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THE MAGAZINE OF

# Fantasy & Science Fiction

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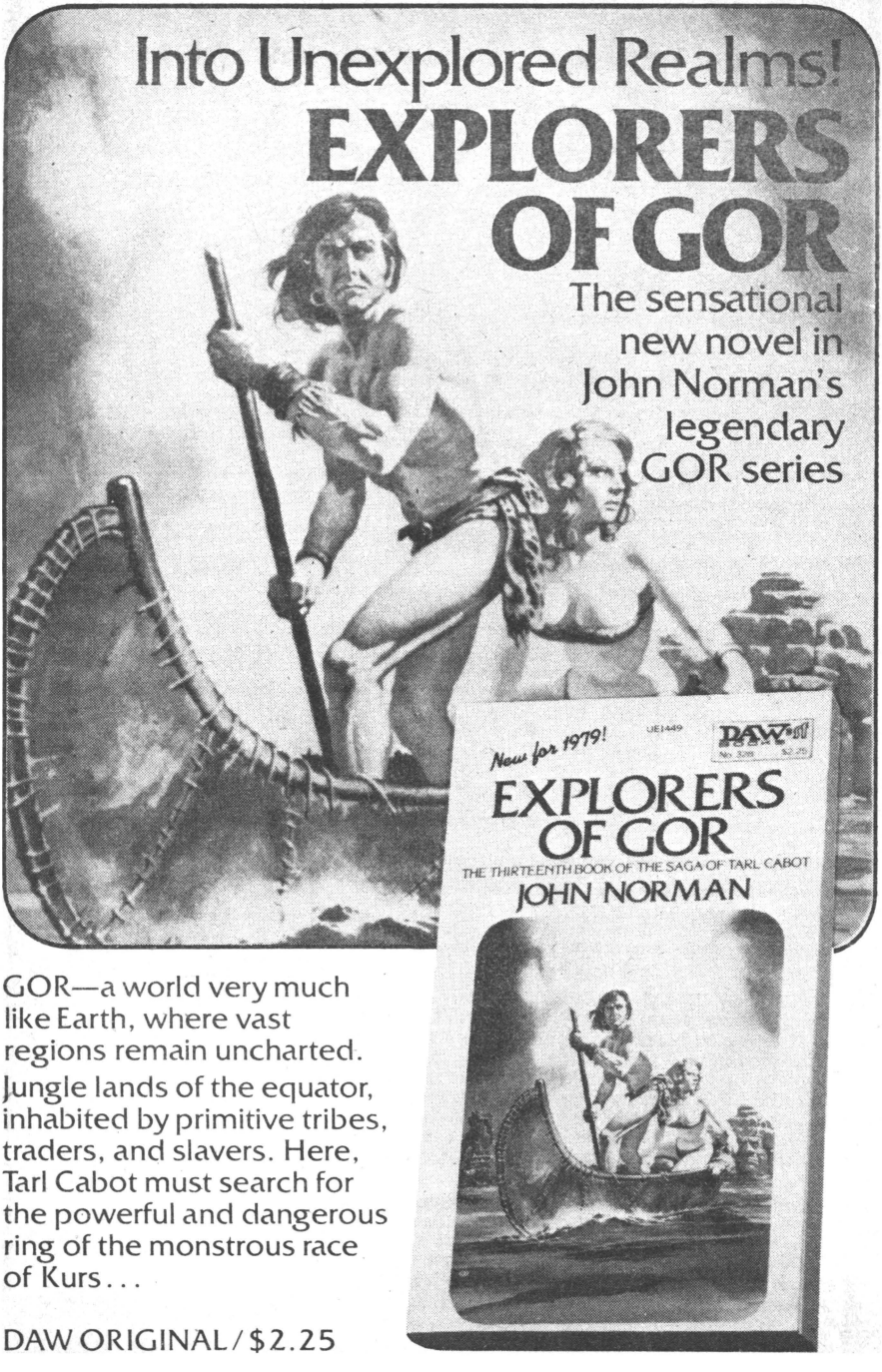


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## *SHORT STORIES*



## *DEPARTMENTS*



COVER BY **David Hardy**




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# In this issue

This magazine has never been known for offering a visual feast to its readers. Our main concern is with the printed word, and so far we have been able to resist the typical sf magazine inside illustration, the kind of drawing that worked well in *The Rover Boys on the Great Lakes* but would only detract from the fiction we publish.

Nevertheless, this *is* our 30th anniversary year, and age 30 is perhaps time to start caring more about our looks. F&SF's new look this month was accomplished by Tom Bevans, an experienced graphic designer who had a reason behind every change that was made. For instance: the new cover logo is as readable and identifiable as the old, but the compression to one panel allows more room for artwork or for telling you about stories and features that are inside. And inside, the size of the text type has been slightly reduced, which makes for better spacing between letters and words. At the same time the spacing between lines was slightly increased. The result, we believe, is a cleaner looking page of type with no loss of readability.

This redesign is an evolving process, and you may notice other changes in the future as we see room for improvement. Our aim is to make changes only when they *are* improvements. Meanwhile, we welcome your comments and suggestions.

# Coming soon

The feature story next month is "The Battle of the Abaco Reef," by Hilbert Schenck, who writes action stories as well as anyone in the field and offers unforgettable characters as well. This is the third in his series of seagoing science fiction tales ("Three Days at the End of the World," Sept. 1977; "The Morphology of the Kirkham Wreck," Sept. 1978).

We'll soon have more details on our 30th anniversary retrospective issue (October 1979). The ad on page 29 will give you a lineup that is 90% complete and also gives you the opportunity to subscribe at a special low rate. You might note that the anniversary issue will sell on newsstands for $2.50. Thus this special offer (in which you get your choice of 10 or 20 issues, including the anniversary issue, for slightly under one dollar each) is truly a bargain offer. You might also note that it will probably be necessary for us to increase our prices within the year because of rising costs, most notably a whopping 65% increase from the U.S. Postal Service.

*Robert F. Young has written 39 stories for F&SF over the years, and we can think of only three writers who have contributed as much fiction as Mr. Young (Poul Anderson, Avram Davidson and Ron Goulart). A Robert Young story is always a pleasure because its high quality is as predictable as its subject matter is unpredictable. Here, he begins with an old sf notion — "They built the spaceship in Larry's back yard..." — and creates something quite different and affecting.*

# *The First Mars Mission*

**BY**
**ROBERT F. YOUNG**

They had built the spaceship in Larry's back yard. His back yard was bigger than either Chan's or Al's. This was because his parents' house was on the outskirts of town where the houses were far apart and did not belong to blocks, where in some cases the whole countryside stretched away from your back door.

