

Gone with the Gods

There are many inventions you never hear about because no one has found a good use for them.

ANDREW J. OFFUTT

I was gagging my way through the day's third Gothic novel, trying to get myself into perpetrating one of the damned things so some artist could perpetrate another cover with an uptight-looking young woman in the foreground and a castle or old house in the background—with a light in one window. It was one of those times when any sort of interruption was welcome, even a ringing phone.

The phone rang.

I bounced "The Castle of Malfoie" off the far wall and reached for a cigarette with my right hand. My left went after the phone. I am totally incapable of handling a telephone without a cigarette. I try to control the nasty things, but on those days when I have to answer and place several calls, the tobacco industry gets a break. And I wake up next day with a throat like a piece of old harness leather.

"Hello, this is Harvey Moss," I said, wiping a book of matches off the desk.

"Harvey sweetheart, howsa boy?"

"Doing my damndest to get into an Otranto mood, Mark," I said, with plenty of put-upon weariness in my voice. Mark Ventnor's voice, naturally, was one I recognized instantly. I hunched my left shoulder to hold the phone against my ear while I tore off a match and lit up.

"Otranto? Otranto?"

I sighed smokily. "The gran-daddy of all Gothic novels, Mark. Very old novelette, by a gent named Walpole, may his soul sizzle sickly!"

"Oh yeah, oh yeah, *that* Otranto," Mark Ventnor said in that raspy high voice of his. Sounds like Ed McMahon doing W. C. Fields, sober. With a cold. And about to cry. "Well, forget that Gothic jazz, Harvey sweetheart. I got something I need you to do."

"Last week you needed me to do a Gothic," I reminded him. "By the first."

"That was last week. I just had a really weird phone call, Harvey. A really odd call."

"Me too," I muttered, "this one." More loudly I said, not without trepidation, "Tell me about it, Mark."

"Yeah. Listen Harve, I just had a call from an old fraternity brother of mine, Dr.—"

"Hey, I never knew you were in a fraternity," I said, reaching for the ashtray and not quite making it. If it's true that ashes are good for rugs, I should keep one on my desk instead of a blotter. The ash is always longer than it should be; the tray is always a few centimeters too far away.

"Uh yeah, yeah, I was," he said, half blown away by the interruption. "Sure I was: It was a long time ago," the cueball-headed boss of Morpheus Books added unnecessarily. "So an old fraternity brother, Dr. Ben Corrick, called me today."

"Marvy," I said, "and you want me to ghost a book about his earthshaking new diet plan, right?"

There was a brief accusing silence, heavy with hurt. Then: "Harvey, this call is costing me money. It's my nickel, remember. Things are not so good I should listen to you shoot off your mouth every time I open mine—and before I close it. I—"

"Right, Mark. Sorry."

I heard his sigh. Oh Lord. I'd done it again. I resisted apologizing for having interrupted to apologize. The silence just sort of sat there for awhile, surly.

"Ben Corrick isn't a medical doctor," Mark said in the manner of the teacher in a retarded-I-meanexceptional class. "He has one of those PhD's. You know. In physics.

Like . . . ah, you know, physics. He's stayed on at the old school all these years while I've been

working my ass off up here in New York, and he's been working on an *invention*."

I curbed the automatic impulse to comment. An invention. Oh boy.

"You still reading all those hard-core science articles the way a kid reads funnybooks, Harvey?"

"Sure. What's the invention?"

"Well, see, he's had this grant, he and his department. But he's been at work on a private project for years too, see. He calls it a, ah, temporal traverser."

"A temporal traverser," I echoed, dry as the landscape around Sinai.

"Right," Mark said, with escalating excitement in his voice. "D'you think it's possible, Harvey?"

"The word 'impossible'," I said, "won't be in Webster's Fourth. But how do I know, what's it supposed to—a *temporal traverser*?"

"Right!"

"Mark? Time travel?"

"Right! Right!" I could practically see him and his belly jiggling up and down in his excitement.

"You sure he's not putting you on, Mark?"

"I don't think so, but that's what I want to find out, Harve boy. Can you get over to Chinchilla, Pennsylvania and find out for me?"

"Can I—you sending me a plane ticket, Mark? *Chinchilla!*"

"I'll cover it, Harvey. Just try to hold it down, OK? Times are hard."

I ignored that. Mark Ventnor is a hyper, not to mention a shucker. He is also publisher, president, editor, and bigot-in-charge of Morpheus Books, which he founded. He's tried dozens of times—literally—to get a really Big Book out there, opportunistically, exploitatively jumping aboard every topical express to come down the track. It's never happened. I know; I've written most of the books for him. And so Mark sings the blues, constantly—although the old phony *does* have money. Part of the reason is he hangs onto it the way fans hoard old magazines and books. I know. I've done fifty-seven books for Mark Ventnor in the past six years, with advances ranging from an embarrassing-to-admit seven hundred and fifty dollars to a decent thirty-five hundred, using eleven pen names. Subject matter has been very broad indeed: attempt after attempt at get-rich exploitation, each about as effective as government economic plans.

Not one of those books has ever sold enough to earn me any royalties beyond the advance. Or so Mark Ventnor says, anyhow, and he's the one with the ledgers. And his mainstay, a seemingly endless stream of Gothics. They *sell*.

And now I knew we were off again.

But Mark was talking. "You know how academic-types are, Harve, Ben had a, ah, little accident. They, ah ... he isn't with the university any more. And he—"

"A little accident?"

"Ben'll tell you all about it, Harve. Dr. Corrick. Just get over there. I've got money at stake."

So then, while I lit another cigarette, Mark Ventnor dropped the rest of it on me.

There'd been a fair crowd on hand the day Dr. Ben Corrick was at last ready to demonstrate his device. He explained, re-explained, blinked, and finally closed the switch. Nothing happened. He then went across the big lab-sort-of room in which he'd constructed his . . . Thing. And he plugged it in.

