstrel."

"We have to keep him dopey at night. Otherwise, it's nothing but whistling and complaining till the wee hours. Daytimes he's not bad. Even fun, as you'll see. Breakfast in half an hour. Unless you want to dig into that nice food package your wife fixed."

"No, Despojo will wait for the official breakfast." The nurse opened the room door with her fingers in a whorl lock. Jolson heard it lock itself after she left. He watched the sleeping Whistling Andy for a moment, then lay back and watched the low buff ceiling.

Whistling Andy Burden said, "Fortunately they allow me to keep my 12-string guitar."

Jolson, sitting in a rubberoid chair and finishing his soy lunch, said, "Despojo has heard enough environmental folk songs for now."

The lean narrow Whistling Andy said, "I'll just do you this one medley of garbage-disposal ballads and call it quits, Simeon."

Jolson grunted and rubbed soy crumbs out of his beard.

Whistling Andy said, "This one is called *New Sewage in the River Talking and Whistling Blues.* The *new* in the title refers not to the sewage but to the fact that this is a *new* version of this particular song. If you've heard it on my popular cassette version or seen me do it on the Uncle Pollution Boys & Girls Hour, you'll notice right off this *new* version has more pungency in its lyrics. Not to mention more whistling." Whistling Andy ran a calloused thumb down across the strings. "Doc Reisberson told me he thought this version was a good hundred percent more effective. Oh, I woke up this morning (tweet) with sewage running (tweet tweet) by my. . ."

"Dr. Reisberson?" interrupted Jolson. "Dr. Reisberson of the Unconventional Weaponry Wing?"

". . .Door (tweet). Oh, I woke up (tweetly tweet) this. . .Well, yes, that's him, Simeon. Don't go breaking in that way. I mean to say, I wouldn't jiggle your elbow whilst you were painting some epic figure. . . .this morning (tweet) with lots of sewage running (tweet) by my. . ."

"How did Reisberson hear the new version?"

". . .Door (tweet). Well, Simeon, it turns out he's an admirer of mine and is aware I'm no crazier than he is and that this is a trumped up situation I'm in."

"And so?"

"He invites me down to the Unconventional Weaponry Wing afternoons, and I render him a few tunes," said Whistling Andy. "Uninterrupted. So I told (tweet) my loving mama (tweetly tweet), mama, we can't live here (tweet) no. . ."

"Exactly where is this wing in relation to us?"

". . .More (tweet). About directly under us. Leastwise, so it seems. A couple of Doc Reisberson's smart young technicians come and get me every afternoon right after Meditation. There's garbage (tweet) in the river, mama, garbage (tweetly tweet) in the deep blue. . ."

"Each afternoon?"

". . .Sea (tweet). 'Cept Sunday. They got the poor guy working on some fiendish new weapon six days a week down there," said Whistling Andy. "So he more than welcomes a spell of folk singing, uninterrupted folk singing. Oh, there's garbage in the river, sweet mama (tweet tweet), garbage in. . ."

"What exactly is Reisberson working on?"

". . .The deep blue sea (tweetly tweetly tweet). I'm not right sure but I think it's got something to do with hay fever."

"Hay fever?"

"Doc's figuring a way to give every man on the enemy side a severe and unremovable case of permanent hay fever," said the lean folk singer. "Now if you've ever had a touch of hay fever in the spring or in the fall—or if you've heard, as most folks have since it's sold eight million TV wall tapes, my *Sneezing and Crying at the Height of the Pollen Season Blues*—you know that permanent and uncurable hay fever will disrupt an army and be no fun. One of these days (tweet tweet), pretty mama, there's going to (tweet tweetly tweet) be garbage all over. . ."

"He's working on this hay fever-producing weapon right under us, huh?" Jolson rocked once in his chair and poked a big thumb floorward.

". . .Me (tweet). Yes, far as I know. He keeps all his notes in a little tin box."

"How do you know that?"

"Wellsir, because once he was locking the notes and such up when I was brought in for my daily concert of, uninterrupted, music. Doc Reisberson made a little joke about how he couldn't even trust his favorite performer these days. Well, there was (tweet) so much garbage, it come floating (tweetly tweet). . ."

"Small tin box?"

". . .Through the door (tweet)." Whistling Andy let go of the neck of his guitar and held his hands about twelve

inches apart. "About this size, Simeon. A tin box about this size. There was so much garbage, mama, it (tweet) was coming. . ."

"Black box?"

"(Tweetly tweet) through the door. No, grey. Sort of slate grey. He keeps it on a glass shelf right above his desk. Well, I tried (tweet tweet) to get off running, but there. . ."

The locked door of the room unlocked and the fat nurse entered, smoking a fresh soy cigar. "Hello, Fuzzy. Hello, Whistler," she said. "Andy, put aside your lyre and come along."

"What to?"

"This is your day for vibra therapy."

"So it is." Whistling Andy leaned his guitar against the wall. "I'll finish up the song for you later, Simeon. If you'd care to hear it."

"I would," said Jolson. "I'd even like to learn it."

The voice of the Meditation leader was coming out of a speaker grid under his cot. Jolson massaged his bearded cheeks and frowned at the door. The meditation period was nearly over and Whistling Andy hadn't returned. Jolson had figured it would be simple to take the folk singer's place on this afternoon's visit to Dr. Reisberson.

The Meditation leader's tin voice cut off in the middle of a metaphor, and the room door unlocked and opened. It was not Whistling Andy Burden. It was a tall middle-aged man, wearing a doctor's smock and carrying a groatskin medical bag. He had blond hair and an upturned mustache. "How are you today, Simeon?"

The door closed behind him and Jolson replied, "As well as can be expected, doctor."

The blond man laughed. "Ha, fooled you. So much for your artist's eye and keen perceptions. It's just as I told Nana." He yanked off his wig and half his mustache.

Jolson sat up on his cot. "Walden Thurman?" This face he remembered from his Political Espionage Office briefing. Thurman of the State Assassins.

"There." Thurman got the rest of his false mustache pulled free. "You misjudge Nana, Simeon."

"Oh, so?"

"She may be unfaithful," said the assassin, "but, let me tell you, she won't divorce you."

"That's a comfort."

"Therefore the only way to free her to marry me is to get rid of you," said Thurman, who was nearly bald without his blond wig. "And look here." He produced a vellum document from the medical bag.

Jolson took the stiff paper and scanned it. "Official Kill Certificate. . .authorizes bearer to assassinate party listed below. . .Simeon Despojo, crazed artist. . .Admit bearer anywhere to carry out this official mission. . .see back for other conditions. Well."

"You don't have to read the rest of it, Simeon," smiled Thurman. "Suffice it to say, I'm going to do you in, officially and legally, and thereafter take Nana for my own."

"You can have Nana right now." Jolson swung his legs over the side of the cot.

"Of course I can. As soon as you're dead and gone," said Thurman, stroking the groatskin of the bag. "I've been trying to get the State to okay a certificate on you for months. Ever since the moment I met Nana and fell head over heels in love. Finally, Simeon, you played into my hands. Painting that godawful liberalistic mural down there."

"You touched it up," said Jolson, "to make it look that way, didn't you? While I was gone and before Lickty had a good look."

Thurman nodded. "Let's get on."

Jolson abruptly elongated his left leg until his foot smashed into Thurman's knee hard. The assassin jumped, dropping his bag. Jolson retracted his leg and hit the floor. He was across the room in a second, catching up Whistling Andy's guitar by the neck.

"Come now, Simeon." Thurman's balance was almost regained.

Jolson swung the guitar like an ax and it thunked into Thurman's nearly bald head. The assassin faltered and Jolson swung again. The man sighed and fell across the water-filled cot.

Fifteen minutes later Jolson was in the corridor. He looked exactly like Walden Thurman now, down to the fingerprints he used to open the whorl lock. He carried the groatskin bag and the kill certificate. The document was altered now, with some of Despojo's art materials, and contained the name of Dr. Reisberson as victim. That would get him safely in and out of the Unconventional Weaponry Wing.

Booker McCrystal pushed the grey tin box to the edge of his desk. "Let our scientifically trained PEO people fool with what's in there," he said, with a thin grin. "I have a sinus headache as it is." He bobbed his head twice at Jolson. "So you used this Walden Thurman's person and an altered

certificate to penetrate the weaponry section of that place? Then you overpowered Dr. Reisberson, snatched his secret files on the new weapon, assumed his appearance and walked blissfully out of the Zombada State Psych Center?"

Jolson was himself again, slouched and lean. "More or less."

"I imagine you had all sorts of other monstrously exciting adventures getting yourself back safely to us in Ordem," said the black Political Espionage agent. "I wish I wasn't so awesomely busy and could take the time to listen. Let me say simply that PEO considers your mission a complete success."

Jolson got up. "There are still a lot of people locked up in that Psych Center for no good reason."

McCrystal grinned. "I assume so. It's horribly unsettling to think about. Still, Lieutenant, that wasn't your job." He patted the tin box. "Getting this was your job. Now you can return home to Barnum, knowing you've succeeded once again. Perhaps someday you'll be asked to do something more about the horribly depressing conditions in Zombada. Let's hope so, shall we?"

Jolson left the office without replying.

COMING SOON. . . .

Next month, in fact, is an unusually inventive and engrossing short novel called SON OF THE MORNING by Phyllis Gotlieb. Also the story by Fred Pohl that was promised for this issue but squeezed out.

Checking our manuscript inventory these days is proving to be a pleasant interlude. We have on hand stories by Harlan Ellison, Philip Jose Farmer, Ron Goulart, Howard Fast, Zenna Henderson . . . Shall we go on? OK. . . . Fritz Leiber, Harry Harrison, Larry Niven, Poul Anderson. There's more, but we'll stop dropping names. Why not drop yours in the coupon on page 132, and we'll make sure that you don't miss anything.

Our April 1963 issue carried a story by Gertrude Friedberg called "The Short and Happy Death of George Frumkin." In recent years we've been forced to dig in against a barrage of stories about transplants and artificial organs, and, secure in our hole, our mind kept going back to that Friedberg story as one of the best and earliest treatments of that theme. The story below is only the second we've seen from Mrs. Friedberg, and it is also something special.

For Whom the Girl Waits

by GERTRUDE FRIEDBERG

FEAR FEAR LIKE A BLOW in the dark. When he knew at last who the stranger was, he felt a terror beyond all nightmare.

It was in the teachers' lounge in Wilson High that he first saw him. First? The word made him tremble. When had the dark cracked apart to let him fall into this heartquake? He sat very still, lest the jigsawed bits that he was trying to assemble fall again into incoherence.

Early this morning, when he got the call from Wilson High, he almost turned it down. He woke with a fuzzy feeling that many paths offered, all equally promising. He would stay home, perhaps call somebody for lunch. To have such alternatives was why he taught as a substitute instead of a regular, supplementing a small inherited income.

"Mr. Demperi," said the voice on the phone, "are you available?"

Before he had a chance to say no, the voice added, "This is Wilson High," and his pulse quickened.

A little red car waited outside Wilson High. He had subbed there a lot during the winter, for a different teacher each time. Late one afternoon, at dismissal time, he came outside to see it sitting there. A little red car, a four-seater.

He wondered what it was doing there. Teachers' cars were parked in a lot behind the school. The curb was usually clear. He walked slowly, looking at it idly.

There was a woman in it, sitting in the driver's seat. He saw her legs, twined silkily, the edge of a green shirt, fingers tapping the wheel, reflectively rather than impatiently. He could not see her face. As he

watched, a bare arm reached toward the doorhandle and the curb-side door opened, as if for him. He stopped, then moved quickly aside as a man brushed past him and got into the empty seat. A moment later the car sped away.

The next time he was at Wilson High the car was there again. He saw it as soon as he came out at the top of the stoop. Almost immediately the man came from behind him, leaped the steps two at a time and ran to the little red car. Again the arm reached to open the car door. The man got in and the car tore off with a sudden roaring acceleration.

Each time he was at Wilson High it was the same. The waiting car. The reaching arm. A thin white hand with a blue vein down the back of it.

Once he ran out early enough to get ahead of the car, turned back as if he had forgotten something, and saw her face, a sharp thin nose, a wide mouth, a dimple which made her look contemptuous, and long reddish-brown hair, worn straight and hanging, in the cynical fashion of the time. Would the dimple dot a smile if he were to get into the car beside her?

She turned toward him, smiling, the dimple put to adequate use. He stared at her, then saw that the man had just arrived, slid close to her and tossed his briefcase into the back seat. The man said something to her that made her laugh. Then she looked down, frowning, as the car leaped forward. Laugh to frown was so quick as to make one of them, laugh or frown, false.

Demperi saw the man next day on the fifth floor. He followed him down the hall, noting the upward tilt of his head and the rather marked plunge of his shoulders from side to side in the rhythm of his pace.

He followed him whenever he saw him. He stood close beside him in an elevator, stealing glances at his attendance book, a stenciled exam, a paperback, and at his neat black hair, his sallow face and heavy black brows. They were about the same height. He made out a name on the attendance book: Anthony Koppinger. The books were history books.

He tried his own black hair parted on the right like Koppinger's. It made him look melancholy.

On patrol duty in the students' cafeteria he was surprised to find Koppinger in charge.

"I'm Demperi, subbing for Mrs. Steel," he said. "What am I supposed to do here?"

Koppinger's eyes, like those of a jail guard, roamed over the

tables. He spoke out of the side of his mouth without looking at Demperi.

"Just walk up and down and keep your eye on them. Call me if there's any trouble."