Larry had had no idea then that someday he would become a real astronaut. Mars had fascinated him as much as it had Al and Chan, but in his heart what he'd really wanted to become was a fireman.

For landing jacks they used a pair of old sawhorses Al found in the loft of his father's garage. Upon them they nailed the deck — a platform constructed of scrap lumber they swiped from behind the new school building. Chan's father, who was a junk dealer, had already told them they could borrow the big conical vented tin smokestack he'd "collected" when the old Larrimore grain machinery factory was torn down, and one simmering July afternoon they freed it from the debris in

the rear of the fenced-in junkyard and rolled it all the way across town to Larry's house. There, panting and perspiring, they jockeyed it onto the deck and braced it with three toenailed two-by-fours.

Scraping and painting the stack took them two days. It didn't cost them anything, though, because there were all kinds of paint cans in Larry's basement, with varying quantities of paint still in them. No two of the colors were the same, but by mixing the brightest ones together they came up with a beautiful greenish blue.

On the third day, after the paint had dried sufficiently, they installed the ion-drive — a 3-HP Briggs & Stratton motor Al's father had saved when he got rid of his old power mower. They'd already sawed out a 2'x2' section of the deck and constructed a lock that functioned on the same principle as a trap door. Lastly they installed the control panel — a 1957 Ford dash donated by Chan's father.

Look out, Mars — here we come!

All this was before Mariner 4 pulled the plug on Giovanni Schiaparelli's *canali*, Percival Lowell's canals and Edgar Rice Burroughs' "waterways," and prematurely "proved" that Mars was both geologically and biologically dead.

Weird, their choice of a landing site. Downright weird.

The map they used had all sorts of mysterious shaded areas that designated seas and lakes and swamps and whatnot, and they picked a region that was partially bordered by one of the larger of these areas. They could have picked any one of a half dozen other regions for the same reason. But they hadn't.

The site selected, they began thinking up names for the spaceship, finally agreeing on *The Martian Queen*. Next, they scheduled lift-off for 2200 hours the following night. Mars should be visible at that hour, enabling them to set their course. Since the round trip would probably take at least two hours and they wanted plenty of time to explore, they had to get their parents' permission to stay out all night. Chan and Al had no trouble on this score, but Larry's mother had a fit, and only the intervention of his father had made his participation in the historic Marsflight possible.

They spent the next day loading equipment and supplies on board, painting *The Martian Queen* in big black letters on the ship's prow and speculating on what they would find when they reached their destination. The equipment consisted of three sleeping bags and Larry's father's flashlight. The supplies comprised three ham-salad sandwiches (courtesy of Chan's mother), three eight-ounce cans of Campbell's Pork & Beans (lifted by Larry from his mother's kitchen cupboard) and three cartons of chocolate milk.

They loaded the supplies on last.

"Maybe we ought to take along some kind of weapons," Al suggested. "In case the life-forms turn out to be unfriendly." Chan went home and got a hatchet; Al, a baseball bat; and Larry went up to his room and got the Boy Scout knife that used to be his father's. It had four blades, one of them a can opener that would come in handy opening the Campbell's Pork & Beans.

Nine o'clock arrived. Nine thirty. The stars began to come out. "I see Mars!" Chan cried. "Right up there!"

It was like a beacon in the night sky, orange and beckoning.

"Let's go," Al said. "We can set our course now."

"But it's not 2200 hours yet," Larry objected.

"What difference does that make?"

"It makes a lot of difference. Space missions are supposed to follow a strict timetable."

"Not when you've got an ion-drive. When you've got an ion-drive, you just say 'Let's go!' and you go."

Larry gave in. "All right. It's almost lift-off time anyway."

They climbed up into the ship, closed the lock and sat down in the darkness. Larry switched on the flashlight, shone the beam on the control panel and set their course.

Al began the countdown. When he reached zero, Larry "activated" the ion-drive. "We're on our way!" he shouted.

Since there wasn't anything else to do, they ate the ham-salad sandwiches and washed them down with the chocolate milk. After they finished eating, Larry switched off the flashlight to save the batteries. Then they sat in silence for what seemed like hours, but since no one had thought to bring a watch, the hours, for all they knew, may have been minutes. Another thing they'd forgot to do was install a viewport. However, there was a crack in the bulkhead where the two ends of the sheet metal that formed the stack were welded together, and finally Larry got to his feet and peered through the narrow opening.

"What d'you see?" Chan asked.

"Stars," Larry said.

"Gosh, we ought to be there by now," Al said. "Here, let me look."

Larry relinquished the makeshift viewport. "Hey!" Al shouted a moment later. "I see it! Dead ahead!"

"Okay, Al," Larry said. "I'll put her in orbit and you sing out when you spot the landing site."

"Hey! I see a canal! Two of them! Three!"

"Never mind the canals. Just keep your eye peeled for the landing site."

"I see it now. Right below us. It's a great big plain with a canal running through the middle of it. Hey! I see a city!"

"We're too high up for you to see a city."

"I don't care. I see one anyway. Take her down, Larry. Take her down!"

"I've got to turn her over first so

we'll land right side up. Hang on, everybody!"

The maneuver completed, Larry revved up the ion-drive for a soft landing. Minutes went by. Or maybe only seconds. Suddenly there was a faint jar.

There couldn't have been, but there was.

Al in the lead, the three astronauts lowered themselves through the lock and crawled out from under the ship and stood up. In their haste, Al forgot his baseball bat; Chan, his hatchet; and Larry, his father's flashlight.

There *was* a city.

It stood at the confluence of three canals, the nearest of which bisected the broad plain on which the ship had landed. It had two towers as tall as the Empire State Building. Myriad lights gleamed above its lofty wall, and a pair of wide gates provided ingress and egress.

The air was clear and cold. Stars so bright they hurt yours eyes to look at them glittered in a stark-black sky. There were two tiny moons. One overhead, the other climbing rapidly above the horizon.