Fortuitous, his being on the other side of that big room. The temporal traverser did absolutely nothing for a moment or so. Then it removed, in a manner most noisy, the better part of the south and east walls of ivied old Smoire Hall, not to mention a large assortment of glass items in the surrounding area.

The t.t. was not amid the rubble.

Shamed, castigated, attacked, called charlatan and worse, Ben Corrick, PhD, was forcibly sabbaticalized.

Now, months later, he had called his old fraternity brother. The working model of his Mark Two t.t. was nearly finished. But his bank account and savings were *totally* finished. All he needed to finish the device was another ten thousand dollars. And everybody knows publishers have lots of money.

Ventnor didn't have to tell me that he then relieved himself of a sermon on money, inflation, hungry writers and grasping, incompetent distributors, inflation, prices, union printers, inflation . . . and so on. I'd

heard it several times from Mark; it's improved signally since the advent of the recent unlamented Administration.

But somehow Ventnor succumbed. Somehow Corrick persuaded and convinced him to check out the temporal traverser, at least. And so Mark Ventnor, actually giving consideration to parting (after due tearfulness and lectures) with ten thousand clams, told Corrick to hold tight. And Mark called in Harvey Moss.

Me.

I'm a writer. It's all I do. I make a living at it and from it. There are several ways that can be done. You can write a book about a garbage-eating bird with a sixth-grade philosophy, for instance, and be rich forever because that's one grade above *Reader's Digest* readers, who are easily impressed. Or do a sort of fact novel about a couple convicted murderers, and be rich and drop names forever. Or you can write science fiction, and stay hungry. You can perpetrate Gothics for whoever it is that reads them, and know that every word you write will sell, instantly and easily.

Or you can do what I do. I make a nice comfortable living the same way the A&P does: on volume. I write a lot, and I've never been late for a contract deadline. Fifty-seven books for Ventnor in the last six years, as I said, and all on time. Dependable, that's me. Always dependable; a pussycat. And always hungry. Oh, I admit it: I have the usual booze 'n' broads habit. Sure, writers get groupies; writing's almost show biz, you know. And we have to get down at the end of a day, after hyping up on ideas and coffee all day. So—broads and booze, right? It cuts into the old finances.

I've also written some decent science fiction, and I read pure science articles just as Mark said, constantly. Presumably, then, I know a few things. Certainly to a guy like Mark Ventnor, who knows *very* few.

So he called to sic me onto Corrick. To study his notes and his schematics and to look at the Thing in the garage behind his Chinchilla, Pennsylvania cottage, and to make a judgment, and to report back to Daddy Warbucks Ventnor in Manhattan. He would then decide whether to risk ten of his thousands on Corrick's alleged temporal traverser.

Flattering? I guess so; Mark trusted me and my knowledge. Also a drag. After all—a *time machine!* Didn't John Campbell prove the total impossibility of time travel?

But ... maybe, I thought, there was a science-fiction idea in it, and that would beat having to do the damned Gothic, since I'd written only one book in the past five weeks. I was in great need of something to do a book about, and Gothics are icky, and writing pornography always makes me so damned horny!

So I journeyed to the town of Chinchilla, Pennsylvania to meet a kook named Corrick, Benjamin A., PhD, and listen to his nonsense, and tell Mark Ventnor what he should have known to do in the first place: save his ten thousand. Or give it to me as an advance to go and interview Clifford Oiving.

But that wasn't the way it turned out.

First I met Dr. Ben Corrick, who was a "call-me-Ben" sort of guy you couldn't dislike if you tried. About Ventnor's age, with hair, less weight, more wrinkles. Somehow he managed to look baggy and wrinkly and rumped even in doubleknits—the trousers pockets stuffed so full of this and that they resembled army fatigues. Quite a bit of reddish hair, curly, above a high forehead that was obviously a lot higher than when he and Mark Ventnor had been fraternal brethren together. His blue eyes were of the sort usually called watery, set in a pleasant-enough face, almost a boy's face.

He was the sort of man you liked the moment you saw him. I had to remind myself to maintain a scientific attitude, to treat him not as a friend but as a charlatan.

But he wasn't. I studied, I pored, I re-studied and asked questions. Examined and re-examined the stuff in the garage. The temporal traverser, he called it.

And so did I, finally. I said so, to Mark Ventnor. He acted incredulous, but his delight and excitement glowed through the careful, questioning attitude like the sun through closed venetian blinds.

With Corrick practically having signed away his birthright (not to mention his burial plot, thus including his deathright as well), Mark Ventnor financed the project he dubbed *Project Fugit*. And time fled, while Ben Corrick worked away at finishing his brain-baby and while Mark Ventnor worked away

at plotting, designing his Grand Scheme—to be rich and famous at last.

Me? To stay in money, I wrote "The Castle of Brandywine," gagging all the while. I had to cut the scene in which the hunchback raped the kitchen maid, too.

"The traverser," Ben Corrick told me in that strangely near-breathless way of his, "is ready for field-testing."

I blinked. "Ready? Really ready?"

He nodded, maintaining his solemnity despite the twinkle in his eyes and the smile that was trying to tug at each corner of his mouth. "It's really ready, Harve."

"And this time," I said, grinning, practically rubbing my hands together, "you're gonna do it from *inside*, hm-m-m?"

"Definitely! The other time there was the explosion, of course, and then the remote failed to work. I am convinced that the machine did work, and properly. That's why there was no sign of it amid the debris."

"Um. But suppose something goes wrong, Ben. You're a certified genius. You've got no business inside that thing before it's tested."

"It's *been* tested," Ben assured me. "It's lost somewhere, the Mark One. I mean, *somewhen*."

"And it doesn't have to be plugged in, anymore? I mean, if you want to go back and have a talk with Ben Franklin, you're going to play hell finding a wall-plug!"

"Of course. And now we hire a truck and take the temporal traverser, Mark Two, out for its field-test."

"Out?" I gave him a brows-up look. "Out? What do you mean? Out where?"