The great hall was filled with students. Demperi moved along slowly, enjoying their relaxation.

Behind him rose the voices of dispute. He turned.

"Just a minute now. What's the trouble here?"

A black boy sat, eating chocolate cake with exaggerated calm. Another stood behind him with a tray piled with food.

"That's my place and he knows it," said the boy standing.

He was little, and very black, with a wide handsome forehead, now raised in a frenzy of outrage.

"Is this your place?" Demperi asked the boy who sat.

"That's right." He continued eating, his face calm.

"He's crazy!" burst out the smaller boy. "They give me this place right from the first day."

"Whose place is it?" Demperi asked the boys.

A boy in a green jacket spoke up. "That child mixed up. This here *his* place," he said, indicating the boy in possession.

Just then Koppinger came up. Demperi explained. "And this boy," he said, indicating the one in the green jacket, "says it's right the way it is now."

Koppinger looked at him.

"You going to believe any of *them?*"

The boys grew still, stopped eating and looked down.

"None of them ever said a true word since the day they were born. Bunch of liars, every one of them. Can't you see it in their eyes?"

Demperi, struck mute with shock, looked at the boy in the green jacket. His eyes were red, a dull hot glow spreading through his dark skin. In the cafeteria hubbub most of the boys, busy talking to each other, had not heard.

"You two come with me," said Koppinger to the two disputants. "And Demperi, would you get up at the front door? Nobody comes in or out from now till the bell."

He walked off, his shoulders dipping exaggeratedly from left to right, the two boys shuffling behind him.

Demperi put his hand on the shoulder of the boy with the green jacket.

"Don't pay any attention to him. Of course I believe you. Come on, eat your lunch. Don't let him spoil it for you."

The boy looked up at him quickly, then down, shrugged Demperi's hand from his

shoulder. He took up his fork again, his face closed with distrust. Demperi went to take up his post at the front door.

This day he got a good look at the girl in the red car. He punched out early, walked down the block until he was ahead of the car, then took up a position against the school fence, waiting, as if for a friend. He took his time staring at her.

She didn't seem to notice him. She tapped the car wheel. She stared ahead of her, unseeing. She looked at her watch. She opened her pocketbook, then shut it frowning. She sighed. With impatience? Anguish? Her eyes, made up to look large and passionate, were childish and frightened.

Koppinger was on the other side of the car.

"Shove over. I'll drive."

She slid to the curb-side seat, murmuring something. The slim white hand reached back to release her long red-brown hair, captive against the car seat. The quick wide smile was there again for the man beside her. The car ripped away, but not before he had a chance to see again the anxious frown that replaced the smile as soon as Koppinger's eyes settled on the road ahead.

Until this morning, that was the last time he had been at Wilson High. It was over a month now. Almost every morning the phone rang. But it was always some other school. Once he thought he saw the little red car parked in front of another school, but when he hurried toward it, he saw it was different and contained two women, a baby and a dog.

He went to William Harrison High. He went to Fawcett High. He went to East District High, to Milbrook High and others.

Yes, he was available for Wilson High. He was there early.

"Mr. Demperi." The secretary remembered him. "It's Mr. Schwartz's program. In mathematics."

She handed him a program card. He took the keys off hook 72 and slid his forefinger through the ring. Strange, how the possession of Mr. Schwartz's keys made him feel that he was indeed Mr. Schwartz. Mr. Schwartz was not here to take his keys. But he, Demperi, would carry the keys all day and own their power.

U-turn to the elevator. He prided himself on knowing his way around the great number of schools he served.

On the fifth floor Mrs. Ralsmeyer smiled at him.

"Who are you today, Mr. Demperi?"

"Mr. Schwartz. Math."

He stopped at the math office. The chairman was a thin man with staring blue eyes.

"Good morning," said Demperi. "I'm Mr. Schwartz today."

"Yes. He telephoned in the lesson pages for you."

Two geometry classes, three algebra. He liked to teach and was a good teacher. The students liked him.

"Come," he said, leaning over his desk, "if the sides are equal, then. . . ."

He knew what puzzled them before they could say themselves what it was. He walked up and down the aisles, reaching out toward them, being at the same time himself, confident with answers, and they, baffled and struggling.

"You're getting it. Now just square both sides."

He felt himself in the student's place, flaring with new enlightenment.

When he asked a question, he looked deep into the student's eyes, the answer tendered eagerly at the tip of his thought, reached for by the other with antennae of yearning. The mutter of words came at last, and their eyes fell away from each other with relief and satisfaction. Separateness was restored.

Boys, girls, black, white, stupid, clever, hostile, timid, annoying, docile—he was one with any one of them. Anyone? Yes, anyone at all. That's the way he was. Anyone? Koppinger?

He had a moment to think about it after the bell rang, while he waited for the next class to assemble.

Koppinger's eyes were cold. Could he reach out to Koppinger? He tried to feel Koppinger's being as his own. It took enormous effort. He felt an intolerable tension, which was split by the next ring of the bell.

After three classes, lunch. In the washroom he brushed the chalk dust off his suit and looked in the mirror to straighten his tie and shirt collar. Within the frame of long black sideburns, his sallow face looked ascetic, his green eyes distant.

He was alone in the washroom. He took out a small pocket mirror and held it so that his reflection was reflected. Now he could see himself as if he were somebody else. As if he were Mr. Schwartz. He was other, outside, looking, with a mild fascination, at a stranger. He raised his head higher and thrust his bottom lip forward to pull his neck taut.

The door of the washroom was opening. He put the mirror back in his pocket.

In the teachers' cafeteria he stood in line to load his tray, silent and alone.

"Mr. Koppinger," said a woman's voice behind him.

He recognized the librarian.

She had hunched shoulders and a rosy face.

"Oh, it's you. I thought you were Mr. Koppinger. From the back, I could have sworn you were Mr. Koppinger."

"Isn't he in school today?"

She was looking around the room as if she had not heard him. He was afraid she wouldn't answer. He wouldn't repeat the question.

"I don't know. I suppose so. Who are you today?"

"Mr. Schwartz. In math."

They carried their trays to a table where a young girl teacher sat alone.

"You're per diem," said the girl.

She wore her hair in an elderly fashion, looped low over her ears into a barrette. It did not go with her pert, freckle-dusted face and a chin so small you expected her to lisp. Had he seen her before? He had an agreeable feeling about her, edged with caution.

"My name is Christine and I teach chemistry," she said, as if he had asked her.

"Louis Demperi."

"I know. We've exchanged names before."

"That's what I do all week. Exchange names. The past five days I've been five different people in five different schools with five different subjects."

"Ha!" said the girl. "That would throw me. Like yesterday the express broke down and was shunted onto the local track. I didn't know where I was for hours. Aren't you confused?"

"Confused?"

His eyes grew misty. He stared past her, looking for Koppinger. "Not more than everyone else."

"I have a theory about substitutes," said the librarian.

He hated women who had theories. He looked away so that she would not elaborate.

"Do you like being a substitute?" asked Christine.

"Yes, I do. I like to teach. I like the students."

"Ah, but you don't have the satisfaction of continuity with them," said the librarian. "You walk out on them at the end of the day."

"That's just what I like. To have none of the responsibility. I borrow another person's classes for a brief and satisfactory relationship and then walk out. It suits me very well."

"I have to go," said Christine. "I have a class in a few minutes."

She had a quaint, appealing face, her eyes cast down like those of a modest child, and that small chin. In a moment she had gathered her books in a pile, popped some change into a suede bag slung over her shoulder, picked up her tray, and was gone.

She had barely touched her food. He was caught off guard by her sudden departure, full of unanswered questions. He could never leave one location for another so quickly. He had to check that he had everything—the Delaney book with the slotted cards for each student, his keys, his briefcase, perhaps a textbook. Then he had to look at the program once more to make sure who he was and where he had to be next.

His program sent him to patrol duty on the fourth floor. There was not much to do. The fourth floor was quiet. An occasional student with a pass on the way to the lavatory. A teacher pushing a cart loaded with books.

He found a window which faced the front street. The red car was not to be seen. She wouldn't be there yet. It was much too early.

On his way to his sixth period class he kept looking for Koppinger. . .if he could be sure Koppinger was in school, then he would have a reasonable chance of seeing her. Walking down the stairs, he thought he saw him, but when he caught up with the man, it was another teacher, somebody in secretarial studies.

"Who are you today?" asked the man.

"I'm Schmidt today."

He had often noticed how many look-alikes there were in the school. The payroll secretary was a heavy-bosomed, narrow-hipped woman with a round white face and black hair pinned in a bun. But so was the dean of girls and so was one of the biology teachers. He was always addressing one of them with a remark meant for one of the others and therefore incomprehensible. There were two small brown-suited men with thin sandy hair and three tall, heavy, bearded ones in florid shirts.

In the seventh period there was a test to give. He had nothing to do but sit at his desk and watch.

The sleepiness he had been fighting all day began to overwhelm him. Whenever his eyes threatened to close, he got up and walked around.

The bell rang. Yawning, he collected the papers, gently prying them away from students with last-minute corrections to scribble.

"How are you today?" asked the incoming teacher, possessing the desk with a quick scatter of papers.

"Schmidt, in math."

An afterimage of a sharp look brought him to a stop in the hall outside. Had the man said "who" or "how"? He looked back through the glass top of the door, but the teacher was writing on the board and

his expression was inscrutable.

One more period. Room 648 was on the floor just above. Today he would be sure to leave early. Perhaps he would have a chance to approach the car, to. . . .

Christine passed very close to him, going the other way. She leaned toward him, her face grave and tender.

"My name is Christine and I teach chemistry," she said. She waved, her small face lit with an aborted, sardonic greeting as if she might have said more and decided not to. He looked after her, wishing he had a moment. There was something he wanted to ask her.

The stairway wasn't where he expected it to be, but at the end of the hall there was an exit. He pushed open the door and started up.

It went up half a landing to a dead end, a locked steel-mesh door. He was wasting time. He was going to be late.

He raced down again, ran the length of the hall to the other end, then up the stairs. Room 648. His forehead was wet, his eyes staring with anxiety as he rushed into the room.

The students were already seated, quiet, waiting for him. A tall black student with a beard was sitting at his desk.

"OK," he said to the boy. "You can sit down in your own place now."

He slung his briefcase on the desk.

"I'm afraid you have it wrong," said the young man gently. "It's my class this period."

A thunderbolt of confusion. This was a teacher. His class. The students didn't laugh as they might have. They looked sorry for him.

"But. . .648. . .?"

He turned and took a couple of wild awkward steps to see the number on the door. 648.

"Let me see your program," said the other. "Who're you supposed to be today?"

He fumbled frantically for the program, all the while thinking desperately of another class sitting in another classroom waiting for a teacher.

"Schwartz. Here. See?"

They bent together over the program. He had not looked at it since his patrol duty, when he had taken a quick survey. There was another Schwartz at Hillside High. Had he mixed the two programs?

The teacher put his finger on the eighth period.

" 'Prep' right there. You have a free period."

He stared, unbelieving. It was unmistakable.

"Oh. I'm sorry."

He escaped without another word, his neck red. Fluttered with panic, he walked unseeing down the hall. Was it the right

program he had shown that fellow or an old one that he had forgotten to return to the desk? No, it was the right one, all right. The other man was a regular; he certainly knew his own class, his own room.

He stopped and rested his bag on a radiator to get the program out again. He couldn't find it. Had he left it in that room on the desk? Well, he didn't need it now. His eighth was free, and that was all he needed to know now.

At least no class of unattended students in some dream room watched the door for a teacher who never arrived. Wasn't there a lounge in this school? On the third floor, just at the stairwell.

As soon as he was on the third floor, he knew it was wrong. On the fifth, then, next to the cafeteria. Or was this the school that had it next to the auditorium?

He stood still, corridors and rooms and schools sifting through his memory in an uncontrolled blur. He went up a flight of stairs to the boys' gym, came down again, went down the hall, vagueness and uncertainty flooding him. Down on the elevator, around to the other wing, up again. On the seventh floor he turned right with a sudden intuition, and a door said, TEACHERS' LOUNGE.

The lounge was well filled. At a huge central table several teachers were totaling attendance records, marking papers, or preparing lessons. Demperi moved slowly into the room, looking for a friendly perch. He half closed his eyes and moved his head purposefully this way and that as if searching for a friend whom he had arranged to meet.

A biology teacher whom he had once talked to during lunch was busy at the central table and did not look up. Miss Garcia, in speech, was talking and laughing with two other young women in the corner. On the couch three men were talking union politics.

Koppinger was not here. Was it his wife who waited for him in the little red car?

A woman, crocheting thick bulbous loops of purple wool looked at him.

"Is this the eighth period?" he asked smiling. He always smiled when he asked a question which might betray inexperience or loneliness.

"The eighth it is," she said. She had a blue ribbon in her hair and a little-girl voice, which she had neglected to revise when middle age overtook her.

He got out the mimeographed bell schedule to see when the period would end, forgot what it said, and got it out again.

"The eighth is a silly time to have a free period. Isn't it?" he asked. Nobody answered.

Ranged around the walls, several deep lounge chairs invited drowsy collapse. But first he sat tentatively on the edge of a chair near a bridge table. A man was smoking quietly, unexpectant. He looked at Demperi and barely dipped his head.

"What do you teach?" asked Demperi, looking away inattentively so that he would not be committed.

"I'm an aide."

"Oh."

He got up as if he had intended to from the first and walked to the window.