As they stood there staring at the distant city, a sound resembling thunder came from behind them. It crescendoed, separated itself into a swift succession of muffled hoof beats. Turning, they beheld a huge beast with a great gaping mouth bearing down upon them, a rider on its back. They shrank back against the ship. The beast had eight legs and a long, flat tail. It pounded past them like a flesh-and-blood locomotive, the ground trembling beneath its awesome tread. Larry gasped when he glimpsed the rider's face.

It was the face of a beautiful woman.

If she saw either the three astronauts or *The Martian Queen* — and she could hardly have missed seeing the latter — she gave no sign. The beast continued on across the plain, rapidly diminishing in size. When it reached the wall of the city, the gates swung open long enough for it and its rider to pass between them, then swung to again.

Al took a deep breath. "We must be dreaming."

"We must be," echoed Chan.

Larry didn't say anything. The woman had been tantalizingly familiar. *Where had he encountered her before?*

And that horrid eight-legged beast. It, too, had rung a bell.

"Well," Chan said, a quaver in his voice, "now that we're on Mars, what're we going to do?"

"We're going to explore, of course," Larry said, with far more confidence than he felt.

"The — the city?"

"I — I think we'd better skip the city. Let's take a look at that canal."

"Race you!" Al cried, setting off at a run.

His first step took him halfway to the nearer bank. He landed lightly on his back, bounced to his feet. "Hey, this is *fun!*"

Larry and Chan followed at a more conservative pace, taking little leaps and trying to come down feet-first. Sometimes they succeeded and sometimes they didn't. Al was already standing on the bank gazing down into the water when they got there. The water was so pellucid that the canal bottom seemed pebbled with stars. The opposite bank was perhaps a half-mile away. Funny-looking buildings stood at intervals along it, yellow light showing in their windows.

Numerous flat stones littered their side of the canal and they began shying some of them onto the water, seeing who could skip one the farthest. Al won. He shied one so hard it skipped almost all the way to the other bank.

"Something's coming!" Chan whispered.

Larry heard the sound then: the *thump-thump-thump* of padded hoofs. It came from the direction of the city.

At first he could see nothing. Then three shapes grew out of the moon- and the starlight. The shapes of three gargantuan beasts surmounted by the figures of three riders.

The three astronauts stood there transfixed.

There were other sounds. A rattling, as of weaponry. A creaking, as of leather harnesses.

The beasts were like the one that had thundered past them earlier. The fact that these particular ones were walking instead of running didn't make them one whit less formidable.

Gradually, as the intervening distance continued to shrink, the three riders stood out more and more distinctly. The one on the left was a handsome, dark-haired white man of indeterminate age wearing leather-like trappings and with a long sword hanging at his side. The one in the middle was the beautiful woman who had zoomed past the three astronauts shortly after their arrival. Possibly the mount she was riding now was the same one she had ridden then: there was no way of telling. Her coiffed black hair was held in place by a golden net; golden breastplates, encrusted with jewels, cupped her breasts, and a skirt comprised of innumerable golden strands alternately concealed and revealed her legs. The darkness of her skin indicated either that it was deeply tanned or that it had a natural reddish tone.

The rider on the right, presumably a male of his species, towered high above the other two and was armed with a ten-foot long rifle as well as a sword. His trappings were similar to those of the handsome, dark-haired white man, but there all similarity ended. He had white, gleaming tusks, and his eyes were located on the sides of his head. Antenna-like ears sprouted just above them, and in the exact center of his face two vertical crevices took the

place of a nose. His size and features would have been enough in themselves to demoralize the three astronauts, but there was more: instead of one pair of arms, he had two; and while the moon-and the starlight raining down upon him left much to be desired in the way of reliable illumination, it strongly suggested that his skin was green.

Rocks. Everywhere you looked, rocks.

Mars had come to be associated with rocks. The relatively small ones photographed by Viking landers I and II; the two big ones in the sky called moons.

Standing in the wan sunlight beneath the oddly bright sky, Larry wondered if Hardesty, the astronaut stationed by the landing module training the television camera on him (the one mounted on the module had failed to pass the final series of equipment tests), was as disappointed with the landing site as he was.

NASA's choice of the site had been altruistically motivated, but it did the planet an injustice. Mariner 9 Mars, as it had come to be called, was a far cry from the romantic Mars postulated by the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century astronomers, but it was fascinating in its own right. East of where Larry stood, well below the horizon, Hecates Tholus, Albor Tholus and Elysium Mons brooded above the broad bulge in the Martian crust known as Elysium. On the opposite hemisphere, just south of the equator, stretched the awesome complex of canyons known as Valles Marineris. Northwest of the complex lay the massive Tharsis Ridge and the shield volcanoes Arsia Mons, Pavonis Mons and Ascraeus Mons, giants in their own right; while farther yet to the north and west the mightiest of them all, Olympus Mons, rose almost fifteen miles into the Martian sky.

But it was the Isidis Region that had got the nod from NASA. Prosaic it might be, but it had posed a minimum of risk and proffered a maximum of safety. NASA had decided as long as a year and a half ago that if man were to walk on Mars, here was where he would walk first.

Only Owens, the third astronaut, orbiting the command module, was seeing the planet as it should be seen; alternately viewing its two "faces" — the young one and the old. In a way, Larry envied him.

MISSION CONTROL: "Everything okay, Commander Reed?"

LARRY: "Everything's fine. Just getting my bearings."

MISSION CONTROL: "You're television's newest star, Larry. The brightest one ever. The eyes of the whole world are on you."

His wife's eyes. His mother's and his father's. The eyes of his twelve-year-old daughter and his ten-year-old son.

Everyone's eyes.

He tried to feel all those eyes, but

he couldn't. He felt nothing at all. It was his moment in the sun and he felt nothing.

Fatigue, that was why. Not physical fatigue, although he knew that too, but emotional. The inevitable result of spending month after month in a cramped environment in the constant company of two other human beings and trying not to become paranoid.

He had paused in the midst of his Marswalk not merely to get his bearings but to try to make sense out of the flight of *The Martian Queen*, out of the Mars he and Chan and Al had seemingly landed on. Now he began moving farther away from the landing module. He had been on camera ever since helping Hardesty plant the metallic flag. The landing site was slightly to the north of the Isidis basin. During the final few minutes of the descent Larry had had to take over manually in order to bring the craft down in a relatively clear area. It squatted there now on its spindly legs, in grotesque contrast to its surroundings. The rocks and boulders that had spewed forth eons ago during the moment of the immense impact-crater's creation stretched away in all directions: southward to the wind-eroded rim, eastward to lowlands marked with mesas, westward to crater-pocked plains and northward seemingly forever.