Ben Corrick smiled his boyish smile and made an uncharacteristically extravagant gesture. "Out into the open. Into a *field*, where else?" His watery eyes studied me, waiting anxiously for my reaction.

I saw that, and then I saw his joke. "Field-testing! In a field!" "Of course."

So we got the truck, a big flatbed. And we got a couple of guys to help us load the t.t., although they were sure we were cracked wide open. We didn't tell them what it was. As a matter of fact we told them. it was a kloosh; ever heard that old joke?

Then we drove the temporal traverser out into the country, off the highway onto a back road, and off the back road into a field, scaring the beak off a matronly bobwhite. The field was full of timothy that rose about halfway up my calves.

I was still frowning, having doubts, prickly in the armpits, when Ben entered the temporal traverser and buttoned up.

The t.t. Well, Ben had a real brainstorm this time, so as not to be too obtrusive when he materialized in the distant past or future. Very clever of him, really—and besides, he needed a power-source at hand. So he had built the temporal traverser into a yellow VW square-back station wagon. Lots of space in those things. It could even be driven.

But he wasn't driving it now. I waited, standing well back. Holding my breath, having palpitations. Staring at that yellow car atop the big red flatbed truck he'd insisted on, just in case the VW couldn't be driven back. Happy thought! He was certain, he said, that the t.t. would move from surface to surface, not materialize elsewhere some five feet off the ground and drop with one hell of an impact. I hoped he was right. What if he came down on a cow, I thought, and started to yell, and—

The explosion knocked me off my feet. It was the shock more than the shock *waves*, I feel sure. But it *was* a shock, and physical force or not it was just as effective as had it been shock wave. I went down, and now my heart wasn't palpitating, it was pounding. Once I got myself sort of untangled and looked, there was the truck. It appeared to be OK.

But there wasn't any VW on it.

"Well I'll be damned," I muttered. "He must have done it. He must be traveling in time. Darn . . . I didn't even think to ask where he was going. I mean when."

I glanced at my watch. During that glance, the VW reappeared. I stood frozen until he stepped out, beaming.

I blurted, "Are you all right?" Sorry. It was the first thing I thought of. I realized I could have said something brilliant, such as "Mr. Watson, come here, I need you." I just hadn't thought about it in advance, as Neil Armstrong so obviously had. Or as Ben Corrick had done:

"One small step for mankind," Ben Corrick said, "one giant step for science." Then, "Of course, I'm all right. I only went to tomorrow. Look at this."

"Oh brother," I said, commenting on his first words, not on what he showed me, although it was worth no fancier comment. I frowned at it. "A button?"

Corrick nodded vigorously. "A button. Look familiar?"

No, but he soon showed me that it appeared to match those on my jacket. That didn't seem to prove anything, and I said so.

Ben blinked. "It proves that I went into the future," he said, dipping a hand into one stuffed pocket of his ever-baggy pants, "and brought you back this button from your coat. It was lying right there on the ground."

I checked. "Ben—I think we ought to be dancing, screaming, getting drunk, whatever. Instead we're standing here talking about a damn button—and there aren't any buttons missing from my jacket!"

"Of course there is, Harvey," Ben said, opening the knife he'd brought out of his pocket, and he cut the lowest button off the front of my coat.

"Hey!"

Smiling, Ben dropped the button into the grass. "I'm putting it there," he said, "so it'll be there tomorrow. And then I walk over from the temporal traverser, bend over like this, and pick it up." He straightened up to show me the two buttons in his palm. They appeared to be identical.

"Be damned," I said. "But Ben . . . this . . . this isn't *proof*. I mean . . . you could have, you know—hell, you're a scientist. This isn't any sort of scientific proof."

"Do you mean to stand there and—" He broke off. "You're right," he said slowly.

So he thought a moment, and then told me to take out my wallet and drop it on the ground, and I did, and off he went again, while I stood there and did as I was told: I stared at my wallet, lying there in the tall grass in the middle of someone's field of timothy. The wallet didn't move. Then Ben was back, and walking over to me, and handing me my wallet.

It was mine, all right. And it was still lying down there at my feet, too.

"Condition's not as good," Ben said as I examined it, "since it spent the rest of the afternoon and tonight here on the ground, and then got covered with dew tomorrow morning, which the sun baked off. And kept on baking until I picked it up."

I went through my wallet. The new one. I mean the second one; wallet. I now had two of everything. Very convenient—but the currency with the identical serial numbers, I thought, could be pretty dangerous. (Also a tempting way to "make" money. Put a wad of it down. Go to tomorrow and bring it back. Again . . . and again . . . and again! If there's a paradox there, I'm not going to worry about it. I can see that it *could* be the money that folded itself, somewhere up the line.)

I dropped the wallet beside its look-alike and hugged Ben Corrick. We danced around a little, and then I asked if he'd mind just going around again and picking up my wallet, *earlier*, before it got ruined. Ben stared at me, then started laughing, and I realized how chickenshit ridiculous I was being, under the circumstances—the circumstances being that he had just successfully traveled in time—and we hugged and whooped and did our jig again.

We had ourselves a genuine bona-fide certified card-carrying *time machine!*

Ben went around again, as requested. Handed me my wallet again. (The second one vanished, with a minor bang.) I was still left with two, but he pointed out that I had to leave the original lying there. So it would be there for him to pick up tomorrow. Because he just had. Twice.

"What if I don't?" I asked, feeling sly.

"Please, Harvey."

"Right," I said, in manner businesslike. "Now what about next week, or next year, Ben?"

Ben tried, but this time he came back crestfallen. The VW wouldn't go past tomorrow. So then he went back to yesterday. That worked out, and he came back just fine.

But he couldn't make the day after tomorrow. Or next week or next year; nothing past tomorrow.

Don't bother asking why. You can play with that sort of thing, theorizing, all day and into the middle of next month. Yesterday is there to visit, because it *was* there, remember? So we can go back to it. Tomorrow? I don't know. Maybe it follows naturally out of today. But the day *after* tomorrow just isn't there yet. It hasn't happened. Maybe it can be *changed*, which is why we can't go there (then). Because it is subject to change, and thus doesn't exist yet.