It was cloudy. If it rained, would she come? He stood with his right arm bent across the front of his body, his left elbow resting on the back of his right hand, his chin supported by his left thumb, his forefinger across his lips.

What did her frown mean, the frown which replaced that wide dimpled smile just as the little red car leaped off. Was it only a mannerism? Did it precede bad news she had to tell Koppinger? A wife's unhappy secret. The washing machine broke down or canned soup had gone up a few cents and she was afraid to tell him.

If he himself were Koppinger, would she have bad news for him, too? Would it be the same kind of bad news?

He found one of the large black leather chairs and dropped into it. The biology teacher was in the telephone booth. Miss Garcia was showing her friends how to apply eye-liner. On the big wall clock it was 2:28. He fell asleep.

So deep was his sleep that when he woke he could not remember at first where he was or what day it was. He must have slept a long time. He sat up.

The biology teacher was trying to get his dime back. The girls were sniffing at the eye-liner while Miss Garcia put her mirror back in her purse. The coy crocheter was adding a row of white to the purple. Unbelievably the clock said 2:30.

He could not shake off the feeling that he had been asleep a long, long time. The confusions of the earlier part of the day receded. He was calm, alert. In a little while the bell would ring for the end of the school day.

The door opened and another male teacher came in. Demperi looked at him briefly, then started checking through his bag to make sure he had no books he would have to return.

He glanced again at the newcomer, who was looking for somebody to talk to. It didn't

take much insight to recognize that hungry covert search. There was something slightly familiar about him.

"Is this the eighth period?" the man asked.

One of the women, the heavy one with the silly bow in her hair, said, "The eighth it is."

His voice was familiar, too, deeper than he would have expected from somebody as slight as that. He was probably a substitute also. He had that worried, fumbling look. Demperi watched him take out a bell schedule, look at it, put it in his brief bag, then get it out to look at it again. A substitute, all right.

He looked something like Dave, his brother. He was an awful lot like Dave. A little taller, perhaps.

Now he was looking at the clock. Pale face, anxious black eyes. Young. Quite young.

The man turned fully around and faced him.

Why, he could be a brother! For a moment he thought with amusement of the possibility that his father. . . .

A prickle of sweat started at the edge of his forehead. It was himself! That man was he, himself!

The clap of fear left him trembling, sitting on the edge of his seat, staring at. . .at himself, a thin tall man with anxious black eyes and sallow skin. That was his forehead! His mouth! His hands! That was his nervous smile!

"The eighth is a silly time to have a free period, isn't it?" said the man.

And that was his voice, a voice Demperi had never heard outside himself, rougher, less melodious than he had thought.

He dared not move, his heart pounded and choked him. He stared, eyes wide and burning.

Outside! He was outside! He could see himself! From the outside!

Gradually the fear faded and a swelling wonder took its place.

That was he! Just a man like any other, somebody who opened the door and came in. He recalled the moment, so long ago, when he stood outside the door about to open it and enter. At that moment he alone was real. All those inside the room did not exist.

Yet Demperi had been in this very room, existing with all its occupants, before the man had opened the door! The thought was numbing.

There he stood. Just anybody. Why had he said, "young"? He always felt older than others. Three-quarter face. Like that? His eyebrows projected! Profile. I? Myself? My very own self? His head was large! He had never known that.

And from the back! His shoulders looked vulnerable, one higher than the other. And look how he kept his feet pointing outward. And that? What was that now? That stretching of the neck in an odd convulsive manner. He did it before, when he first came in. He keeps doing that! Still, all in all, not a bad-looking young fellow.

Now he was sitting with that smoker at the bridge table.

"What do you teach?" "I'm an aide." "Oh."

That "oh" had seemed so innocuous at the time, just something he said, with no importance. Now it sounded like the bang of a shutting door. When the man turned his back to walk to the window, the face of the aide closed around the small humiliation. He put out his cigarette, slowly, his eyes cast down.

As for the man at the window, what was he thinking? How extraordinary not to know because he was outside, other. Look how he stands there with that funny resting of chin on hand and elbow in palm, as if he were intent on curling up into himself. It didn't look as comfortable as he knew it felt.

He was rapt with discovery. Oh, he couldn't get enough of him. He wanted to stand closer, endlessly surveying, wanted to peer over his shoulder, fly over him, circle constantly, follow him everywhere, forever. What an extraordinary opportunity this was.

There he goes, searching in his briefcase again. Looking for his program.

A monstrous thought occurred to him. Ask him the question! The question they asked all day! Ask him WHO ARE YOU TODAY? They would look directly at each other. Who are you today? He trembled. The man was turning his way. Now. Say it! He stood up and started across the room. He was just about to utter the awesome challenge when the man got up, took his brief bag and swung out of the room.

He was after him in a trice. There he went. Hurrying down the hall. He was going down to the office to replace the keys, hand in the program, and be all ready when the last bell rang. The small tasks would take three minutes, all told. He could have stayed up in the lounge reading until the bell. But he wanted to be ready in advance today. Demperi certainly knew why.

Flying down the stairs behind the man, Demperi could see the top of his head, the part lost in a zigzag, and felt a tender pity.

"I have a warm spot in my heart for that man," he thought.

In the office he watched him check the key numbers, then hang the keys on the appropriate hook, then take the keys off to look at them again, and hang them again.

The bell would ring in a few moments. Demperi ought to return his own program and keys.

His program. He had never found it the last time he looked for it. He started fumbling again through his briefcase. It wasn't there. He was mortified. They would have to make out another program for...What was the name?

He was tired. What was the name? Who was he today? He was....Oh, come on.

Keys. No, he was sure about that. He didn't have keys today. His teacher had not left them.

His teacher.... Today I am.... Oh, what was it? It was on the tip of his tongue. It began with a K....

A terrifying memory scattered his reason. If the man he saw come into the lounge was Demperi, then who was he himself now? The question rang with despair. My God, who was he?

The bell, much louder here than upstairs, clanged suddenly, startling him. The bright lights made him dizzy. He looked for the man he was following. Perhaps he was waiting at the clock to check out.

Just then he saw him at the end of the hall, leaving the building.

He pushed roughly through the knot of teachers converging on the rack of timecards and scanned blindly for his own. If there was no timecard with his name on it, then.... His blood clotted in dread of such a possibility.

Demperi! He almost shouted it aloud. Here it was. He took it down. The time was already punched on it. 2:58. That man had punched his card.

Then what timecard was there for him to punch out? And who had he been today? He could go through all the cards and see who was absent today. But he didn't dare. He would just look at the K's. He was sure it began with a K. Kessel, King.... No. They didn't sound right. Kluber... Koppinger! Of course! He was Koppinger today. What was the matter with him? He remembered perfectly now. He took the card down boldly. Koppinger had not checked in this morning. There it was.

He put the card back. And his own card was punched. No need to do anything. He put it back in its rack. All set? He patted his jacket pockets and was surprised to find a bunch of keys after all, not his own. He put them on the open shelf, where the owner, whoever he

was, would find them.

Feeling jubilant and disencumbered, he hurried outside and stood at the top of the three fronting steps.

The students were shuffling away in uneven clumps, darting out here and there in fits and starts of rendezvous and escape.

The man he had been following was nowhere in sight. His head felt full of light and buzzing noises. He couldn't think back or ahead. Down the street a hundred yards or more stood a small red car.

He stood still, looking around cautiously. Was Koppinger in school after all, and had he simply forgotten to punch in in the morning? Any moment he would come leaping down the steps and run to the car. The white hand, blue-traced, gentle, would reach out and open the door. A sheaf of red-brown hair would swing and coil and fall in place, and the car would roar away.

He could not see her. But she was in there. He was sure. He would go very slowly so that he could look at her longer. Perhaps her eyes would meet his this time. She might think Koppinger was coming at last and look up with a beginning smile before she saw it wasn't Koppinger.

He tried to give his steps the rhythm and sound of Koppinger's pace, dipping his shoulders left and right as Koppinger would. He fixed his mouth in the same cruel, confident smile.

The seat on the curb side was empty, and there was no show of her hand. He stopped short, feeling doomed.

In a moment a slim sweatered shoulder moved into sight as she slid over out of the driver's place into the empty seat. She had her back to him, as though she expected him to come around to the driver's side.

Just as he came even with the back of the car, he stopped, stepped off the curb, went around the back of the car, and opened the front door with a brusque confident movement. He slid in under the wheel. The keys were in the ignition.

He dared not look at her. She was sitting very still. Was she going to scream? There was silence except for the thudding of his heart. He started the car, then turned to look at her.

It was the same blinding smile, wide mouth in a white face. Her eyes were black. She had false eyelashes. Her dark-red hair hung childishly in faltering streaks over her shoulders.

He stared at her hungrily. Now that he saw her face so close, he could see clearly that there was something uncertain about her smile. It didn't match

her eyes. It was the smile that a well-brought-up child gives to an intolerant parent.

He started the car forward, stepped on the brake to let a bus pass, then looked at her again. She had lowered her head now and wore the anxious frown he had seen so many times before.

"What did you want to tell me?" he asked roughly, as Koppinger would. He moved out into traffic.

"It's no use, Tony. I'm not coming home with you."

It was not what he expected. She had her pocketbook in her lap and was pulling on some gloves he had never seen before. He wasn't sure what she meant.

"Not—not coming home with me? Why not?"

They came to the corner and he stopped for the light. Her lips were trembling. She spit the words out fast.

"You're always calling me a liar. You call everybody a liar. All right, I'm a liar. He's waiting for me. And I'm getting out right here."

Before he could stop her she had opened the door and slid out.

"Wait!"

The light was changing and the cars behind were honking. She stood there at the corner looking at him. The inimical face she turned to him now looked pinched and trivial.

"You can't leave now! Not now, just when. . . . Wait just a minute. Let me talk to you. I'll turn the corner and park a minute. Wait!" he said, wondering what he could talk to her about, a pinched, trivial girl who lied.

Frantically he signaled a turn and swung to the right, his eyes on her as she moved uncertainly away from the car in her tweed skirt and black sweater. As if from a great distance, he heard her scream.

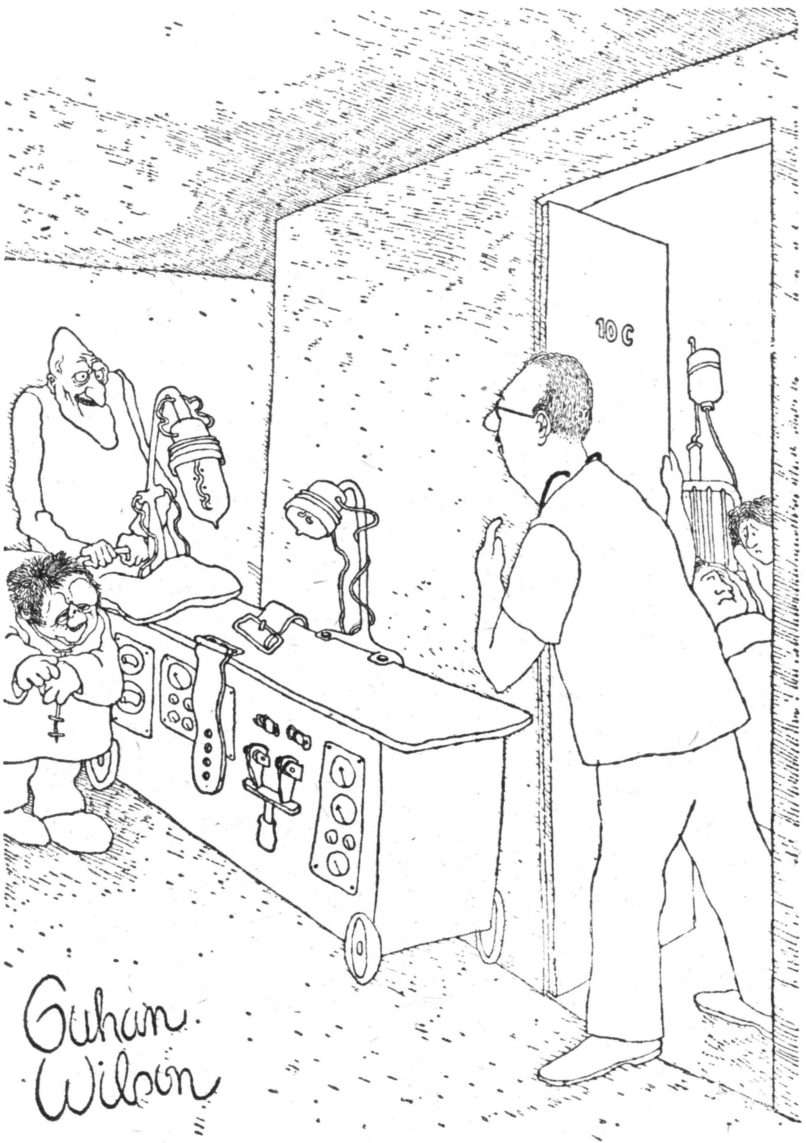
It was a one-way street the other way.

Demperi, who had just crossed the street, heard the scream and then the terrible crash. He hesitated. There were so many trucks in the way that he couldn't see clearly what cars were involved in the accident.

Ahead of him, further up the street, that funny little girl, that Christine, stopped also and turned around, but she was too far away to make out what had happened and continued on her way.

Had she seen him? He hurried after her. It seemed to him that she quickened her steps. For a quarter of a block he chased after her. Then suddenly she stopped and turned around to wait for him.

"I'll never learn," she said as he came alongside her.



"O. K., they've signed the release."

Science Fiction and the University

Why a special report on science fiction and the university?