He was headed in a northerly direction. He walked slowly, carefully. On Mars, he weighed less than ninety pounds, but the terrain was anything but conducive to giant steps.

Wryly he remembered Al's giant step; recalled once more the canals, the city and the plain. Had the whole thing been a dream? he wondered. And if so, had he dreamed the dream alone or had Chan and Al dreamed it too? He had been afraid to ask them afterwards, afraid of being made fun of. Perhaps for the same reason they had never asked him. Or each other.

After all these years he still didn't know.

The three riders brought their monstrous mounts to a halt half a dozen yards from where the three mesmerized astronauts were standing on the canal bank.

It dawned on Larry finally who they were. He had met them before.

In books.

So had Al and Chan, although they probably didn't remember.

But knowing who the riders were didn't help. Meeting them in fictive form was one thing; seeing them in the flesh was another. He was no less terrified than Chan and Al when the one on the right shifted his rifle from his lower to his upper pair of hands, and when they turned and fled, he did too.

Two giant steps apiece brought them to *The Martian Queen*. They crawled inside, closed the lock and huddled together in the darkness. No one thought to "activate" the ion-drive, but apparently it "activated" itself. In any event, dawn had found

them safely back on Earth.

The rocks had a reddish cast in the enervated sunlight. Larry was about to circumvent one that was considerably larger than the others when a faint gleam near its base caught his eye. Bending down, he saw a small, oblong object. He picked it up.

Straightening, he held it in his gloved hand, staring disbelievingly down at it through the tinted visor of his helmet. He knew that nothing would be the same for him again. Ever.

After Chan and Al went home, carrying their sleeping bags and promising to return the next morning and help dismantle the ship (it had been tacitly taken for granted that there would be no more Marsflights), Larry put the flashlight back in the glove compartment of his father's car and replaced the three unopened cans of Campbell's Pork & Beans in the kitchen cupboard. Then he ate a bowl of cereal and milk and crept upstairs to bed.

He hadn't missed his Boy Scout knife till late that afternoon. He searched the ship for it. He combed the back yard. He looked for it high and low, far and wide. But he had never found it.

MISSION CONTROL: "Commander Reed, a moment ago you bent down and apparently picked something up. Have you found something of scientific interest, by any chance?"

Larry hesitated. If he told the truth,

would anyone believe him?

NASA might. They would more or less have to. Before being given the okay to enter the command module, he and Hardesty and Owens had been so exhaustively scanned that they couldn't have sneaked so much as a pin on board.

But whether NASA did or didn't, others would.

Not very many, but a few.

His mother and his father would. His wife.

His twelve-year-old daughter and his ten-year-old son.

*They* would believe him implicitly.

Did he *want* them to?

Did he want his children, who, like their peers, had been breast-fed on technology, to believe that three kids had traveled to Mars in a tin smokestack in 1/6000th the time it had taken three adult astronauts to make the same journey in the most sophisticated space vehicle that technology had ever devised?

Did he want them to believe that on the cosmic scales Mariner 9 Mars weighed no more than the Mars postulated by Percival Lowell and populated by Edgar Rice Burroughs?

Did he want them to know that reality was a big joke, and that the joke was on the human race?

Did he want them to doubt — as he was doomed to doubt — the objective existence of everything under the sun and, for that matter, the objective existence of the sun itself?

MISSION CONTROL: "Commander Reed, have you found something of scientific interest? Come in, Reed."

Valles Marineris was worth a thousand silly canals. Olympus Mons dwarfed the tallest tale the romantics had ever told.

Did it really matter that both might be made of air?

LARRY: "So far, all I've found are rocks."

MISSION CONTROL: "So be it.... In a few minutes you and Commander Hardesty will be returning to the module to rest up for your experiments. Before doing so, Larry, would you care to say a few words to commemorate this historic moment?"

LARRY: "I'll try. Today, Commander Hardesty, Captain Owens and myself have surmounted a pinnacle in man's long and perilous journey to the stars. That we have been able to do so is owing infinitely less to ourselves than to the base camps that technology pitched along the way."

MISSION CONTROL: "That's great, Larry. No one could have said it better. Commander Hardesty, before you and Commander Reed return to the module, would you give the world one more view of the flag?"

Larry waited till he was off camera; then he let the knife fall to the ground. He kicked dust over it. As he turned to walk back to the module, a distant twin-towered city wavered tantalizingly on the periphery of his vision. It faded quickly away.

*Classic Science Fiction*, Terry Carr, Ed. Harper & Row, $14.95

*Lifeboat Earth*, Stanley Schmidt, Berkley, $1.75

*Exiles to Glory*, Jerry Pournelle, Ace, $1.75

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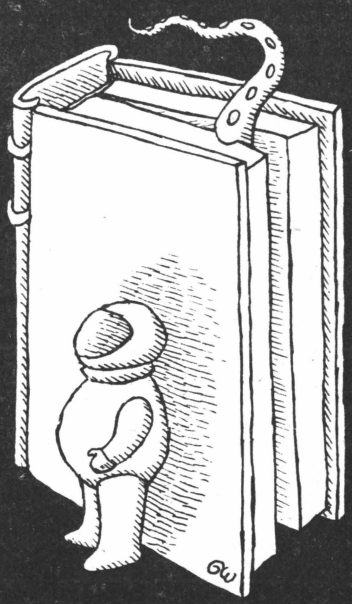
# Books

## ALGIS BUDRYS



I can understand and sympathize with the plight of the SF academics. Not everyone who was there when SF began climbing back out of the ghetto has yet shuffled off to that Great QSFL meeting in the sky. So there are yet some trifling constraints on total academic freedom to invent the past. Actually, the Good Lord intended most SF scholars to be senior members of advertising agency Creative Committee review boards, but when He sent down the memo it failed to cite precedent, so they quite rightly ignored Him. It is Lucifer who thought of substituting the deaf-blind elixir for the jug Colombard they put in the little plastic glasses at the symposia. By a stroke of malefic genius, the Prince of Lies omitted making his subjects mute. But, then, the only thing subtler than the fallen heir to Heaven's throne is a PhD candidate in search of a dissertation

topic so rarefied that no one could dispute its assertions without actually going to a window and looking.