Buy it; you like the concept of freedom of choice, don't you? Would it be there if we could visit the future?

"Well," I said, a little dry in the mouth, "there went a lot of marvy get-rich-quick ideas! OK Ben, it's time to find out, right?"

Ben and I stood there in the middle of that field of slightly-waving timothy, looking at each other. He blinked those pale, watery eyes, stared another couple of seconds into mine, and turned away. He waded through the timothy, and mounted the truck, and got into the VW. Then he and that strange VW wagon went away: *Bang!*

I squatted down and gazed at my wallet while I waited.

That was the explanation for the unfortunate, precipitate, and lamented demise of the south and east walls of poor old ivied Smoire

Hall, I mused. The bang. Thunder. Suddenly there's a VW-sized hole in the air, and the air rushes in to fill it. *Bang!* He had thought of that, and that's why we were way the hell out in the middle of this field. Shaking up birds with bang after bang.

Then Dr. Corrick returned, obviously able to return to the same moment at which he'd left if he really wanted to, fine-tuning. He bore five *comic books*. Five, no less. All newsstand fresh, all identical: the June, 1938 edition of Action Comics.

Chortling, he explained. "I thought I might as well bring some *worthwhile* proof," he told me triumphantly. "This is the origin of Superman issue! Each is worth a thousand dollars or more, in mint condition. And believe me, Harvey—these are in mint condition!"

The sound I made is what is known as a Comanche yell.

A few more little experiments taught us a few more little things. For one, there's a weight-loss, a nigh weightless factor in trans-time movement. Let's don't go into too many details, but Ben and I learned that the VW could transport enormous weights, so long as it was timejumping.

(Time-travel, Ben had postulated and now proven, is inextricably bound up with e and $e=mc^2$. That led me to point out that since we got it all together out in the middle of a field, we had proven the Corrick Unified Field Theorem.)

He did have a hard time selling those comic books, by the way. They were *so* perfect, so new, that dealers were decidedly wary. But he sold four of them at last—keeping one because he just couldn't "bear to part with it"—to some hotshot dealers out Dallas way. Some people kept insisting that those guys had been taken, and there was a lot of chatter in the dealers' magazines for awhile, about the Dallas con.

We let a hyper-excited Mark Ventnor know what we'd done, and he came down to Chinchilla to see, and then to try out the temporal traverser (which Ben and I by now referred to simply as "the veedub").

Mark came back from his fourth jaunt into the very distant past very shaken indeed. He had visited a consummately ancient gent named Abram, the same who later changed his name to Abraham. Much impressed, he indicated to his visitor that he was invited to dinner.

"Mutton?" Ben asked.

Mark nodded, frowning, unable to speak.

"Wow," I muttered.

Ben was obviously deep in thought about something else. At last he said, "But how is it that we can travel in time without covering enormous astronomical distances as well?"

Mark stared at him, frowning.

"Uh ... we've proven that we're all tied up with $e=mc^2$," I said. "So ... we *do* cover enormous astronomical distances. At faster-than-light speed."

Mark stared at me, frowning.

Ben made a helpless, somewhat anguished gesture with his hands. "Perhaps—but if we've discovered FTL, it *isn't* taking us anywhere. We stay—or return to—Earth. Look, Harve . . . our Sun is moving along—and dragging the Earth with it—at something like two hundred kilometers a second."

I nodded. "OK. A little over four Astronomical Units a year."

Mark stared at us, frowning.

"That's right," Ben said. "Four-point-two AU's, to be a bit more precise. So. Using a rough value of a hundred million kilometers for the AU ... in, ah, say ten thousand years we've traveled *nearly a light-year!*"

I thought about that. "Meaning . . . if we go back ten thousand years, why the hell weren't we some four-point-two times, ah times . . ."

". . . times ten to the twelfth," Ben supplied.

Mark stared at him, frowning. "OK," I said, nodding. "But we *weren't*. So . . ."

"So we don't know all there is to know about what we're doing," Ben said quietly, and not without sadness. "So we're engineers, not scientists. We're doing it, but we don't know how and why!"

"Maybe, uh, gravity," I said, knowing how lame that was. But at least it was a comfortable scientific word. There's security in labels; so long as we can tack a scientific-sounding tag on it, we feel a lot better. Awhile back it was witchcraft. Now it's science. Come to think, both witchcraft and scientific problems tend to yield to the same sort of solution: a lot of Latin words.

Mark frowned at Ben, staring. "What are you two chattering about?"

"Mark," I began slowly, "you just went back into time a long, long way. Since the Sun and therefore the Earth are moving, all the time, we figure you shouldn't have, ah, 'landed' on Earth at all. You *should* have wound up somewhere like 4.2×10^{12} kilometers away from the Sun's position."

"My God," Mark said, staring and frowning.

Ben nodded. "Uh-huh. Is that what Abraham said?"

Maybe that was what gave Ventnor his Idea. Certainly he could have become rich merely by journeying relatively short distances into the past and bringing forward more comic books, postage stamps, or silver dollars. Or betting on derbies, fights, and ball games. But that wasn't how he chose to make his mark. And what Mark chose to do was *it*. As noted, Ben Corrick did tend to overlook little things. Such as the fact that the temporal traverser was no longer his, but the property of Transtempus, Inc., seventy-three percent of the stock of which was owned by Marcus D. Ventnor. And Mrs. Ventnor.

Mark Ventnor overlooks damned little.

First we added the heavy-duty cables and huge sled-like runners to the veedub, making it resemble a bright yellow forklift with pinache. That way, timejumping, it would be able to transport about anything.

Then we liberated the new device that Westinghouse developed for NASA, to use in space; an electron beam generator or "gun." It was unfortunately too expensive to buy, but judicious use of the temporal traverser solved that problem. It is a great mystery, how the e-beam generator, Mark Two, just *vanished* one fine night . . . and was back in place by the time the watchman came arunning with the two superiors he'd run for.