Well, first there is the wonder-evoking fact that this stuff we've all had fun reading over the years has suddenly become a very respectable academic subject. Further, the academic interest in science fiction is already widespread and growing rapidly. In SCIENCE FICTION IN COLLEGE, Jack Williamson notes that the first college course in science fiction happened at Colgate as recently as 1962. The list on page 144 of colleges offering courses in sf approaches 100, and we don't pretend that it's complete. As for the reaction to these new courses, James Gunn at the University of Kansas tells us that his class in sf is up this year from 105 to 160, with many more students turned away.

There is something else: Joanna Russ, who teaches at Cornell when she's not writing sf or reviewing it for F&SF, has written: "Students seem to take to sf partly because it's never been taught to them (I feel two ways about teaching it just because of this). . ." Or, as William Tenn puts it in the following article: "Can you take the jazz out of the cat-house? It may survive in the speakeasy, but how about the concert hall?" We don't know—the main business of this magazine is to play the music and offer the booze—but it's another reason for this brief pause to ask: Why all the academic attention to science fiction? What shape is it taking? Where will it lead?

In the following articles, William Tenn looks at the long-range change in campus attitudes toward sf; Thomas Clareson examines the dimensions of the current academic scene; Darko Suvin covers some new books *about* science fiction in an essay-review on levels of sf criticism; and our own Dr. Asimov offers a personal look at his dual role as writer and teacher.

Consulting editor for this special section was Philip Klass, who writes science fiction as "William Tenn" and teaches it at Penn State.

Science fiction under the byline of William Tenn (a pen name for Philip Klass, an associate professor at Penn State) has regretably been almost non-existent in recent years. However, many readers will be familiar with his work, which includes a distinguished body of short fiction (most recently, here, "The Masculinist Revolt") and a novel, OF MEN AND MONSTERS (published by Ballantine as part of an unusual six volume set of Tenn's work).

Jazz Then, Musicology Now

by WILLIAM TENN

RECAPTURING THE ATTITUDE of the pre-World War II campus toward science fiction is like trying to evoke the Russia of grand dukes and czarinas for a Young Communist League meeting at Moscow University. The same unbelieving, impatient questions: "But how could they? Didn't they really know all the time. . .?"

They damn well didn't. Only much, much history can turn a charlatan into a hero, a crank into a prophet. Just as Lenin squalling out pamphlets from Switzerland was slightly ridiculous, so was Hugo Gernsback, building that strange structure on the foundation laid by Verne and Wells. Was it important that the Georgian bank robber Joseph Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili had founded a newspaper called *Pravda* in 1911 before going off into Siberian exile—or that John W. Campbell, Jr., had become editor of *Astounding* in 1939 and was publishing new writers like Robert Heinlein and established writers like Jack Williamson? And Einstein's equations, and Goddard's experiments with rockets—did they relate to any of these events?

I thought so, but I was barely twenty and awfully naive. So everyone told me. My teachers. My fellow students. The literary critics I read, the social and physical scientists I respected.

There was this chemistry professor at CCNY. While I sat in his office, waiting for him to finish the conference with the student ahead of me, I read an article on space travel in some

butcher-paper science-fiction magazine. He noticed what I was reading and asked me if I took it seriously. When I said yes, he sighed, picked up a pencil and paper, and spent almost an hour showing me—with figures and formulae—why space travel was unlikely, impracticable, and very close to being a scientific impossibility. Something about escape velocity and weight of fuel, I vaguely recall, one being an arithmetic progression and the other a geometric progression. "And that's not even to touch upon," he concluded, "what would happen to the human body at such crazy speeds. Then, when you get out into what you call 'space,' you take with you physiological components evolved to operate with a definite gravity pulling at them. You place them in zero gravity, and what happens? Blood cells agglutinating, glands not secreting, muscles relaxing when they should contract. A mess."

I was willing to risk all that rather than give up my dream of a Martian odyssey. "But the escape velocity problem," I said. "Suppose we invented a more powerful fuel. Suppose—"

"Sure," he grinned. "Atomic bombs. Time travel. Dragon's breath. Look, if you want to do well in science, stick to what's logical and real."

He'd been patient; he'd been tolerant. I went away feeling lonely.

I felt even lonelier, later at NYU, when I wrote my first science-fiction story and showed it to the English professor I most admired (she taught only in the graduate school, and I was an undergraduate—so I took all her courses for two years, without credit). The woman was bewildered. "I wouldn't even go so far as to call it garbage," she said. "It's like all the rest of this Buck Rogers stuff, mysterious and peculiar and aimed at neurotic children. What literary standards could possibly apply? Now you do have some talent. Develop it. Write about things you know, subways and girls and shipping clerks. Write about your family in Brooklyn. Write about that union you helped organize. And when you've learned to write about familiar things, when you've managed to make a story out of your daily life and had it published, then perhaps you might try unfamiliar material, a bit of fantasy. But not this. Never this. This has nothing at all to do with genuine fiction."

But I was at my loneliest when I began writing for the NYU *Apprentice*, the undergraduate literary magazine. A kind of Marxist esthetic was the fashion then: young writers

read Granville Hicks and the *New Masses* and *Science and Society* (this was before skirts went up, so to speak, in the literary world and people turned to *Partisan Review* and F. R. Leavis and the New Criticism), and any of my friends who couldn't do Mike Gold stories or Clifford Odets plays tried at the very least to sound like John Steinbeck. I believed in the Revolution, along with everyone else I knew, but I couldn't seem to work it properly into a story. So I wrote humorous fantasies for the *Apprentice*—no space travel and no time travel, but semiphilosophical fantasies which kept tongue in cheek and one foot firmly on *Das Kapital.*

The editors and my fellow-writers liked them—and, since this group functioned pretty much also as the entire readership of the magazine, I was a success. But they kept asking me about my model. Everyone had to have a model. One day I admitted to science fiction. Of course I also insisted on Jonathan Swift and Voltaire and every other moderately respectable satirist I could think of, but it did me no good. *Science fiction!*

Most of those young university writers sat there and giggled their heads off at me. About a third of the group, though, couldn't see the joke. "What's this science fiction? A new religion? Like Mary Baker Eddy?" The gigglers, the sophisticated ones, explained the relatively novel term to them. "You know, ray guns. *Buck Rogers in the twenty-fifth centureeeeee,*" they squealed, imitating the announcer on the children's radio serial.

Then, zestfully through the giggles, someone quoted the opening lines of S. J. Perelman's "Captain Future, Block That Kick!"—a passage I was to hear again and again in the next ten years, whenever I dared to mention science fiction in the company of intellectuals:

"I guess I'm just an old mad scientist at bottom. Give me an underground laboratory, half a dozen atom-smashers, and a beautiful girl in a diaphanous veil waiting to be turned into a chimpanzee, and I care not who writes the nation's laws. You'll have to leave my meals on a tray outside the door because I'll be working pretty late on the secret of making myself invisible, which may take me almost until eleven o'clock. . . ."

Many of my teachers and fellow students had read Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and the novels of H. G. Wells, Karel Capek's *R.U.R.* and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon.* But what did one thing have to do with the other? Science fiction—if you

had managed to hear of it at all—was one of the categories of pulp magazine fiction. It was published by firms which put out such sister periodicals as *Spicy Detective*, *Ranch Romances*, and *Dime Hockey Stories*. It was merchandised, all too often, under covers of surpassing garishness: the heroine, in a gleaming metal brassiere and panties of satin gauze, being clutched at by a miscegenetic entity from Mercury, Mars, or points outward. In "Captain Future, Block That Kick!" S. J. Perelman says of those panties: "Unfortunately for the fans, however, recent tests reveal that the wisp of chiffon which stands between the publisher and the postal laws has the tensile strength of drop-forged steel."

Even more unfortunately for the fans on campus, nothing stood between them and ridicule but absolute secrecy and, when that failed, stout denial. The tightly buttoned lip that I learned to wear was probably standard equipment for many crypto-fans and slinking science-fiction buffs around me in classroom and university library. But I never cracked their security, nor they mine.

Asimov was a college student then, and I know now that he appeared at meetings of the Futurian Society, a group that included such fans and budding professionals as Dick Wilson, Cyril Kornbluth, and Fred Pohl. But if there was a similar club at City College or New York University before World War II, it hid out in the window-washers lounge. *I* never found it. Nor could I imagine a faculty advisor sufficiently careless of his dignity to take it on.

I met Ted Sturgeon in the 57th Street Cafeteria about this time. He had just published his first two stories, "Ether Breathers" and "A God in a Garden," and he was living right royally as a professional writer should—on a budget of six or seven dollars a week, saving all his smoked-out butts for consolidation and rerolling into future cigarettes (he kept the precious butts, I remember, in a terribly scratched, badly dented Half & Half tobacco tin). He gave me good, warm advice about writing: how to achieve honest prose in a commercial medium, the peculiar leap of mind necessary to the creation of science fiction, the role of real dialogue and real incident in the fantasy tale. My lips were dry with awe when I left, but the NYU grad student who'd been with me all the time shook his head in hilarious wonder. "He takes the stuff he's doing seriously! Sitting there, nursing his five-cent cup of coffee so he won't be turned out of the

steam-heated cafeteria, talking like an honest-to-God genuine writer. The poor schmuck." And he told the anecdote, with ruffles and with flourishes, to everyone we knew at the Washington Square campus.

I began tearing the covers off any science-fiction magazines I bought on my way to class, or—at the very least—hiding them carefully at the very bottom of my briefcase. It would be unfair to say that I was merely ashamed of my predilection for the stuff; more correctly, I knew beyond any doubt that I was a special kind of pervert, so special in fact that I was the only one of my kind in two large metropolitan universities.

After the war, after I had become a published writer in the medium, I continued this diffidence about most of the science-fiction magazines. True, the possibility of atomic bombs had been shown to be of a different order of possibility than dragon's breath; true, also, there was a bit of a science-fiction boom on that extended from the scientists on the Manhattan Project to a few enterprising book publishers; and true, finally, that the good old Campbell *Astounding* was as dignified and substantial and sexless as ever. But one couldn't make a living from *Astounding* alone, and I appeared in several magazines which still featured on their covers the eternal conflict between Bug-Eyed-Monster and Metal-Brassiere-*cum*-Wisp-of-Chiffon. The university, I found in the course of several guest appearances in lecture halls, was willing to lift a tolerant eyebrow at anything that pertained to Campbell but still dropped loudly disapproving clucks at anyone south of him.

It also disapproved of the intellectually unwashed who now began creeping out of hiding places in library stack and laboratory corner to attend these lectures. I remember an occasion in 1952 when I was sitting around with a group of professors after one of these talks. I showed them a story of mine, published three or four years before, that I thought was particularly good. They picked up that copy of *Planet Stories* with fingers that had turned into tongs, and they passed it around. These were good, well-bred people, so the giggles were almost inaudible as they examined the madly struggling space heroine on the cover, as they glanced at the letter section, the *vizigraph*, with its rolling fanfaronades. "Those were fans there tonight," one friendly associate professor said. "They'd write letters like this, wouldn't they?" He barely looked at my story; he didn't

even notice the magnificent Ray Bradbury and the really fine Poul Anderson in the issue.

Well, after all, why the hell should he have? That issue of *Planet Stories*, now dissolving into a cellulose mist on my bookshelves, meant no more at the time than a canvas by a minor artistic weirdo of the Paris School before Gertrude Stein arrived to publicize in an unpunctuated gush. It meant no more than a Bunk Johnson solo in a New Oreleans cat-house, than Baby Dodds doing his thing on wood blocks for a "racial record" in the twenties.

Jazz then, musicology now.

And the thing I wonder about, friends, neighbors, fans, students, wise men—can you take the jazz out of the cat-house? It may survive in the speakeasy, but how about the concert hall? What happens to jazz (to jazz, by definition!) when its audience is no longer three drunken whores and their cigar-thumping boy friends but a bunch of thoughtful, soft-spoken scholars and earnest, ladylike critics who are trying to raise it to What It Should Be?

The answer, I imagine, is that to everything there is a season. There's a lot to be said for musicology.

I'm a friendly associate professor now, myself. In 1961 I was invited to read a paper at one of the first Modern Language Association panels on science fiction. In 1966 I was invited to come to Penn State to teach writing. I've been attending Secondary Universe conferences from the beginning, and last October I read a paper on Mark Twain as a science-fiction writer at the conference in Toronto. I've taught several interdisciplinary courses in prophecy and prediction at Penn State, and this January I began one on the history and social context of science fiction. I'm treated quite well, almost like a celebrity who's a member of the family, although I do suspect that I have more honor in the country of Engineering than in my own country of English.

It's been obvious for some time that there's another boom erupting in the field. At first I was very skeptical about it. I've seen at least five major booms in science fiction since I began writing, but they never seem to get large enough to compete with a suburb of Miami. Science fiction, I said years ago, is the mass literature of the very, very few. When you double the number of those few, you have what looks like a mob to all the near-sighted hermits who read the stuff.

But this boom is different: it is significant in terms other than numbers. It's occurring in

one place essentially—the university. And the university is where it's always belonged. Science fiction, after all, is nothing but dramatized concept, ideation made into flesh of character and line of narrative. It's come home at last to its origins, to the one place where the hard sciences become abstract, where the social sciences build reality, where the new frontiers of esthetics and metaphysics are measured off.