All this, as I say, I can understand. What I cannot understand is why we SF people ourselves persist in muddying the water.

Case in point: Terry Carr's *Classic Science Fiction*, subtitled "The First Golden Age." This is an excellent anthology of stories from 1940, '41 and '42, mostly from *Astounding*. Many are legendary — A.E. van Vogt's "Vault of the Beast," Heinlein's "By His Bootstraps" and "— And He Built a Crooked House —," Sturgeon's "Microcosmic God," Asimov's "Nightfall," etc., etc. "The Mechanical Mice" is bylined, at last, as by Eric Frank Russell rather than Maurice G. Hugi. Ross Rocklynne's "Into The Darkness" and Donald A. Wollheim's "Storm Warning" are included, as are Henry Kuttner's "The Twonky" and Leigh Brackett's "Child of The Green Light." This is a compilation overlapping Wollheim's *The Pocket Book of Science Fiction*, from the early 1940s, and Healy-McComas's *Adventures in Time and Space* from the late 1940s. On the strength of its stories, it deserves to sit on the shelf right beside those two monuments.

The Wollheim and the Healy-McComas, of course, were presented as contemporary anthologies. The latter institutionalized the term "Modern Science Fiction." The Carr, looking backward across nearly forty years,* reflects a feeling that its stories each need to be set in context by an individual scholarly monograph, citing sources, and that the volume as a whole requires a historical introduction.

The thing about all that supporting material is that while it isn't often flagrantly wrong — sometimes it is — it frequently conveys a distorted impression.

Cyril Kornbluth's "The Rocket of 1955," mentioned in one introduction, is not "about the first trip to the Moon, of course." Carr's offhandedness dismisses an important event in science fiction. Kornbluth's story is about a con game involving a fake rocket to Mars. It is hardly SF at all — it is very nearly a straight fiction story, published in a Futurian SF magazine. Its power then derived from the fact that in 1941 it was already becoming credible that you could sell shares in a Mars rocket by 1955. Its power now derives from its excellence as art. Its existence also tells you a great deal about the perspective both of its author and of the editor who published it.

Sprague de Camp's character, Johnny Black, is not an "ape with human intelligence;" he is a literate bear. The one idea is banal; the other is ingenious, and of considerable note as a pioneering invention.

**Oh, my God! I bought* Adventures *new — new! — in the first edition! Is this a subway token I see before me? Which way to the Queens Science Fiction League?*

These are two immediately visible errors of fact. There is no telling how many others are concealed because they concern less prominent features of the SF landscape. To place any reliance on his copy of the Carr, one would now have to duplicate all Carr's ostensible research — and probably research the sources — and hand-annotate, in which case what is the value of Carr's role? Carr is a long-time fan, a major editor, a major figure in the SF community. If he does not know the Kornbluth story (I find that impossible to believe, particularly since Carr cites it by place and date), or Johnny Black (and that is nearly as incredible), what does he know?

Then there are matters of interpretation. This is a book about science fiction, and hews strictly to John W. Campbell, Jr., editor of ASF from the October, 1937, issue, as the father of "modern" science fiction. Properly so. But when Carr tells you that Hannes Bok "sold a number of stories" to various markets including Campbell, what he does not make clear is that of Bok's nine story sales during this period, two were to *Unknown*, Campbell's fantasy magazine, and none were to ASF. Similarly, he implies a significant number of sales by Ray Palmer to ASF. There was one, "Matter is Conserved," in the April, 1938, issue. There is room to doubt he sold it to Campbell, rather than Campbell's predecessors. Carr also asserts that Campbell 'lured' Edd Cartier away from *The Shadow* by giving him cover-painting assignments. Again, Cartier painted exactly one cover for ASF, in 1950; he did do 5 for *Unknown* and *Unknown Worlds*, but none of that is germane to "modern" science fiction.*

It's possible to defend Carr's assertions by pointing to the strict letter of the fine print. But I would think it reasonable to call them distortions of the actual history of "modern" SF, and I so call them. It's unsettling to find Terry Carr assuming Sam Moskowitz's franchise in matters of the glib mis-statement and the tendentious phrase.

The tendentious assertion also creeps in. I think it is disputable how many readers today would not understand a reference to a blow that would have caused Joe Louis to "bat his expressionless eyes," and I know there are several people around who know that Jesse Owens was pretty fast on his feet.† More important, just how significant is this sort of passing reference, in determining whether a story is "dated" or not? Most readers could puzzle it out, and wouldn't lose much if they couldn't. And "The Rocket of

**'Lured' is probably the wrong verb, too.* The Shadow *was a sister publication, and Cartier was simply a Street & Smith Publishing Co. illustrator, working covers and interiors for many of their titles.*

†*The book refers to "Jessie" Owens; Carr is quoting from a story by Bill McGivern. I don't know at what stage the error crept in, but certainly McGivern knew better, so some editor somewhere is at fault.*

1955" *is* just as powerful now as it ever was. I am probably making the same mistake, harping overlong on a minor feature of Carr's essay, and yet again here I think is a half-contemptuous glibness, the more harmful because anything Carr says comes from a source that is eminently citable by scores of academics, who will probably never take the trouble to examine and assess the original object of Carr's opinion.

Then there is ideological criticism. Carr reprints Lester del Rey's "The Smallest God," but feels compelled in his introduction to call stressed attention to the 'saccharine' quality and 'male chauvinism' of del Rey's famous "Helen O'Loy." There is no need for anyone to apologize for including a del Rey story in this anthology, which is what Carr seems to be doing. There is some need for Carr to go back and reread "Helen O'Loy;" he will find that Helen, a robot, was emotionally programmed by incessant days of watching TV soap operas.

Lester was not, in those early days, as skillful a writer as he soon became, and there are places in the story where the prose simply fails to convey a sharp picture of the actual situation. Nor is there any doubt that Lester for years believed in "getting out the old slush-pump," to quote him exactly, and making sure the reader had plenty of opportunity to indulge in sentimentality. But Lester, as Terry knows from personal acquaintance, has been an acidulous son of a bitch at least since shaking off the dust of St. Charles, Minnesota, and it is quite likely that Lester was expressing an opinion of soap opera mores.