How does something vanish for ten or so seconds, then reappear? And particularly when I tell you that I used it, in this time period and that, this place and that, for several *months*?

Right!

We also equipped the veedub with a thermal drill, a truly marvelous invention.

Although he wasn't ashamed to admit he wasn't sure how/why it worked, Corrick meanwhile came up with a means of calibrating the veedub to the Earth's movements. Look, the machine was obviously somehow "glued" to the planet and thus couldn't get left during Sol/Earth's race through space. Using that as a premise, Corrick modified things so that the traveler could get from one *place* in the world to

another, by time-jumping.

I practiced. And practiced some more, until I could bring the veedub down on a dime, in any given minute of time, and could practically remove a splinter from my finger with the thermal drill. Practically. I learned how to make little jumps back and then forward, to land in different areas.

It was Ventnor's ball game. He had signed a contract with me, written me out a fat check. His money covered the drill and a few other little knickknacks I'd be taking with me on my mission into the past. Yes, *I* was going. Along with the detailed instructions Mark had written out.

And then the day came, and I slid into that extraordinary VW squareback, and I was off. Into the past. The *distant* past. I was equipped with a suit resembling an astronaut's, because certainly I didn't want to spread any modern diseases among my remote ancestors. Or bring any of theirs forward to our time!

It was no lark. Using the electron-beam generator and the thermal drill to dig all those smooth-walled tunnels and caverns was *work*, and a drag betimes. Too, I had to keep coming back for more fuel: power source. (My favorite place and time for buying more gasoline was Louisville, in 1961. Very little attention was paid to my car; there weren't that many VW's around then, for anyone to have seen enough to realize mine was a later model. And there was more gasoline. Besides, Mary was in Louisville in 1961, and I *deserved* those periods of R&R.)

Then back I went, to create more tunnels with floors resembling trinitite. I incised some most interesting pictures and pictograms on the walls, too, while I was at it.

Then I went in search of pre-man. This time I was tightly suited up, and hopefully sterilized; I didn't want to be a carrier of something that would wipe out Man before he got off the ground—or rather, out of the trees and caves.

My sudden appearance and strange garb really shook up the first band of hominids I came upon. I endeared myself to that hairy host, though, after the manner of Dorothy of Kansas and Oz, by materializing precisely atop their big shaggy leader, who I soon learned had been the meanest sunuvabitch in the valley.

Bowing and genuflecting hadn't been invented then, but they let me know they were most deferential and subservient indeed. A bit obscene, that demonstration. Think of a dog, showing his deference and trust. I was just able to refrain from laughing.

My appearance and simultaneous ending of the tyrannical reign of Grunt made me both god and savior, which, I mused, would be a fine combination for religion-inventors to bear in mind in a few thousand years . . .

I made that stooped, stupid, hairy and homely lot understand, eventually and after much agonizing work that made me reaffirm my high respect for elementary teachers. But I finally got the message across to those almost-men: I wanted them to continue my drawings and carvings, and to make a few more little items in my honor. I showed them models.

Their making themselves understood to me took considerably less time. My translation of their reply goes like this:

"Check, OK, right, whatever you say, god sir."

I rewarded them: taking time out from his busy schedule, god-sir zapped them a nice big critter that looked like a super-hirsute elephant with a glandular imbalance. A very big meal, and they were most grateful. I received the homage routine again. Although I didn't need petrol, I jumped straight up to 1961. I needed Mary.

Back I went, this time dropping in on a happy-enough tribe of considerably more advanced near-people. Their holy-mackerel-He's-back reaction let me know that stories about my previous visit had been handed down. They were just about to sacrifice a flagrantly bosomy virgin in my honor, before I stopped them. Though I considered making better use of her, I refrained. I said *near*-people.

Getting my new and revised message across to this more-developed gaggle of humanoid geese was just as hard as last time, but I prevailed. I had to do a lot of gesturing and a lot of scratching out symbols in the dirt before, with an obvious mixture of fear and awe, they began to get the message. I worked harder, and they showed they had it all, but weren't happy about it.

Here's what I told those poor progenitors of us all, liar that I am:

"Look, I am a Good Guy from the heavens, right? I came down here to this strange world among you in my skywalking thing, old fader over there. I was fleeing some Bad Guys, I mean real hard cases and lots of 'em, who are after me. Now I am afraid that I may have gotten all you nice handsome (ugh) folks in a bit of a spot, because those bad dudes may track me here even as one tracks the foodbeasts. So, you folks'd better stand by to dig in for swift shelter in case you need it—from aerial attack."

Now that shook them a bit, but it also sounded like work. They weren't too darned happy about the Bad Sky-people, but they weren't too enchanted with the prospect of all that digging, either.

So I "told" them a few tales about the Followers. Communication was a problem, and it took awhile. Signs and drawings and even postures and facial expressions served well, particularly inasmuch as I was obviously a god, anyhow.

Besides, I'm a writer, and everybody knows writers are brilliant and resourceful, right?

I punctuated the hair-raising tales (they raised the hairs all over the bodies of my audience) with bloodless little displays of god-power. The matches made them go goggle-eyed and back away. The cherry bombs I tossed—no, not *at* anyone—were even more effective. With the semi-automatic rifle, United States Army surplus (how can they sell these things so cheap?), I cut down a tree a hundred or so feet away. The thermal drill felled another, almost as spectacularly and far more aromatically. The small quantity of nitric acid I dribbled onto an animal-hide blanket brought -more wide eyes and oohs and ahs.

Then, using the veedub and some fine and careful settings, I moved some exceedingly weighty chunks of rock. The mighty BANG that accompanied each mini-jump didn't hurt my cause any.

My demonstrations, along with my tales of possible followers of the inimical persuasion, served, in a few words, to shake the shinola out of them.

Besides, I showed them how to set this kid's broken leg . . .

Right willingly, they went to work.

Despite their sorrowful importunings, I departed—and "returned" a couple of years later. (Took me less than five minutes.)