Why is it happening now? Why are the literary critics suddenly taking it seriously, the college bookstores stocking it copiously, the students flocking to courses in it so hungrily? I'm dazzled to find myself—little old lonely perverted me—the advisor of the Penn State science-fiction club, but I'm even more dazzled to discover how little the fan has changed in twenty or thirty years. Science-fiction anthologies intended for classroom use pour onto my desk from the mailing-rooms of publishers who are apparently positive they have read the auspices correctly; specialized texts like Richard Ofshe's *Sociology of the Possible* appear to confound my knowledge of the audience; best-sellers like Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* come out with their new approach to science fiction as sheer raw material. An Institute of the Future pops into existence on one campus; on another, a brand-new young science-fiction writer, barely out of his hyperspace drive, is drafted to teach courses in the subject to students no more than three years his junior.

I don't think there's a single explanation: any major change, from a political revolution to a new legal definition of pornography, is an effect flowing from several separate causes, and the cumulative effect of each—the moment of boil—is perhaps the most important. Scientific developments, for example, have been responsible for various boomlets in science fiction; from Hiroshima to the moon landings there has been a steady increase in the public's acceptance of what used to be called the bizarre concepts of our field. Most of today's college students had not yet learned to read when Sputnik went up; to them a first flight across space is only a little bit more startling than a first flight across the ocean was to their parents. But take it in stride as they will (a golf ball on the moon, history turning into burlesque with the telephone call from the Oval Room in the White House) consequences still lurk and cause the mind to trip. We stand today at the threshold of immensity. Will revolt at home be sublimated into settlement on other worlds?

Will man evolve now in planetary patterns which have nothing to do with terra? Are we about to discover that we are not Nature's only child—and will we react to lately-acquired siblings as only children always have?

The cry for relevance, heard from campuses for the last six years, is thus about to intersect with an accumulation of developments which will turn our society inside out. Older people are at least subliminally aware of this; college students, however, are forced to confront the phenomena consciously as they make their plans. Wars in Asia may come and go, and today's restless minority may be tomorrow's governing class, but the colossal sweep of forthcoming change reviewed by Toffler and others—in technology, in the education of the young, in sexual statement, in vocational choice—cannot be contained and examined in any known discipline. Toffler has suggested courses in Future I and Future II, but even if these courses were to be devised, science fiction would still be the only place where accumulated change becomes drama.

This special drama has been enlivening the minds of today's young people from the time they began to think—and they couldn't imagine being defensive about it. If Sputnik belongs to their early childhood, Heinlein and Simak and Campbell are family heirlooms, entirely respectable and undeniably useful. Students may introduce Heinlein's "They" or Sturgeon's "Bianca's Hands" into a discussion of abnormal psychology, Asimov's *Foundation* into one of history, Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* or Blish's *A Case of Conscience* into a paper on comparative religion. When this happens in my class in short-story writing, when I make a comment about Chekhov or Joyce and some student elaborates the point with a reference to the work of some disreputable literary friend of mine, I feel highly uncomfortable, as if my trousers have just fallen down. When this happens in other classes, other disciplines, the professor's sarcastic response is met with outright bewilderment by the student. Vonnegut and Golding may disown their origins, but reasonably bright and well-read students today shrug off the coats-of-arms these writers would acquire: as far as the youngsters are concerned the blood-lines are unmistakable. And something to be rather proud of.

Not that all professors in other disciplines are sarcastic. They've reached middle age, now, and respectable status in

the world, these lonely unknown ones from my own college days. I've met distinguished scholars in political science, in sociology, in microbiology and geology, who have told me how *they* hid science-fiction magazines in loose-leaf notebooks, how *they* wondered if anyone else on their campus was reading this crazy stuff—and how they had been excited and influenced, how this strange new form, this literature of and by scientific man, had helped them achieve their present direction.

This is perhaps the last and most important cumulative effect which has become a new cause. There are administrators in the university today who raised themselves on science fiction. There are literary cholars who were once nervous, round-eyed science-fiction fans. They are aware of each other, of student interest and sophistication in the field: they find that there is no longer any need for them to be nervous. They, the former slinkers, the once-upon-a-time fans who were afraid to admit it, they are now part of the Establishment. And they are usually the most imaginative component in the Establishment.

I don't worry about Captain Future any more. I have other troubles. The kick, the genuine kick of science fiction for me, has been blocked.

Too much musicology now, perhaps.

Thomas D. Clareson is Professor of English at the College of Wooster. He has been editor of *Extrapolation* since 1959 and was the first chairman of the Science Fiction Research Association.

SF: The Academic Dimensions

by THOMAS D. CLARESON

IN THE MAY 1971 ISSUE OF *Extrapolation*,* Jack Williamson described some seventy courses devoted to science fiction at the college and university levels during the academic year 1970-1971. This year—not counting the many high school classes which are springing up—that number has more than doubled in the United States alone.

True, the majority of them are offered by English professors and English Departments as a part of the regular curriculum, but a wide variety of other disciplines are also involved. The recent emphasis upon the study of Pop Culture as well as the work of the Futurologists has been influential, of course, but does not explain the phenomenon. For example, courses have been offered by members of the departments of History, Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, and the History of Science.

One of the most provocative experiments last year was that of Professor Andrew J. Burgess of the Religion Department at Case-Western Reserve University; during the month-long interim between semesters, he set up the seminar, "Religious Dimensions of Science Fiction," ostensibly to deal with the theological problem of particularity, which C.S. Lewis treated in *Perelandra*, as did Ray Bradbury in "The Fire Balloons." Burgess has acknowledged that the suggestion for

**The newsletter of the Modern Language Association Seminar on Science Fiction*

the project came in part from John Arnold's "Creative Engineering" given a few years ago at MIT.

His students spent the first two weeks of the term creating an imaginary world, complete with a complex, non-humanoid culture dominating it. The problem: the interplanetary expedition trapped on the planet must demonstrate to the dominant culture that its members can communicate cultural, including religious, concepts. "Although this class centered on a particular question concerning religious concepts," writes Burgess, "it should be possible to take parts of the format. . .to study [for example] questions in sociology and anthropology concerning the nature of a social organization." (Since the 1940's, at least, haven't some sf writers suggested that this was one of their aims?)

Such specialized courses alone do not measure the impact of science fiction on the curriculum. At the Midwest Modern Language Association regional meeting in Detroit in early November—chaired by Professor Steven Kagle of Illinois State University—a number of individuals said that they did not believe in relegating sf to a specially labelled course, for they had long used sf titles as a part of the regular offerings in their various courses in fiction and the novel. How many have done so cannot at the moment be estimated.

Long before I introduced a Seminar on Science Fiction and Fantasy at the College of Wooster, I did precisely this, including such titles as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Wells's *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*, Arthur Clarke's *Childhood's End*, Clifford Simak's *City*, Eugene Zamiatin's *We*, James Branch Cabell's *Jurgen*, John Hersey's *The Child Buyer*, William Golding's *The Inheritors*, and stories by Borges and Lagerkvist—to cite but a cross-section of the works I have used during the past ten years.

My rationale in doing so is this: since the 18th century at least, one tradition in fiction has concentrated upon the minutiae of everyday life; the other—the tradition of fantasy—has created unreal, imaginary worlds. Both concern themselves with social criticism and metaphorical statement; both employ so-called realistic detail in order to gain credibility; and both entertain us with stories (plots). In *SF: The Other Side of Realism* (Bowling Green University Popular Press), I tried to suggest that during the last third of the 19th century, realism-naturalism and science fiction were twin

literary responses to the intellectual temper of the period. That is to say, realism-naturalism has been the manifestation of the first tradition; science fiction, the manifestation of the second. This is *not* to call sf fantasy; however, in allying it to the continuing tradition which creates unreal, imaginary worlds, one does establish a context in which science fiction may be placed and evaluated as an important literary expression of the last century. It ends any isolation that has been thrust upon it for whatever reasons.

To provide that context, however, still does not explain why academic attention has turned to the genre at this time. Why? That question is asked more often by fandom than by anyone else.

As usual, there is no simple answer. At the Science Fiction Research Association session at Noreascon (29th World Science Fiction Convention)—and in his regular December column in *Fantastic Stories*—Alexei Panshin voiced a part of the truth when he said that some "buffs" had attained academic position and wanted to share their enthusiasm for sf with their students. But this alone would not get courses past a curriculum committee. The emphasis upon Pop Culture and Futurology has helped.

Probably the basic reasons for the genre's increasing acceptance by English Departments lie in the Gordian knot of literature and intellectual history. First, at the turn of the century the literary establishment (the Humanities in general) assumed, by and large, an anti-scientific stance because the vision of the universe offered them by the mechanistic science of the period frightened them. This reaction may perhaps be most vividly seen in the poetry of the first half of the 20th century. Secondly, even the most unreadable Utopias of the late 19th and early 20th centuries have had a certain academic respectability because they reflect the intellectual ferment of the period.

Thus, during the last quarter century as one of the dominant moods of science fiction has grown more noticeably dystopian—more discenchanted—sf has gained an acceptability in certain circles because it has seemed to move toward an anti-scientific stance. Notice that Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984* immediately gained wide, lasting reputations. Whatever one thinks of Kingsley Amis's *New Maps of Hell*, that book first brought widespread attention in critical and academic circles to the dystopian mood of sf. (That he was a

British novelist whom critics favored and that he gave the series of lectures on which the book is based at Princeton helped.) The utopian-dystopian axis of science fiction provides the core of the genre's new respectability for many individuals who have previously ignored or dismissed it.

Although I do believe that this is one of many possible approaches to sf, I agree completely with Samuel R. Delany when, writing for *Quark 1*, he deplores that criticism which speaks of sf *only* in these terms. It *is* "absurd to argue whether Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy represents a Utopian or Dystopian view of society." It is equally meaningless to label as dystopian James DeMille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, as a recent bibliography has done. This emphasis simplifies content and usually bypasses more significant questions. This emphasis would also reduce science fiction to a mere tool of didacticism.

Yet because Utopia has always been a legitimate topic within academic circles and because literature is tied to the history of ideas, newcomers—particularly—will discuss sf in this context; moreover, many sf enthusiasts and critics have literally asked for this approach by stressing the role of science fiction as a literature of ideas and a critic of society. And, of course, if one focuses upon changing attitudes toward science (and technology), the concern for content leads directly to the ideological quarrel within fandom which has centered around the so-called "New Wave."

Fortunately, formal academic recognition of science fiction did not wait for the discovery of Dystopia. The first Seminar on Science Fiction sponsored by the Modern Language Association took place in 1958, two years before Amis's book appeared. Although I chaired that meeting, the man most responsible for bringing it about was Professor Scott Osborn of Mississippi State University. (Only at that first meeting did we haggle over general definitions.) Professor J.O. Bailey of North Carolina University, author of *Pilgrims Through Space and Time*, chaired the second meeting. Since 1958 it has met annually and now is one of the two oldest continuing seminars held by MLA. In 1966 it focused upon Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams; Professor Mark Hillegas edited the anthology, *Shadows of Imagination*, partly as a result of interest in that meeting. In 1967, Professor I.F. Clarke, author of *Voices Prophesying War* and head of

the Department of English at Strathclyde University, Glasgow, flew to the U.S. especially to lead a discussion of the problems he had encountered in doing that book. The 1971 meeting marked the first time a paper on sf films was presented to the Seminar, while, as plans now stand, Professor Glenn Sadler will base the 1972 program on Mervyn Peake.

One of the best features of the Seminar has been the participation of persons professionally active in sf. Fred Pohl, Phil Klass, Joanna Russ, Judith Merril, and Sam Moskowitz have attended frequently. In 1968 Samuel Delany gave the paper which has since been published here and in England under the title, "About Five Thousand One Hundred and Seventy-Five Words." In 1969 John Brunner discussed the writing of *Stand on Zanzibar.* Separate from the Seminar itself and a high point in the formal recognition of sf, in 1968 the MLA devoted one of its three special forums to the topic, "Science Fiction: the New Mythology." Professor Bruce Franklin chaired a panel made up of Fred Pohl, Isaac Asimov, and Professor Darko Suvin of McGill University.

Since 1959 *Extrapolation* has served as the Newsletter of the Seminar. In a new format (averaging eighty-some pages an issue), it circulates only to subscribers, but it goes to libraries, both academic and municipal, and individuals throughout the U.S. and Canada as well as twenty countries, ranging from Australia and Japan to Russia and Hungary. It publishes no original poetry or fiction, and concentrates upon historical and critical articles and annotated bibliographies. It does review all critical studies of sf, and has begun this year to review some fiction. A series of articles on "classic" sf titles is now being planned.

Extrapolation has reached the point where it must soon go quarterly and thus, for example, be able to devote at least a major part of an issue to an individual author. One reason for this expansion is that it now functions as "A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy," serving both the MLA Seminar and the newly formed Science Fiction Research Association.

In 1968 Professor Ivor Rogers sponsored the first "Secondary Universe" Conference at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee. In the spring of 1969 at Columbia University, Fred Lerner chaired the first Bibliographical Conference on Science Fiction. With Lerner, perhaps, as the motivating force, a group of individuals primarily from

academic circles formed SFRA. Professor Virginia Carew planned the Secondary Universe Conference at Queensborough Community College in 1970 at which it came into being. Last fall the Conference met at Toronto. In 1972 it will meet at Drake University; in 1973, at Penn State University.