"Helen O'Loy" is an important SF story, considered historically. It is not my favorite del Rey story, because of its out-of-focus passages which make it impossible to fully visualize Helen. But it appealed strongly to a great many readers and helped transform an important segment of SF. It is not going too far to say that writers such as Asimov, Sheckley and Goulart owe a little something to Lester's concept of the accidently mis-programmed robot ... a feature which del Rey does make quite clear, and which he used repeatedly, with stunning variations, in later stories. It is also possible to assert, just as readily as it is to assert chauvinism, that the robot repairman marries Helen because he recognizes his human responsibility for having done something rather terrible through his carelessness, and rejects the alternate course of opening her up and reprogramming her — that is, rejects the course of treating her as property. Certainly, his abrupt *volte face* on the subject of meeting her wishes is open to conflicting interpretations, because the author, uncharacteristically, did not supply any form of precipitating event for the change in the human's attitude; it simply occurs, and we could argue forever about what went through his mind offstage.

My point is that the ready, fashionable editorial comment is again, glib, and in this case gratuitous. I find it unfair; more to the point, I suspect that readers thirty-five years from now would find it even more awkward and puzzling than some reference to The World's Fastest Human or The Brown Bomber.

Most of all, I wish that Terry Carr had simply presented the stories, which make fascinating and often powerful reading that transcends any taxonomic considerations, or, since that is probably too much to ask, I wish he had done scholarship instead of displaying it so that the publisher could charge more. Carr is one of the gentlest, most likable, most diligent people in SF, and young enough to still be standing here after the doors have closed on many of us.

Most of the points I have cited are checkable by looking in the Don Day *Index* to science fiction magazines, 1926-1950, a standard reference. That is where Alex and Phyllis Eisenstein confirmed them for me because I once lent my copy to someone else. We did it over the 'phone in five minutes. *Quis custodiet, Terry, ipsos custodies?*

"Modern" science fiction, as you know, was marked by a verve we do not often see these days, fueled by a pervading technological optimism and a set of ethical assumptions slightly to the right of the John Birch credo. Might was not only right, it was moral, and lesser breeds, peering in timorously from without the law, had better come to an understanding that a great many things were about to be done to them for their own good.

Baldly put that way, it sounds pretty bad from a 1978 point of view. But if one removes the political orientation and examines what remains, it is a statement that those who have the advantage of a broader experience are subject to a duty to uplift and assist their fellow sentient beings in the struggle of life against the uncaring Universe. This is the point at which Fascism and Liberalism intersect, coming around from their opposite directions, and is why it is sometimes so hard to eavesdrop on a dinner table conversation and detect which person is the Fabian Socialist and which is the concentration camp commander.

It was entirely possible, then as it is now, to be either far right or far left, and still write "Modern" science fiction. In fact, I rather imagine most writers of the day did not think in political terms; they simply shared a common pervasive cultural orientation toward Getting Things Done, and an optimistic conviction that the 20th century was the time when Mankind would at last get its house into rational order.

It was only if you pressed them that you — and they — might discover they had quite differing standpoints. The methods they proposed were not all that dissimilar ... and "Modern" sci-

ence fiction, as an outgrowth of pulp action fiction and as the media of engineers, not scientists, was not so much a literature of ideologies as it was a literature of methods. I mean — Heinlein and Wolheim quite comfortably in the same volume?

Why not? The essential thing is the effect on human thought of the fundamental discovery that the Universe does not care; it simply works. There is no way to repeal or amend physical laws. The rich, the poor, the holy and the unholy are all subject to hunger, thirst, pain, and death. Civilization, of whatever kind, is a response to the discovery that community action at least offers hope of relief to all. Most human history represents the ongoing attempt to work out a plan whereby that relief is in fact distributed to all, rather than merely some. Technological action — exploring the physical possibilities and applying deft means of conveying maximum comfort to the maximum number of individuals — offers the best hope, magic showing a very poor record in that respect.* So "Modern" science fiction, while no longer dominated and centralized by John Campbell's individual personality, will never be expunged; it is a natural and in some ways artistically the most inevitable expression of a major human concern, whatever fashionable political tags and transitory epithets may be applied to it.

It is in fact alive and well, within the general body of contemporary SF, in some cases evolved and updated in terms of literary technique, in other cases deliberately written in the "pure" style, as in Tony Rothman's *The World is Round* or the novels of James P. Hogan. Ballantine/del Rey is the house most closely associated with its production in novel form, where it accounts for a major part of their prosperity, but many other publishers are also doing it, and I rather expect that we'll be seeing quite a few additional houses jumping aboard that bandwagon, for the excellent commercial reason that a great many readers want it and are clearly willing to pay for it.

The "pure" style. Ah, the pure style, which is often replicated to be so pure that it pre-dates the intrusion of Heinlein's "Golden Age" smoothness upon the prototypical 1935 didacticism of John W. Campbell, Jr., author of *The Mightiest Machine.*

Campbell was capable of other approaches, as Don A. Stuart, and perhaps other practitioners of the superscience style are similarly capable but nevertheless use it because it gives a flavor of authenticity. That "authenticity" is of course pure nostalgia — the sigil certifying that the mixture is as before. There are uses for deliberate clumsiness in writing. The question in

**And yet, how appealing it is to think that simply displaying the proper attitude might modify the Universe! It's a hope we somehow cannot bring ourselves to abandon. Hence Campbell's interest in fantasy. He was a humanist.*

evaluating this sort of work becomes one of deciding whether the clumsiness adds something, as it does in enjoying Hogan, or whether it fails in the delicate act of remaining in balance with the pacing and plot evolution of a technologically exciting premise. For this kind of writing will not work if the storytelling does not carry the prose.

Case in point: *Lifeboat Earth*, by Stanley Schmidt.

The premise is a stunner. An advanced humanoid race, the Kyrra, arrive at Earth with news that the Galaxy is exploding and that the wavefront of killing radiation will hit us in seventeen years. The entire Milky Way galaxy offers no refuge. The only way to save the human race is to move the planet, complete, to the spiral galaxy we perceive as being in the Andromeda constellation. The move, consuming the Earth's core as fuel and turning our planet into a cheerless hulk hurtling across two million light years, will enable some humans to survive, and to colonize a suitable new planet.