"Oh-oh—god's back," their attitudes said, but I was taken on a little tour of inspection.

Fascinating. Caves and tunnels, miracles of hard work and applied genius. Interesting, though crude, drawings adorned the walls: drawings of me, in my atmosphere suit. All about them, as decor, had been traced pictogram representations of what I had scratched out in the dust in my efforts at communication. Circles for suns and planets, squiggles, beelines with arrowheads, this and that. I smiled with pride at the genius and hard work of *my people*; some of those pictures were very artistic indeed. Phidias and Michelangelo were on their way.

But their mandated labors were otherwise pretty much petering out. After all: two years, no sky people, no returning Good Guy. So I conferred with the high priest (of the Harvey Moss cult).

"Get their tails back to work on those tunnels and things," I laboriously conveyed to that pot-bellied high-rolling do-naught, "or I'll fry yours the same way I did that shrub!"

With a glance over at the burning bush, he got the message. In short order *our people* were back at work, digging and carving.

I time-jumped, returned to them one month after I'd left (a day and a half later, my time), and gave them their reward: enough fresh game and exotic fruits to feast twice their number. I let the headman fire the rifle, too, and preserved his fragile dignity by blocking him as, taken by surprise by the recoil, he started going over backward. I'm sure he wore that bruise on his weighty shoulder like a badge, and lamented its passing.

(In a cavern deep beneath what is now Normandy there is a pictorial representation of a primitive man with a stick in his hand, belching fire, and with a great dark mark carefully traced out on his shoulder.)

It was work, but I had accepted the task and it was a fascinating job and even sort of fun. Feeling like poor overworked Herakles (he was a blond, by the way, with ridiculously big feet), I repeated this labor-organizing among other tribes, widely separated from the first. I even took one headman's daughter for a time-jump, which she didn't appreciate overmuch. But she was returned to her people happy.

My next jump was a long one, forward, and I had to bounce three times to get to the right time and place. *That* was some big river, in those days. These people were advanced, and those bronze swords and the faces behind them looked nasty. But I got myself conveyed to their king, without having to kill or maim, and we "talked." His wife also made eyes at me. Unfortunately she looked just like him; his sister, I assumed.

A lot of short-period bouncing around in time followed. He provided the slaves; the electron "gun" and the thermal drill easily carved out huge—I mean H*U*G*E blocks of stone. The veedub transported them to the appointed place in no time, if you'll pardon the expression. All the slaves had to do was shove those megatherian building blocks onto the veedub's runners; it and I took over from there.

Piling them up in the proper form and shape was up to them and their ugly king, who was crazy about the whole idea. I provided a few instructions and suggestions, even diagrams (on clay tablets and papyrus, both of which I knew would never survive the centuries). Thus I started those Egyptians and their megalomaniac king off on a nice project: the Great Pyramid. I think they did very nicely with it.

So did the Incas and Aztecs I started on the same project a few days (and several thousand years) later. In Peru, Mexico, and Ecuador I picked up some perfectly lovely groupies of both sexes, though I assured them I suffered from a hopeless heterosexual hangup. I'd had a vasectomy long ago; it seemed the thing to do. Now I was glad—Harvey Moss simply could *not* afford to have any Inca or Aztec offspring!

I did several other things, in several other times and places, but I think I've given the general flavor and manner of it. And then, with a lot of hair and a quite respectable beard, I returned to hometime, with more projects to my credit than Frank Lloyd Wright or even FDR ever envisioned.

I spent the next two months collecting and collating material on my activities from articles in newspapers, scientific and popular journals and worse; the range was from the *Washington Post* and the *Louisville Courier-Journal* to *The Morehead News* and the *L.A. Free Press*; from the *Smithsonian* through *Escapade* and "specialized" journals such as *Fate* magazine. I said material on *my* activities. Right. Except that none of the writers knew that the strange finds were *my* works. I was at first surprised to discover a lot of things I hadn't put there. But I smiled, realizing that I—carrying out the weird genius-plan of Marcus D. Ventnor—had fostered much of what we now call spinoffs.

That required two months, as I said. Then I wrote the book, with photographs. (Oh, they're *excellent!* Most of them I took on location while time-tripping. They are for the most part extraordinarily clear.) The actual writing of the book was the tedious part; writing that damned manuscript took three long weeks, man, and four more to edit and type it up pretty. Good writing, as Snoopy once observed, is hard work.

I didn't have to worry about finding a publisher; Ventnor was waiting for the ms. with glowing eyes and dangling tongue. He rushed it into print, the bastard, using not the name I'd used as author—my own, for a change—but the French pen name you now know so well, Andre de Vrees. I dragged out our contract—and learned that I'd been a lot more excited about the advance and the prospect of my extended tripping into the past than ever-shrewd Ventnor. No wonder the advance had been so fat! It wasn't an advance against royalties at all; it was the sale price. Just as he owned the temporal traverser, Ventnor owned my book, totally.

You know what came of it. The book made a mint. Ventnor and the (invisible!) writer were hailed, kudoed, attacked, castigated. It was a work of genius; it was charlatanry. It was the discovery of the age; it was the work of the Anti-god.

It was also bought by nearly everyone in the United States. And overseas. It was also Ventnor making the money and the appearances on Today and Carson and Cavett, not me. Then there was the big television special; one hour long and a full page in *TV Guide*. MGM bought movie rights and immediately contacted and contracted Charlton Heston to play the part of the man from outer space the book postulated had visited Earth, so long ago.

"Mark, you slimy bastard, you're RICH!" I roared at the fat, hawk-nosed, bald man across his own desk—brand new, brushed walnut. "You're *rich!* You're *famous—dear* god, why NOT share some of it

with me—it was all MY work!"

Ventnor sighed exaggeratedly. "But *my* idea, Harve baby. And, as I pointed out to an equally screechy Ben Corrick just yesterday, *my* money financed the project. Come, look at it this way. I hired him to make it possible; I hired you to plant the evidence and write the book. And you were both paid."