SFRA was formed to bring together all those individuals, both here and abroad—in the academic, professional, and fan communities—who are interested in the study and teaching of science fiction in any of the art forms. I see it as a kind of clearing house, a continuing meeting ground. If it can function in that way, then students, collectors, fans—anyone—can come to it to secure information they need and to contribute information everyone needs if science fiction is to receive a full and just evaluation as a medium of ideas and a literary form. If this can be done, its evaluation will no longer be left to strangers who are unacquainted with it, its students will no longer have to start from scratch because no one can advise them where to go for materials, and the field itself will no longer be splintered into special, often short-time interest groups—as has occurred in the past.

For example, what books have you wanted that are unavailable? Phyllis Gotlieb tells a hilariously tragic story of the availability of her novel *Sunburst* in the Aegean Islands. Such an organization as SFRA can help SFWA and others to persuade publishers to keep books in print and improve their distribution—if only because of the potential classroom market.

What worries me particularly is the loss of papers and business records that will make future study of the genre much more difficult. Yes, I know *some* writers have given their papers to libraries and that *some* libraries have sf collections. But where, for example, are the papers of John Wyndham, John Campbell, and August Derleth? They should be in a library, but if they are in the hands of a private individual, that, too, is perfectly all right, so long as someone knows and so long as they are somehow and *sometime* available for study.

As a result, in addition to wanting to promote the teaching of sf and hoping to aid publication of studies in the field, SFRA has several long-range projects which it cannot accomplish without the aid of everyone interested in the field:

1) A catalogue describing the holdings of library collections—books, magazines, and papers—so that the student will know

where to turn. A similar catalogue of private holdings is also needed.

2) A record of the publications of individuals—and of fanzines. Too often valuable works have not been published in sufficient quantity to be accessible to the general public. Much valuable information exists in fanzines. All of this can be easily lost.

3) Similar records and depositories (such as the University of Kansas and Forrest Ackerman's private collection) are needed for sf film and TV materials. Where, for example, is the student writing about *Star Trek* in 1981 to go for materials?

Much valuable work has been done by individuals and fan groups. But I do not know anyone in the academic world who can direct students to specific sources in more than a small percentage of cases. Far more serious, I can cite instances when I have asked professionals and fans where certain things are and no one has been able to tell me. Things vanish, and we start all over again.

I realize that such plans as these raise the question of cooperation between fandom and academe. I have been told—primarily rumors—of mutterings about the academic "intrusion" into the field and about "killing off" sf in the classroom. Yet I have heard only one individual completely denounce the academic interest. I suspect he does so for profoundly personal reasons.

If the MLA Seminar and SFRA have proved anything, they have shown the willingness of teacher, editor, writer, and fan to work together. In this regard the Noreascon and Minnecon Committees have earned the special thanks of SFRA.

Such criticism as does exist undoubtedly stems from the general criticism of our educational system at the present time. I believe that those few who dislike the academic interest are largely uninformed. They certainly forget two crucial matters. First, most of us involved in sf in academic circles have long been readers and collectors at least. (I cite Jack Williamson as example *par excellence.*) Secondly, if we did not *like* science fiction and did not believe it a valuable contribution to literature as a whole, we would not take time to deal with it in class or in our research. (The suggestion that we have nothing else to write about is as absurd as saying that nothing new can be written in science fiction itself.)

The basis of these rumors undoubtedly grows out of the fear that academic critics will

impose a heavy-handed, heavy-minded system on the genre that will ignore the freedom and variety the genre has enjoyed. (In a sense this problem is analogous to the ideological quarrel going on in fandom.) Few, if any, of my colleagues want or expect this to happen, for we realize that no one critic and no one critical approach can adequately describe any body of literature. Moreover, this cannot happen *if* teachers, students, editors, writers, and fans cooperate, work together. I think of the delightful story assigned to Frost, Faulkner—whomever you wish—in which the writer said to the critic, "Oh, are you sure that's what I meant?"

As Jack Williamson said in *Publishers Weekly* last summer, the long exile of science fiction is ended. A combination of people, the intellectual temper of this period, and the literary trends in fiction itself—among them the grotesque and black humor—have made it impossible for sf to remain isolated.

In stressing the MLA Seminar and SFRA, I have only begun to sketch the academic dimensions of science fiction. A number of university presses are looking for studies of sf. Trade publishers are responding to suggestions they would not have considered five years ago. Bowling Green Popular Press wishes to publish a number of pamphlets on sf authors similar to those done on American writers by the University of Minnesota Press. They will soon release such a pamphlet on Kurt Vonnegut and have contracted for one on Arthur Clarke. If these go well financially, a series will result. The annual Conference on Popular Culture held a panel on sf last year and again this spring; MMLA has planned another seminar for its 1972 meeting in St. Louis; and the State University of New York at New Paltz held a conference last November.

All this ignores the European scene. Courses in sf are being offered at several British universities, while a Science Fiction Foundation—comparable to SFRA—has been founded in England. In October 1971 Peter Kuczka announced that the first scholarly conference on sf in Eastern Europe was then convening in Budapest; an anthology of critical studies will result. Jannick Storm is preparing an anthology for use as a text in the Danish schools. And these are only the start. The academic presence is here, and it will not go away.

I believe that the cooperation and exchange of ideas among the different groups, here and abroad—each with its own perspective—can only strengthen science fiction.

DARKO SUVIN

BOOKS

MORE ISSUES AT HAND, William Atheling, Jr. (James Blish), Advent, $5.00

THE UNIVERSE MAKERS, Donald A. Wollheim, Harper & Row, $4.95

SCIENCE FICTION: WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT, Sam J. Lundwall, Ace, 95c

THE MIRROR OF INFINITY, Robert Silverberg, ed., Canfield Press

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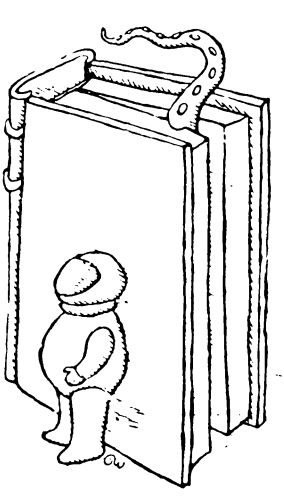

AGAINST COMMON SENSE: LEVELS OF SF CRITICISM

NO LITERARY FIELD OR genre, let alone SF, exists without criticism—oral or written, gossipy or scholarly, and so on. This essay in reviewing SF criticism will take it as axiomatic: 1. That criticism ought to clarify its premises so that they can be evaluated, improved, and if necessary demolished; criticism which is conscious of its methods is—other things being equal—more valuable than impressionistic gossip and biobibliographical chronicling (though the latter is always indispensable and the former sometimes amusing); 2. that methodologically explicit criticism, that is, criticism which deals with the theory of SF—of how its forms developed, what its basic devices are, how its models are organized, and what sociological function they fulfill—is particularly imperative for this genre, in order to identify it and so make rational inquiry into it possible in the first place. As Atheling—Blish puts it, "before we undertake to shoot down bad SF, we ought to know what kind of animal we are gunning for."

Definitions and basic views of this field are still a dime a dozen. Is Tolkien SF? Or the

later Ballard? Or *Stranger in a Strange Land?* Or Kafka's *Penal Colony* and Borges' *Library of Babel?* Or sword-and-sorcery? Is SF a sub-variety of romance; of myth, fairy-tale, and fantasy? Of utopia, adventure story, and scientific popularization? All or none of these? Criticism which proceeds to book-length syntheses and overviews without explicitly discussing any of the above questions is prejudiced blather. *Blather*, because in the present highly complex state of the genre, where currents, generations, ideologies and forms are intermixing and mutating into each other, it is as impossible to approach any view of it without carefully developed instruments as to advance cancer research without electronic microscopes: the naked eye won't do it. *Prejudiced*, because people like Moskowitz (one of the incarnations of gossipy positivism in Anglophone SF criticism) tacitly assume they have solved all the questions by divine afflatus, which turns out to be some makeshift construction based on their personal common sense ("Don't we all *know* what SF is?—such and such?"; well, no Virginia, we do not.) Such people proceed then to write books giving equal prominence to Wells and Murray Leinster, presumably because both are read by a lot of SF fans. Their basic assumption is, thus, that on the whole *whatever is, is right*—diametrically opposed to the basic assumption of all criticism and scholarship, which is that *whatever is, is questionable.* Instead of personal common sense, we need a communal uncommon sense. We need a critical community doing what scientists call *fundamental research.*

In brief, we need many more reliable bibliographers and reviewers; but before all we need "meaty" critics willing and able to attack the fundamental historical and formal parameters of SF. Once these are at least approximately established, writing monographs about writers and forms, historical surveys, and cross-references between SF and anything else you wish (science, sociology, futurology), is a matter of application and field prestige. Both application and prestige seem to be rapidly rising in the universities and outside of them; but the "meaty" critics are still very few, though one is heartened by signs that some are appearing.

In fact, critics engaged in fundamental research into the intimate structures of SF can be counted on the fingers of two hands. Here is the list compiled in my graduate seminar at McGill University (very similar to chapter 2 of *More Issues* At

Hand, the best introduction to book-length SF criticism I know of): J.O. Bailey's pioneering *Pilgrims Through Space and Time*, which stops before Heinlein and Asimov, and never synthesizes the atomized aspects found; Kingsley Amis' equally pioneering *New Maps of Hell*, witty and illuminating but even more resolutely one-sided and one-dimensional; challenging glimpses in three essays from *The Science Fiction Novel* edited by Davenport, and half a dozen essays from *Modern Science Fiction* edited by Bretnor; Damon Knight's *In Search of Wonder;* and of course, "Atheling's" *The Issue at Hand.* There are also scattered prefaces and books on particular topics such as Richard Gerber's *Utopian Fantasy;* most notable among them are Mark R. Hillegas' *The Future as Nightmare* and Alexei Panshin's *Heinlein in Dimension*, lucid and of general methodological validity. Nonetheless, as the yield of 20 years of organized thinking in the two world empires producing most SF and most critics, it is really slim.

In this dearth, *More Issues at Hand* is an event to be met by cheers. Blish is, with Knight and a few others of smaller output, that rare SF critic occupying the vital middle ground between applied and fundamental research. He is equally at ease with concrete texts and closely argued generalizations or overviews going beyond the text. He discusses Heinlein by focussing on the first-person narrator-protagonist, which is not only formally but also ideologically the key to Heinlein the radical individualist (strange how Heinlein's weaknesses and strengths elicit the best in SF criticism, including Panshin, Knight and the best essay in Moskowitz's *Seekers of Tomorrow;* perhaps his qualities are central to American SF of his period). He notes that U.S. magazine SF has not qualitatively changed between 1940 and 1961, since it did not take the logical next step of infusing genuine emotion or music of language into SF (pp. 60-61), the basic reason being SF readers' response, the immature fannish standards (p. 14). He demonstrates incisively and persuasively that some of the all-time commercial favorites like Merritt (ditto C.A. Smith and Lovecraft) are unreadable (ch.7); he shows with chapter and verse that a magazine like *Astounding-Analog* was by 1957 mostly unreadable (and I would add almost wholly so by the mid-60's); and he includes in that analysis a rare self-criticism in SF that is both seriously meant and making some sense (ch. 8).

A few judgments of Blish's I

would demur from. I think his introductory disparagement of historical and evaluative criticism is justified only because by evaluative he means a critic who has ahistorical absolutes in mind, and by historical one "who detects trends and influences" between literary works or a work and its time. But if we—more properly—call that critic evaluative who applies standards of his own to a work regardless of what its writer or readers believe, then the whole of Blish's criticism is evaluative: there is no way to say that Sturgeon is a better writer than Merritt without extrinsic evaluation. Similarly, Blish concedes that the historical critic is necessary when readers are unfamiliar with the artistic conventions or preoccupations employed. As a devotee of Joyce, he knows that most significant works in our time—and certainly all significant works of SF—employ partly unfamiliar themes and conventions: the present has become history too, not to be accepted as given but explored as unique. In fact, Blish is engaged throughout this book not only in evaluative but also in historical criticism. Often, he goes about it quite explicitly, as when he convicts Heinlein of he-man neo-romanticism; or when he identifies parts of *Venus Plus X* as being in Southern Agrarian taste (a brilliant stroke and possibly a key to what is weak in Sturgeon); or when he sketches a convincing sociological explanation of SF pessimism in the 1960's (p. 103).

His mistrust of "historical," or, better, positivistic criticism sometimes leads him to overreact, e.g. when he questions the canonical position of Cyrano in SF by asking the "common sense" question, which SF writer read him (p. 26)? The answer to that is Swift, who adapted some of Cyrano's basic devices and approaches in *Gulliver's Travels* (the full filiation runs More-Rabelais-Cyrano-Swift): and of course, almost all SF could be called "Sons of Gulliver." All this is independent of positivistic who-stole-from-whom snooping, of chronological common sense. Culture and literature develop by creating and breaking down paradigms, just as science does (see T.S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions):* and SF has not broken the Swiftian paradigm yet.

Finally, Blish has a certain number of privileged concerns and wavelengths, and he can, though very rarely, be curt with people who do not at all fit into them. This is the case with Judith Merril and Samuel Delany in his ch. 10. Miss Merril is one of my favorite people to

disagree with, but her evolution seems more complex than sketched here, and far from over; e.g., her essay *What Do You Mean: Science? Fiction?* is one of the most useful views of American SF extant. Blish's antagonism to Delany is perhaps as extreme as the hosannas of the admirers; for me, Delany is the most interesting name in his age-group, a writer of major promise in sensitivity and intelligence who has yet to justify that promise. My strongest disagreement with "Atheling," though, is ch. 5, where, laudably impatient with the proliferation of hollow SF, he created his own book out of what *Rogue Moon* might have been had it not been vitiated by Manhattan cocktail-party Freudianism—and then proceeded to praise it to the skies. I am not sure he fully believed himself: there is an anxious tone of special pleading here, evident in the telltale notes or the sleight-of-hand glossing over of immature human relations in the novel. Evidently, its hoped-for horizon of "Death and the Beloved"—beautifully identified—hit a responsive chord in Blish, so that he shut his eyes to Budrys' "thin execution" (as he says of a story by the same author 25 pages later).