This proposition is believed by only one man — Henry Clark — of all those in a position to act on it in Earth's behalf. Clark is barely in such a position; he will have to lie, cheat, and evade, in order to commit us, our world, and all our hopes and history, to this Draconian act. He is opposed by the UN, in particular by Franz Gerber, the Secretary General. (*Lifeboat Earth* is part of a series of Schmidt stories.) As the novel begins, Clark has okayed the throwing of the switch, and the Earth begins moving irrevocably out of its orbit. He presents this to the UN as a *fait accompli*. Everyone alive now has a very limited time in which to prepare for the journey while evading the natural disasters that occur as the Earth's crust takes the strain of acceleration. To save time and for maximum efficiency, Henry Clark must be made dictator.

So far, so good. Clark is the legitimate lineal descendant of Arcot, Wade, Morey, Kinnison, and every other technologically validated figure who, on another branch of literary evolution, became Heinlein's Man Who Knows How. His dictatorship, he points out, is thrust upon him by his qualifications, and the meddling, emotional bureaucrats who refuse to let plain facts divert them from their petty squabblings and nitpickings may eventually nibble through his heel tendons, but Humanity will be saved.

Okay. Now here is a sample of the prose, as Clark sits down in his personal plane:

> Why (a piece of his mind wondered abruptly) was he going to New York at all? Why hadn't he insisted that Gerber come down to Florida instead, to save time?
>
> Because (another piece of mind answered) this way would save time in the long run. Because Gerber and those who worked with him were very, very human, and under the best conditions Clark faced an uphill battle to make them see what

they had to do and get them going in time to help. The fact that he had already forced everybody's hand was not going to make it easy. For him (whose official title was still nothing more than Lieutenant Commissioner of Grants of the World Science Foundation) to compound the offense by telling the head of the U.N. that he must come to see Clark rather than expecting Clark to come to him —

It would be too much. Far better to do it this way — to appear cooperative now so the U.N. people wouldn't waste still more valuable time trying to make him change his mind.

It would be worth it. Both for the big reason of improving mankind's chances, and for the very personal one of getting this whole enormous burden out of Clark's hands and into the ones where it belonged. How he looked forward to that!

Only —

Only it wouldn't be like that, he realized with shocking abruptness, and his throat went suddenly dry. For an instant he caught a clear glimpse of this whole situation as it must appear to Gerber, and the glimpse blossomed into a terrifying picture of what was *really* going to happen. He felt his pulse quicken as he examined the future and gradually realized what he would have to do.

He didn't like it, and he was painfully aware that he couldn't see enough moves ahead. But what he had just envisioned seemed *so* likely that he had no choice but to cover it as well as he could.

Grimly, he squeezed the qualms out of his mind, reshaped them into resolution to do what he must, and squeezed them back in. That felt better....

When I think of what Damon Knight could do to those passages, I can only thank God on Dr. Schmidt's behalf that Knight is not writing this column. Here is a man who climbs on a plane and then decides why he's on it; rather, here is a writer whose characters present their rationales when the reader catches up to their actions, and Devil take verisimilitude, and a writer who has firmly been convinced that only what he tells us three or perhaps four times will be accepted as true.

The book is thick with this sort of clumsy over-writing; abrupt shocks, quickened pulses, painful awarenesses, squeezed qualms.* But this is no worse than Hogan, who in his way delights, or Rothman, or *The Black Star Passes.* Superscience has its charms.

The problem with *Lifeboat Earth* is that every time you try to come to grips with the technology — to see some hard evidence of human ingenuity accomplishing the seemingly miraculous — you are given, instead, the miraculous. "How will that get done?" various characters ask as the next supraphysical motion is proposed, and Clark's reply is always: "Well, I dunno, but the Kyrra will handle it."

This is actually a political novel, on

**Think on the bravery of the first man to ever re-insert a qualm.*

the most crude, most elementary level, as perceived by an author who has clearly never seen real statespersons at work and very likely has never even talked to an alderman. Bureaucrats and politicians *do* bumble, but not like these cartoon figures, who are the same cartoon figures in every one of these books. To understand the difference, read Heinlein, which one must assume Schmidt and Hogan have, but have ignored.

Tellingly, the architects of superscience here are gods with a machine. The Kyrra come, and the thing must be done. Who do? The Kyrra do. *Lifeboat Earth* is a fantasy ... a fantasy for and of lower-echelon management types who dream of power. This will not prevent its being enjoyable to readers of many sorts, but it may be particularly unsuitable to those readers who are looking for what it is ostensibly.

Jerry Pournelle, SF's latest protean man,* delivers something less superscientific but closer to what "hard" science fiction readers are known to like, and something which is genuine "modern" science fiction. That is, he is much more like Heinlein than he is like either of Campbell's major avatars.

It's the Heinlein of his middle period — after *Beyond This Horizon* and before *Stranger in a Strange Land.* Not that you can confine Heinlein in that manner, *The Moon is A Harsh Mistress* is a superb example of middle-period Heinlein, but was published after *Stranger* and after *Farnham's Freehold.* Somewhat similarly, Pournelle's *West of Honor,* composed of magazine material copyright 1976, plus 1978 wordage, is far less naive in its writing style, and rather more sophisticated throughout, than *Exiles to Glory,* which was published in 1977 magazines.

*Exiles,* the Ace book, is a novel much resembling the orientations of *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress.* In this case, the asteroid-mining entrepreneurs must resist the efforts of Terrestrial corporate bureaucracy to deprive them of what they have won through determination and ingenuity. Earth is hopelessly mired in its "soft" culture — dominated by fuzzy-minded liberal administrative practices which attempt to homogenize the initiative out of outstanding individuals, applied by connivers for power who lash out in blind panic because they fear they cannot hold the ramshackle social system together.

Pournelle makes the good case against what some would call Socialism; it does not work when applied by people whose only real competence is in backroom politics, and it tends to encourage the advancement of just such people. Whether what some people would call Free Enterprise is in fact

**Actually, a long-time member of the SF community who had relatively recently chosen to sometimes be a professional SF writer.*

the best solution to the human social dilemma is another matter. Pournelle's story is full of special cases, as such stories have always tended to be; his characters are *particularly* competent entrepreneurs, with especially well-concealed jokers up their sleeves, while the bureaucrats are so inept that they have clearly never thought for instance of indoctrinating and advancing young Jerry Pournelles to act for them. The characters in *Exiles* are thus reduced to the status of heroes and villains, playing out their melodrama against this background. It is the Heinlein technique, and a mind approaching Heinlein's, but it is not yet the hand of Heinlein.