"HIRED! You . . . you damned Jay Gould, I'll—"

He lurched forward in his swivel chair, so new it was squeakless. "*Don't*, Harvey. Whatever it is, *don't*. Try suing or making wild claims and I'll smash you. *We have a contract*. You've received the highest advance on a book you ever saw in your life!"

I tried not to splutter; my face felt as if I had a fever of 105. "ADVANCE! You mean PRICE! And that book's made MILLIONS!"

He shook his head. "Oh Harvey, Harvey. *Price*, then. But why quibble over terminology—when did you ever do a book that earned royalties? Come on; this is more than you ever made on a book in your *life!*"

OK, there was nothing to be done, aside from murder. I tried to get hold of Ben for some mutual commiseration; he linked me with Mark and wouldn't even talk with me. He did own twenty-seven percent of Transtempus, Inc. but unfortunately T.I. didn't publish the book. Morpheus Books, Inc., did. Transtempus had turned no profit ...

I sat down and started whanging out a science-fiction novel, since I didn't dare do an exposé. It was about this guy who went back in time and planted all the evidence in the de Vrees book—and it became obvious very quickly that no one wanted to publish it. So I thought, and thought, and my money dwindled. Then I hit upon a unique plan of vengeance, and practically cackled, in my laughter.

It took awhile, and it took some more of my dwindling assets. But I regained the veedub, and I went back again. On a mission of vengeance. Mark Ventnor would be the biggest laughingstock on the planet.

This time I labored long and hard over an enormous statue, a crude stone monstrosity that was a caricature of big-nosed, bald, Mark Ventnor of the basilisk eyes. More hard work: I placed it on a platform on the coast of an unpopulated island, facing inland. Then I hauled Polynesian settlers to that island, trio after trio, trip after trip. You can only get so many people into a VW. And I showed them how to catch fish more rapidly, so they wouldn't have to sweat food-gathering. Thus they'd have plenty of time, and I started them to work: creating duplications of my statue. More Mark Ventnor caricatures.

It required only a few hours, subjective time, to pop back on five occasions, thus throwing the fear of, ah, Moss into them and insuring that they would continue the project.

The next trick was to keep the veedub. I had liberated it from where Mark had it stashed in Manhattan. Now I set the controls carefully for two months *after* the date of my departure, so I'd materialize elsewhere. Near, as a matter of fact, Chinchilla, Pee-Ay. Then, chuckling at my colossal joke on that bastard Ventnor, I consulted the records: encyclopedias and so on. Yep! There were now *many* such stone busts on the *Isle de Pascua*: Easter Island.

So much for Mr. Marcus D. Ventnor!

Then I saw the copy of *Newstime* on the newsstand. It featured a story on the new book by Andre de Vrees, all about the Easter Island phenomena. And there was a picture of the man who must have churned out that second book, the bastard: Mark Ventnor. The miserable mother had used part of the first book's vast proceeds to get a nose-job, to root hair on his no-longer-cueball noggin, and he had raised a mustache!

I stood there staring at that picture, and I groaned. Mark Ventnor no longer bore the faintest resemblance to my Easter Island caricatures.

I didn't just nurse my wounds. I planned and plotted, again. I worked it all out carefully, and I admit to feeling like a genius.

We're all afflicted—or blessed—with it at one time or another. This plan I even talked over with Ben

Corrick; we were friends now, and allies.

I went back again.

Back, this time, to 1816. A bit of jockeying: June, 1816. A bit more: Switzerland, June 15, 1816. I hid the veedub pretty damned cleverly, I thought, and reached my destination in the midst of a cold nasty rain that I knew would continue for several days. And I knocked at a door, the door of the Maison Chappuis. Out back, I knew, was a vineyard and, about fifteen minutes' stroll away, the Villa Diodati.

Naturally they had to take me in. I was obviously what passed for a gentleman in those days, and just as obviously a stranger in a strange land, not to mention of passing intelligence—and wetly bedraggled, and hungry. They were all there: Mary, Claire, George, Percy, and John. Claire, Mary's half-sister and George's mistress, obviously wished we'd all bug off and leave her and her lover alone so they could continue the relationship they'd begun in England.

We didn't. We talked constantly. (George kept writing down pieces of a long heroic poem he was working on and stuffing them into his pockets. I wondered if he'd ever get all that fire-starter sorted out and pieced together.)

Mary was a shy girl (yeah, you female sexists, *girl*; she was nineteen) who was manifestly content to listen to the rest of us. She exhibited the presence of a good brain though, and was well-read. Her husband and his friend were fervently interested in modern science—that is, what was modern then, and passed for science. Galvanism, for instance. No, no, not galvanizing. Galvanism, after Luigi Galvani, who'd died only eighteen years before. He had serendipitously discovered what he was to call "animal electricity," and learned how to create a metallic arc that caused the muscles of frogs' legs to contract so that they twitched.

The new discipline was still called "galvanism," although by the time of my visit to Maison Chappuis, Alessandro Volta had slipped paper soaked in salt-water between alternating plates of copper and zinc, and had been proclaimed a count by Napoleon, who also hung a gold medal on him.

"The point is," George said, gesturing with his glass of sherry, "that galvanism appears to enliven the limbs of the deceased. Now, might it not be possible, as some say, to impart life to the entire organism by the same means?"

John, whose father had been a countryman of both Volta and Galvani, smiled, obviously making a small effort not to sneer. "George seeks little, friend Moss; he would but revive the dead, you see."

I sighed. "I agree that it seems not too likely," I admitted. "That a body can be made to jerk does not necessarily mean that it possesses *life*. Though perhaps in future, with more knowledge and more sophisticated machinery, electricity may provide means for, ah, treating sudden death."

"Dear God," said Percy the atheist, "what a phrase!"

"What a phrase, indeed," John said. "And you actually believe that someday the dead might be raised by men of medicine—using these lightning-tools of Volta and Galvani—oh, and the American, Franken?"