However, my objections are quite secondary in face of the value of *More Issues at Hand.* Besides the chapters on criticism, Heinlein, Merritt, and magazines, there is a masterly sketch of Sturgeon's many sided loves, from erotics as a theme to his love affair with the English language, and the especially admirable chapter 9 on "Science-Fantasy and Translations." This is one of the best pieces of ethico-esthetical hygiene in a long time, on a par with Knight, Lem, or Joanna Russ' article on *Dream Literature.* The "science-fantasy" section shows why this is a non-viable hybrid and insists that, whatever the writer's view, he must respect basic cognitive possibilities if he pretends to be writing science-anything. Ascending from the particular to the general—and thus to what I have argued is the most valuable level now—the "translations" section points out that a contamination of literary models (when fairy-tales, Westerns, etc. are dressed up as SF) leads to third-rate writing. Such is also the conclusion of the most interesting critics outside the US and Britain, Foyster, Rottensteiner, and Lem; I can only say Amen. Finally, the chapter on the New Wave gives the best sketch yet of that movement. Though I indicated some of my reservations, I subscribe to everything Blish says about blind "myth-

olatry," adding that it is simply a flight from history into the treacherous wombs of the past and the unconscious—a complementary reaction to Gernsback-Campbellism, as red is complementary to green. Finally, I regret "Atheling" did not develop some of his *apercus:* that no author in American SF has more than one masterpiece (p. 77), that there are difficulties in hybridizing SF and the detective story (p. 110), that critical terminology is not surface rhetoric but basic (p. 117), etc. Dare we hope that his third critical book could be a piece of sustained writing instead of a gathering of issues that happened to be "at hand"? I think Blish owes that to us and to himself.

The Universe Makers operates on a different level. It is a personal credo and memoir, an approach to SF publishing, fandom, writers, and themes by a well-versed man for whom SF is "a world philosophy" (p. 3). I do not believe that any literary genre can stand in for a philosophy, but Mr. Wollheim's SF is resolutely linear, extrapolative, futurological, and progress-oriented; which is, of course, a "philosophy" or, more accurately, ideology. Mr. Wollheim's definition of this genre hinges on its being motivated as scientifically possible, which makes the same novel SF or fantasy by changing "one paragraph or two" (p. 13); what I think of this rule of thumb can be seen in the discussion of Blish's chapter 9, but it has been the relevant commercial, i.e., social, context of "reservation" SF. As for Mr. Wollheim's sub-classes, he himself acknowledges that most writings pertain to several of them. One could continue with objections: research on Verne has shown him to be a much more complex and varied writer than is usually believed, with a definite ethos and symbolic system, as well as a "social content." Or, one of the less desirable by-products of Mr. Wollheim's admirable onward-and-upward view of SF as a genre essentially in harmony with man, society, and science is that its worth is judged by its sales; this may be tried commercial ideology, but it really does not, for example, refute Knight's strictures on Van Vogt (p. 46). But such cavils do not truly matter *here*—Mr. Wollheim rejects any claim at writing a history of SF or at being interested in esthetics. Although he gives us interesting glimpses of many works, the main thrust of the book is toward explaining the optimistic or scientistic view of U.S. SF from 1920 on. *The Universe Makers* is, together

with some articles by Asimov, the best introduction to that view, its ethos and pathos.

No wonder the nova in or pivot of Mr. Wollheim's man-made universe is Asimov's *Foundation Trilogy*. This is eminently logical: if SF is thought of as an empire (a publishing empire?) developing by gradual colonization of unknown reaches of space starting from a center, then Wells is the center, Stapledon the first scout to reach the rim, and Asimov's *Trilogy* not only the final unification of that empire but in its very form the supreme model for it. Galactic Empire equals Science Fiction, and all slumps, renegades, or misguided New Waverers are but the Mule arresting its post-Depression recovery in vain. I have always felt psychohistory is Asimov's coy (Rooseveltian?) substitute for a deterministic pseudo-Marxism as understood in the incredibly ill-informed Depression America, and Mr. Wollheim happily confirms this (pp. 40-41—he is not better informed about Marxism today either). Indeed, when reading Wollheim or Asimov one is often reminded of some more sophisticated Soviet comments on the glories of Science in the service of all-conquering Man: "socialist realism" and "capitalist realism" (if I may coin a phrase) are quasi-utopian cousins, at least. *The Universe Makers* is a very readable account of "A Life for (such) SF," and it will remain a sociological treasure-trove of data and attitudes for a long time to come. I wish we had more books of this kind—by Campbell, Boucher, Gold, Pohl, etc., and indeed the second book Wollheim hints at. Only when all data and attitudes are public possession can this all-important social context be properly understood, and the development of SF interpreted.

Mr. Wollheim supplies a cover quote to Sam J. Lundwall's *Science Fiction: What It's All About* which claims it is "as fascinating as a dozen interplanetary epics." Indeed, the book uses a similarly "epic" sweep or pan across dazzling SF vistas, but its ambition is greater—no less than touching all the significant past and present bases of the field. Mr. Lundwall's main strength lies in his wide knowledge of SF, and his weakness in the cheery rapidity of his agile skimming. Most fundamental questions are elegantly dodged. For example, Mr. Lundwall has conflicting views at various points of the book on whether SF is or is not a branch of fairy-tale and myth. Or, his knowledge of European as well as U.S. literature enables

him to see the importance of utopias and their quest for Power as one major source of SF; but his common-sense pragmatism leads him to equate utopias with Mickey Spillane's escapism (I'm really not making this up—pp. 49-51)! He too approaches SF by themes and not by differential structural models. This is not good enough: it makes him treat, e.g., *Flatland* in the same breath with *Pinocchio* and *Castle of Otranto* as a "magic unreality." Many of his capsule summaries are economical and just (I like especially the one on Tolkien, p. 111), and he has a nice line of wit—say, in the pointed remarks on women in SF. One could continue praising things such as his glance at the institutional context of SF. Or, alternatively, one could make a long list of objections to his individual judgments, to bad gaps (*The First Men in the Moon* and several other works by Wells do not make the index, nor do stories by Campbell, Clarke, Knight and Blish, Bester's *Tiger, Tiger*, Borges, etc.) and mistakes (Gothic novels were written by Hugh Walpole not the 20th Century Horace, and *Cor Serpentis* by Yefremov, not Lem; the assessment of the Strugatsky situation on pp. 236-7 is factually wrong; etc.). But more importantly, Mr. Lundwall's view of SF seems to me shapeless: it marries Poe and Heinlein, or—in the same chapter!—Asimov and Bradbury. This can be commended as tolerance, but it does not tell us "what SF is about."

Indeed, my main critique of the book is that it has a subtitle "What It's *All* About"—assuming the "all" it would have to prove. Despite the superior breadth of Lundwall, who has read de Sade, knows several languages, and is a movie buff, this assumption is a wittier variant of Moskowitz's pragmatism: these writings are "all" read by consumers of commercial publications sporting the

name of SF, so they "all" must be SF; packaging is taken for the product. This readable book (though the names and quotes from foreign languages are in dire need of proofreading) assembles much useful data and provokes many chuckles. Regrettably, the eminently capable Mr. Lundwall has not used his unique position at the crossroads of American SF and European traditions to fulfill the promise in the subtitle. Wollheim managed to write both for fans and students; Lundwall's book is for fans rather than students of SF.

The Mirror of Infinity is "A Critics' Anthology of SF," where 13 SF writers, academics, and critics at large in happy justaposition introduce as many stories, popularizing SF while contributing to its understanding. This most useful idea is very successfully executed. The editor has assembled a group of critics who are at their best stimulating and enlightening, and at worst harmless. They (or the editor) have picked good stories to present, covering the entire Anglophone SF range from Wells and Campbell to Ballard. Three cavils: first, Borges is the lone foreigner. Second, there are some notable U. S. omissions, such as Pohl and Simak. Third, even the erudition of Professor McNelly did not convince me that Ellison's story is anything but classical fantasy, nor the elegance of Mr. Panshin that "*All you Zombies*—" is Heinlein's best story. But a score of 11 out of 13 is astoundingly near perfect for any anthology. It is the most useful resource book of its kind for a classroom. Mr. Silverberg is to be congratulated on it. I can only hope some publisher will be enlightened enough to follow it up with "A Critics' Anthology of International SF."

Academe And I

ISAAC ASIMOV

SCIENCE

WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT I have reached the point where I am the subject of advanced-degree work?

Well, I am. People get their master's degrees by preparing bibliographies of my stories, books and articles. They earn it, too, because trying to prepare a complete Asimov bibliography is almost impossible. I wouldn't care to tackle it myself.

One gentleman, Lloyd Neil Goble, has earned his Master of Science degree by analyzing, very carefully, the techniques I use in science writing; as in these articles, for instance. His dissertation is being published by Mirage Press (it should be out by the time this article appears) and is entitled "Asimov Analyzed."

I have read "Asimov Analyzed" with a mixture of gratification and fear.

The gratification is easy to explain. It's true that there are some people who gather from my writings that I am just a little bit on the immodest side, but never in my most outrageous sweeps of self-love would I dare be as pro-Asimov as Mr. Goble allows himself to be.

The fear arises from the fact that Mr. Goble mistakes me. He carefully works out the average lengths of sentences, and my systems for using parentheses, and seems to think it is all part of a carefully-constructed plot on my part to devise a style particularly suited for science writing.

No such thing! The fact of the matter, of course, is that I haven't worked out anything and haven't the faintest idea as to what I'm doing. I just bang the typewriter, that's all. Consequently, I turn the pages of Mr. Goble's dissertation *very* carefully and try not to read it in detail, because if I find out too much about all my devices, I will get self-conscious and lose that fine, easy style that arises only out of my innocent naivete.

But to top it all off, here's something else—

It so happens that the college crowd has discovered science fiction—I don't mean the students; I mean the faculty. Colleges are giving *courses* in science fiction. And at the University of Dayton, a course is being given which is entitled, "The Science Fiction of Isaac Asimov."

When I found that out, I went and lay down for a while. I am a rational person after all, and there are some things I consider hallucinations.

Of course, I've been in a peculiar position with regard to the academic world even before the sudden mushrooming popularity of science fiction in the college classroom. You see, I have long had one foot in each world.

I don't for one moment intend to imply that I am the only college professor who writes science fiction, or that I am the only science fiction writer with a professional appointment. I do suspect, though, that no writing professor writes as much science fiction as I do or (dare I say it?) as good science fiction as I do. And I don't think that any science fiction writer has quite as notable a professorial position in a science department as I do.

It has its disadvantages. I am sometimes interviewed by gentlemen or ladies of the media, and this combination of careers seems to fascinate them. They find the juxtaposition anything from eccentric to outrageous, and they ask me questions about it; the same questions, over and over.

Let me then take this opportunity of answering some of the questions I am over-frequently asked. Perhaps if I do so, that will encourage the invention of new questions.

1- Dr. Asimov, isn't it odd that a biochemist should write

science fiction? What made you abandon your lectures and your test-tubes and turn to writing sensational stories?

Believe it or not, I am asked this question often, and the mere fact that it is asked shows that the questioner doesn't know much about my writing, or he would know that I never turned from biochemistry to science fiction. The science fiction came first—by years!

Those of you who have read my article PORTRAIT OF THE WRITER AS A BOY (F & SF, October 1966) know very well that I have been a writer since well before I was a teen-ager, and that I sold my first science fiction story in 1938, when I was eighteen years old and a senior at Columbia University.

In fact, I was a major science fiction writer by mid-1942, by which time I had written 42 stories and published 31*, including "Nightfall," the first three positronic robot stories, and the first two Foundation novelettes. And I was still just a graduate student with a freshly-minted master's degree.

By the time seven more years has passed and I had joined the faculty of the medical school, I had written all the Foundation stories and all but one of the stories that were to appear in I, ROBOT.

So I am not, *not*, NOT, a biochemist who turned to science fiction. I am a science fiction writer who eventually became a professor, and that's an entirely different thing.

2- *I see. Well, then, in that case, Professor Asimov, what made you decide to become a biochemistry professor? If you had established yourself as a science fiction writer, why did you turn away from it?*

Because I never intended to be a science fiction writer for a *living*. I might as well have intended to be a rag-picker for a living. Let me explain—

My ambition, as a child, was to be a medical doctor. At least my parents told me that that was my ambition and I believed it. It was the normal ambition for Jewish parents of the ghetto to have for their sons. It was the surest way of getting those sons out of the ghetto.

** Eleven of my early stories were never sold, never published, and no longer exist. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is. And no, I can't reconstruct them. If you want to know the full story of my early writing life, you will find it, along with 27 of my early stories, hitherto uncollected in any of my books, in* THE EARLY ASIMOV, *a book which Doubleday will publish in October 1972.*

So when I entered Columbia University in 1935, it was with the purpose of applying to medical school at the conclusion of my college years. I wasn't overcome with joy at the thought, because being involved with pain, disease, and death did not appeal to me. On the other hand, I didn't know any other alternative to inheriting my father's candy store with its 16-hour workday and its 7-day week.

Fortunately, I didn't get into medical school. I was unenthusiastic enough to apply for entrance to only five schools altogether, and none of them would have me. By that time, though, I had discovered another alternative. I was majoring in chemistry, something I had started with routine pre-medical notions, and discovered that I loved the science for itself. Consequently, when I didn't score with the medical schools, I applied, in 1939, for permission to continue on at Columbia, so that I might do graduate work in chemistry with the objective of a Ph.D.

My notion was that once I got my Ph.D., I could use it to get a position on some good college faculty. There I would teach chemistry and do research.

Actually, World War II delayed me, but I finally got my Ph.D. in 1948, and I joined the faculty at Boston University School of Medicine in 1949. —My plan worked.

All through my life, then, it was the one doctorate or the other—the medical, for my parents; the philosophical, for myself—that was my goal, and my hoped-for device for earning a living.

Science fiction writing has nothing to do with that; nothing at all. When I first began to write, it was merely through an uncontrollable impulse. I had no vision of money, not even a vision of readers, just a desire to spin stories for my own happiness.

When I finally did sell my first story, in 1938, I was, as aforesaid, an 18-year-old college senior. I was still in my pre-medical stage, still looking forward uneasily to the possibility of starting medical school within the year—and wondering where I would get the money for it. For that matter, it was hard enough to get money for college tuition itself, and those were the days when Columbia only charged $400 a year.

Consequently, when the first few science fiction checks came in, I saw in them only one thing—a contribution toward my tuition. That's what they were, and that's all they could be.

Was I stupid not to see that they might someday be more? Well, consider—

When I started writing science fiction, the *top* word-rate was one cent. I was much more likely to get half a cent per word. The number of science fiction magazines was exactly three, and only one of them was prosperous. Science fiction was all I wrote or, it seemed to me, could write. I didn't even want to write anything but science fiction.

With a market that limited and that poor, could any sane person expect to make a living as a writer? With the years, to be sure, a few more magazines were started and rates went up a little, but even so, the prospects remained dim.

In fact, let me be precise. During my first eleven years as a science fiction writer, my total earning, my *total* earnings, through my labors at my typewriter, amounted to less than eight thousand dollars. And I was doing well. I was selling everything I wrote after the first four years.

With that kind of record, is it any surprise that my science fiction writing never for a moment deflected me from the serious task of preparing myself for what seemed to be my real career? Naturally, then, when, in June 1949, I had a chance at joining a medical school faculty for the princely payment of $5,000 each and every year, I jumped at it.

3- *I understand, Professor. But tell me, did this double career of yours ever bring about a conflict? Did your academic colleagues ever look down at you for your disreputable avocation?*

I guess there was some amusement at it in Columbia. A good portion of the student body had read science fiction at some time or other in their early life. Back in the 40s, however, science fiction was looked upon as essentially children's literature. The pattern generally was that you read science fiction in high school and abandoned it in college. They smiled at me not so much for reading science fiction, but merely for *still* reading it.

The fact that I *wrote* science fiction was easier to accept and understand than the fact that I read it. After all, I was paid for writing it, and I was using the money to help me get my education. There was nothing wrong with that.

Through all my schooling there was only one time when I got nervous about my science fiction.

In 1947, I had my forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation much on my mind, and it was one of the few periods when I was doing little

writing. So the pressure was building up to do some writing of some kind.

I was conducting experiments that involved a substance called catechol. This existed in fluffy, white, extremely soluble crystals. As soon as they hit the water surface, they were gone, dissolved. I thought, idly, that perhaps they dissolved a fraction of a millimeter above the water surface, and it occurred to me to write a story about a substance that dissolved *before* water was added.

Because my dissertation was so much on my mind, I couldn't resist writing it in the form of a mock-dissertation, complete with turgid sentences, tables, graphs, and fake references. I called it "The Endochronic Properties of Resublimated Thiotimoline" and sold it to John Campbell, editor of *Astounding Science Fiction.*

Then I got nervous. My position at Columbia was rocky anyway, because I was considered eccentric even aside from the science fiction bit. My scholarship was all right, but I was loud, boisterous and irreverent (behaving in the hallowed halls of Columbia, a quarter of a century ago, much as I behave in the hallowed halls of Doubleday these days). I knew that some of the faculty thought that I lacked the proper gravity to make a good scientist, and it occurred to me that the thiotimoline article, which clearly made fun of science and scientists, would be the last straw. —And the article would be published just about the time I was getting ready for my oral examination for the doctorate.

So I called Mr. Campbell and told him I wanted the article run under a pseudonym. He agreed.

He also forgot. It came out under my own name about three months before my orals. Yes, sir; yes, ma'am; the entire faculty read it.

When I stood before the examining committee, I was put through the usual hell, and then when they had me beaten down into a quivering mass of panic, one of them said, "And now, Mr. Asimov, could you tell us something about the thermodynamic properties of thiotimoline?" and I had to be led out of the room in hysterics.

They passed me, obviously, or I wouldn't be the Good Doctor, now.

4- *I wasn't really asking whether you had trouble when you were a student, Good Doctor; I meant, did you have trouble with your fellow faculty-members when you were yourself on the faculty?*

I certainly didn't expect to. Several of the members were science-fiction fans, notably the one who recommended me for the job, and who knew my writing well.

In fact, I had only one bad moment to begin with. My first book had been sold just a couple of weeks before I accepted the faculty position and went to Boston. That book, PEBBLE IN THE SKY, was to be published by Doubleday & Co. on January 19, 1950, and I knew they were going to publicize my relationship to the school. I found this out when I read the material on samples of the cover jacket which Doubleday sent me. On the back cover (along with a very good likeness of myself which breaks my heart when I look at it now) was an account of the thiotimoline question at my oral examination, and a final sentence which read:

"Dr. Asimov lives in Boston where he is engaged in cancer research at Boston University School of Medicine."

I thought about that for quite a while then decided to bite the bullet. I asked to see the Dean and put it to him frankly. I was a science fiction writer, I said, and had been for years. My first book was coming out under my own name and my association with the medical school would be mentioned. Did he want my resignation?

The Dean considered thoughtfully and said, "Is it a good book?"

Cautiously I said, "The publishers think so."

And he said, "In that case the medical school will be glad to be identified with it."

And that took care of that.

5- *But if you were a science fiction writer, professor, didn't that cast doubt on the validity of your scientific work? I mean if you published a scientific paper, might that not be dismissed by someone as "just more science fiction."*

That would be a very obvious half-witticism, but it has never happened, that I know of.

To be sure, my career as an active researcher was short, and the number of papers I put out was not large, but they were all perfectly good and sober papers, and I don't know that anyone ever dismissed them because of my other profession.

Naturally, I don't know what happened behind my back, but stories would reach me indirectly—

A fellow member of the department who got his appointment only a month after I did, and who was *not* a science fiction writer, told me years later that when he discovered I was a science fiction

writer, he was sure that would ruin my scientific career. He was curious enough to sound out the feelings of others and told me that nobody minded.

Well, almost nobody. I was doubtful sometimes about the socially conservative individual with whom I did my early research. I don't know that he objected to my science fiction, particularly, as much as to my personality in general.

He hinted to me, for instance, that in the heat of the Boston summer I should nevertheless, in accord with my social status as a faculty member, wear a jacket and tie. I smiled genially and turned a deaf ear, of course. I also ignored all hints that my relations with students were too informal. (If he had looked more carefully, he would have noted that my relations with *everybody* were too informal.)

Anyway, I heard one story about him that I cannot vouch for personally but which my informant swore to me was true. My research colleague went to Washington once to push for an increase in grant funds and of those functionaries he consulted, one looked over the report, pointed to my name on the list of those engaged in the project and said,

"Isn't that the science fiction writer?"

My research colleague, in an immediate sweat at the possibility of losing the grant, began to assure the other that I never allowed my science fiction to mix with my real science.

But the functionary shook that off and proceeded to ask many more questions about me. It turned out that he was a science fiction fan and was far more interested in me than in the project. My boss got all the money he asked for that time, but I think he was annoyed about it all, anyway.

But it didn't matter. I only worked with him for a few years and then got out from under.

6- *To change the subject, Professor Asimov, you write a good deal, don't you?*

I publish seven or eight books a year on the average—say half a million words a year.

7- *But how can you do that and still keep up a full teaching load?*

I can't and I don't.

A funny thing happened after I took my job at the medical school. Once I finally had the scientific career I had striven toward

for so many years, my writing activities which, until then, had only been a helpful adjunct, suddenly took on a life of their own.

My first book was followed by another, then another. Royalties began to arrive regularly. Anthologies began to multiply, and book clubs and paperbacks and foreign interest. My writing income began to bound upward.

Then something else happened. Working with two other members of the department, I helped write a textbook on biochemistry for medical students and discovered I liked to write non-fiction. Then I found out there was a larger market for non-fiction than for fiction and that the word-rates were considerably better. Then I found out I could write non-fiction on all sorts of subjects.

So I wrote more and more, both non-fiction and fiction, and enjoyed myself hugely. After I had been on the job for several years, I discovered two more things: One, I made more money writing than professoring and the disparity increased each year. Two, I *liked* writing better than professoring and that disparity, too, increased each year.

I kept having the impulse to quit my job and just devote myself to my writing, but how could I? I had spent too much of my life educating myself for this job to throw it away. So I dithered.

The dithering came to an end in 1957, by which time I had a new department head and the school had a new dean. The old ones had been tolerant of my eccentricities, even fond of them perhaps, but the new ones were not. In fact, they viewed my activities with keen disapproval.

What bothered them most was the status of my research. As long as I had written only science fiction, my research was not affected. My science fiction was written on my own time. No matter how hot the story, or how pressing the deadline, it was written evenings and weekends only.

Non-fiction was different. I considered my books on science for the public to be a scholarly activity, and I worked on them during school hours. I continued to carry a full teaching load, of course, but I gave up my research.

I was called on the carpet for this by the new administration, but I held my ground stubbornly and even a little fiercely. I said that I was paid primarily to be a teacher, that I fulfilled all my teaching duties and that it was generally recognized that I was one of the best teachers in the school.

As for my research, I said, I didn't think I would ever be more

than a merely adequate researcher, and that while my scientific work would be respectable enough, it would never shed luster on the school. My writing on the other hand (I said) was first-class, and it would bring a great deal of fame to the school. On that basis (I continued) not only would I not abandon my writing in favor of research as a matter of personal preference, but also out of a concern for the welfare of the school.

I did not manage to put that across. I was told, quite coldly, that the school could not afford to pay someone $6500 a year (that was my salary by then) in order to have him write science books.

So I said, contemptuously, "Then keep the darned money, and I won't teach for you."

"Good," I was told, "your appointment will be ended as of June 1958."

"No, it won't," I said. "Just the salary. The title I keep, for I've got tenure."

Well, what followed was a Homeric struggle that lasted for two years. Never mind the details, but I still have the title. Since June 1958, however, I haven't taught and I haven't collected a salary. I give one lecture a year and I fulfill some honorary duties (such as sitting on committees), but I am now a full-time writer and will continue to be one. And I am still Associate Professor of Biochemistry.

The school is now very happy with the situation. As I predicted, my writing has indeed brought them favorable publicity. And I am happy with the situation, too, because I value my academic connection. It is pleasant to be able to walk into a large University and feel you belong, and are there by right.

As a matter of fact, the administrator with whom I had the trouble has long since retired and, since that time, a succession of University Presidents, Directors and Deans have all been extremely kind to me. I would like to emphasize that, except for that one argument in 1957 and 1958, I have always been treated with surpassing generosity by everyone at the school from top to bottom.

I must also emphasize, once again, that even during that argument, it was *not* my science fiction writing that was in question. The quarrel was entirely over my abandonment of research, and I had abandoned that in favor of my *non*-fiction.

8- *In view of the fact that you no longer teach, Dr. Asimov, do*

you still view yourself as a scientist?

Certainly. Why shouldn't I? I've had professional training in chemistry. I've lectured for years, at a professional level, in biochemistry. I've written textbooks in these subjects. None of that has been wiped out.

I consider one of the most important duties of any scientist the teaching of science to students and to the general public. Although I don't often lecture to formal classes, my books on science reach more people and teach more people than I could possibly manage by voice alone.

It is true I no longer teach class, but that is not at all the same as saying that I no longer teach. I teach science now more than I ever did in school, and so I consider myself not only a scientist, but a *practicing* scientist.

Naturally, I also consider myself a writer.

9- *In view of the wide variety of writings you turn out, what kind of writer do you consider yourself?*

Sometimes I wonder. In the last two years I have published a two-volume work on Shakespeare, a satire on sex books, and a jokebook* in addition to my books on science and on history.

So I let others decide. To others I seem to be identified always as a science fiction writer. It was how I began; how I made my first and perhaps still my greatest impact.

Nor have I really retired as a science fiction writer. It is no longer my major field of endeavor but I have never stopped writing it. At the present moment I have three science fiction short stories waiting to be published. In addition I have written my first novel in a long time. It is being serialized in a science fiction magazine, and Doubleday will publish it in May, 1972. It's title is THE GODS THEMSELVES.

So there you are—

I'm a science fiction writer.

**These are respectively, for those of you who are curious:* ASIMOV'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE *(Doubleday, 1970);* THE SENSUOUS DIRTY OLD MAN *(Walker, 1971, under the transparent pseudonym of Dr. A.); and* ISAAC ASIMOV'S TREASURY OF HUMOR *(Houghton Mifflin, 1971)*

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