"Franklin," I muttered, noting how Mary was sitting forward in a tense posture of concentration. "Perhaps, Doctor. Certainly there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our simple philosophies ... and what it pleases us to call science. Meanwhile . . . it would seem the only means at hand of raising the dead is through the East European superstition ... vampirism."

Well, George confessed to being fascinated by that subject, though just now he was into Charlemagne pretty heavily, again. So we talked on. Outside, it was a proper night for such a conversation: the wind blew and cracked its cheeks, the rain sluiced down with viciousness. Eventually Percy was nodding off, and we had to call a halt. George and John stayed the night, though I think Claire slept alone. I did.

The following night we were reminded that Percy had on two occasions penned what were then Gothic romances (of the "Castle of Otranto" school, not like the "Gothics" of the Twentieth Century): "Zastrozzi," and "St. Irvyne or The Rosicrucian." That led us to the fact that John's father was guilty of

having translated Walpole's "Otranto" into his native tongue. Ah, the interconnections! I tried to tell them Ruthven Todd's surrealist tale of the boy who found himself in a sort of Erehwon and eventually turned into a Great Auk, "The Lost Traveller." They weren't much interested, though John was taken with the name "Ruthven" and made a note of it.

This night was even worse; somehow we agreed to an appropriate reading of stories of the occult. There was one about the legend of poor old Prometheus, another, "History of the Inconstant Lover," about a man whose bride turned out to be either ancient or a corpse, I forget which.

Then, all excited, George was suggesting that we all try our hands at a ghost story, or *something* supernatural. I suggested a vampire tale, with George excitedly interrupting the outline to embellish—and John assiduously making notes in his illegible physician's hand. Mary demurred; she had no supernatural ideas.

"Suppose," I said, "that a scientist of brilliant mind, a physician such as our esteemed friend here, were convinced that galvanism could be used to revive the dead—or impart life to a humanoid creature of his own devising!"

"There, dear," Percy said, yawning, "combine that with your fascination with Prometheus and perhaps you will unburden your sweet self of a story of surpassing horror."

So, George Gordon started his vampire story, halfheartedly, and Claire, too, started one, while John tinkered with the *wennpyr* idea that was mine and George's. Eventually he wrote it, as a novella—about a vampire named Lord Ruthven, no less!—and for a while it was attributed to George. It was Mary, though, who commenced to skip meals and make her fingers sore, writing her yarn of "Prometheus Rebound, or The Strange Tale of Doktor Schmidt." It was I who suggested that the entire novel might be handled as a flashback. She thought that was very clever indeed, and hopped to it.

Convincing her that "Viktor Schmidt" was a nowhere name was rather more difficult.

"Why not the name of that American electricity man, Franken?" John suggested.

"Franklin," I muttered.

"Franklinson?" Claire amended.

"In German," enthusiastic George cried. "Frankenstein!"

"That's a nice name," Mary said.

At last the rains let up. I departed, with Mary thanking me profusely and all of them begging me to return. I promised.

And I did; that was part of my Master Plan. By that time, two years later, John Polidori had been canned as George's companion and tame physician and had published "The Vampyre" in London; George Gordon had abandoned his novel in favor of fitting together the scraps of paper into the third canto of "Childe Harold," which he signed Lord Byron as usual, and Mary Shelley's novel "Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus" was doing very well indeed.

I was welcomed with open arms and bottles, naturally, and both Byron and Shelley agreed to what I wanted and had gone through the whole business to set up: personal interviews. I made sure never to goof up and let them hear any sounds from the tape recorder. Nor would Count Alessandro Volta, over Como way, have recognized its power source, the successor to the Voltaic pile and the Voltaic cell. Size C.

Once again I departed my dear friends George (of *course* we didn't call him Lord), Percy, Mary, and Claire, and let Truman Capote top *that*.

I moved myself forward only a few years, to England in 1846. There/then, by divers devious means, I made the acquaintance of two lamentably homely and unrelentingly neurotic sisters. One thing led to another, according to plan, and each became a bit less neurotic, via method similar to that which the service station man means when he tells you your car needs to be taken out and have its carburetor adjusted.

Thus, a bit happier and more knowledgeable and having less trouble with their monthlies, at least, those two did *not* that year or any other year write the novels that were to be the progenitors of the modern flood of what *we* call Gothic romances; thus the Bronte sisters perpetrated neither "Jane Eyre" nor "Wuthering Heights."

A quick bounce up to the end of that century showed me that Henry James, without those books as catalysts, never thought of his novella about the poor sweet governess who comes to the mysterious house inhabited by ghosts *Out To Get Her* and the children: "The Turn of the Screw."

I had not only made the career of Boris Karloff, I had effectively stopped all those novels with girl+castle/mansion-with-one-lighted-window on the cover. The modern Gothic was stillborn!

My work was nearly done, except for the few weeks I took off to transcribe the notes and tapes of my conversations with Byron and Shelley.

Although we'd spent most of our time at Shelley's chalet, I called the book after Byron's, "Villa Diodati." It hath a better ring and doth fall more trippingly off the tongue.

Published in 1954, "Villa Diodati" became *the* definitive work on those gentlemen. The movie starred Robert Taylor and Tyrone Power, with George Sanders as Polidori and Grace Kelly as Mary. Though it received far less critical acclaim than the book, and certainly nothing but the back-of-me-hand treatment from academia, the movie was a blockbuster. The gross was enormous, of which my ten percent was—well, we needn't get too specific, need we?

The publishing firm I then launched, beginning with my own novel based on the (unwritten) "Turn of the Screw," not only prospered, but utterly swamped another firm that was being launched at the same time. Faced with bankruptcy, its owner/founder accepted my less than munificent terms. You know who it was, the bastard.

Mark Ventnor is the oldest slush-pile reader in the publishing business.

As to Benjamin A. Corrick, PhD and now FRS . . . I financed his researches personally, when he was just beginning them. He was kind enough to give me a great deal of the credit last year when he received Honorable Mention in the Stockholm Nobel ceremonies—for having proven graphically and conclusively the utter impossibility of time travel.