*West of Honor,* however, hints at increasing maturity. It is no less an action story, part of a series involving John Christian Falkenberg, who is billed as "The Mercenary" but who appears simply to be a competent military officer in the interstellar Marines. The story in *West of Honor* is actually told from the viewpoint of one of his junior officers in a cobbled-up regiment which has been sent to restore order in a colony planet.

The junior officer is naive but not foolish, and he is brave, and ingenious. He displays concern for something larger and more complex than the imposition of a Pax Romana upon fellow human beings. The role of the more experienced and less impulsive Falkenberg in this story is to hold up a mirror to Lieutenant Hal Slater. Falkenberg is The Man Who Knows What's What; Slater is the Man Who Will Know.

There are obvious parallels to *Starship Troopers.* There is also an obvious difference, in Slater's very contemporary social conscience. He is no less a hero than Kevin Senecal of *Exiles;* he, too, gets the princess in the end. But although both of these pieces are no less wish-fulfillment than the Schmidt, in *West of Honor* there is that tinge of melancholy which is the *essential* mark of "modern" science fiction, the same bittersweetness which is shared in various specific ways by "Twilight," "Nightfall," or "Microcosmic God," and which persisted as the trademark of the "best" SF from the late 1930s until Fritz Leiber jolted it crucially with the black laughter of "Coming Attraction" in 1950. It lives yet, it breathes, it serves its readers.

Well, I have gone on too long already here. We shall pick this up again at some future time.

*Phil Farmer's new story is about a 60-year-old freshman who enrolls in the Occult Arts and History department of a most unusual university where all the fraternity houses have Arabic names. Mr. Farmer has recently completed the fourth novel in the famous "Riverworld" series; it is THE MAGIC LABYRINTH and will be published this Fall.*

# The Freshman

BY

## PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

The long-haired youth in front of Desmond wore sandals, ragged blue jeans, and a grimy T-shirt. A paperback, *The Collected Works of Robert Blake*, was half stuck into his rear pocket. When he turned around, he displayed in large letters on the T-shirt, M. U. His scrawny Fu Manchu mustache held some bread crumbs.

His yellow eyes — surely he suffered from jaundice — widened when he saw Desmond. He said, "This ain't the place to apply for the nursing home, pops." He grinned, showing unusually long canines, and then turned to face the admissions desk.

Desmond felt his face turning red. Ever since he's gotten into the line before a table marked *Toaahd Freshmen A-D*, he'd been aware of the sidelong glances, the snickers, the low-voiced comments. He stood out among these youths like a billboard in a flower garden, a corpse on a banquet table.

The line moved ahead by one person. The would-be students were talking, but their voices were subdued. For such young people, they were very restrained, excepting the smart aleck just ahead of him.

Perhaps it was the surroundings that repressed them. This gymnasium, built in the late nineteenth century, had not been repainted for years. The once-green paint was peeling. There were broken windows high on the walls; a shattered skylight had been covered with boards. The wooden floor bent and creaked, and the basketball goal rings (?) were rusty. Yet M. U. had been league champions in all fields of sports for many years. Though its enrollment was much less than that of its competitors, its teams somehow managed to win, often by large scores.

Desmond buttoned his jacket.

Though it was a warm fall day, the air in the building was cold. If he hadn't known better, he would have thought that the wall of an iceberg was just behind him. Above him the great lights struggled to overcome the darkness that lowered like the underside of a dead whale sinking into sea depths.

He turned around. The girl just back of him smiled. She wore a flowing dashiki covered with astrological symbols. Her black hair was cut short; her features were petite and well-arranged but too pointed to be pretty.

Among all these youths there should have been a number of pretty girls and handsome men. He'd walked enough campuses to get an idea of the index of beauty of college students. But here.... There was a girl, in the line to the right, whose face should have made her eligible to be a fashion model. Yet, there was something missing.

No, there was something added. A quality undefinable but.... Repugnant? No, now it was gone. No, it was back again. It flitted on and off, like a bat swooping from darkness into a grayness and then up and out.

The kid in front of him had turned again. He was grinning like a fox who'd just seen a chicken.

"Some dish, heh, pops? She likes older men. Maybe you two could get your shit together and make beautiful music."

The odor of unwashed body and clothes swirled around him like flies around a dead rat.

"I'm not interested in girls with Oedipus complexes," Desmond said coldly.

"At your age you can't be particular," the youth said, and turned away.

Desmond flushed, and he briefly fantasized knocking the kid down. It didn't help much.

The line moved ahead again. He looked at his wrist watch. In half an hour he was scheduled to phone his mother. He should have come here sooner. However, he had overslept while the alarm clock had run down, resuming its ticking as if it didn't care. Which it didn't, of course, though he felt that his possessions should, somehow, take an interest in him. This was irrational, but if he was a believer in the superiority of the rational, would he be here? Would any of these students?

The line moved jerkily ahead like a centipede halting now and then to make sure no one had stolen any of its legs. When he was ten minutes late for the phone call, he was at the head of the line. Behind the admissions table was a man far older than he. His face was a mass of wrinkles, gray dough that had been incised with fingernails and then pressed into somewhat human shape. The nose was a cuttlefish's beak stuck into the dough. But the eyes beneath the white chaotic eyebrows were as alive as blood flowing from holes in the flesh.

The hand which took Desmond's papers and punched cards was not that

of an old man's. It was big and swollen, white, smooth-skinned. The fingernails were dirty.

"The Roderick Desmond, I assume."

The voice was rasping, not at all an old man's cracked quavering.

"Ah, you know me?"

"Of you, yes. I've read some of your novels of the occult. And ten years ago I rejected your request for xeroxes of certain parts of *the* book."

The name tag on the worn tweed jacket said: R. Layamon, COTOA-AHD. So this was the chairman of the Committee of the Occult Arts and History Department.

"Your paper on the non-Arabic origin of al-Hazred's name was a brilliant piece of linguistic research. I knew that it wasn't Arabic or even Semitic, but I confess that I didn't know the century in which the word was dropped from the Arabian language. Your exposition of how it was retained only in connection with the Yemenite and that its original meaning was not *mad* but *one-who-sees-what-shouldn't-be-seen* was quite correct."

He paused, then said smiling, "Did your mother complain when she was forced to accompany you to Yemen?"

Desmond said, "No-n-n-o-body forced her."

He took a deep breath and said, "But how did you know she...?"

"I've read some biographical accounts of you."

Layamon chuckled. It sounded like nails being shifted in a barrel. "Your paper on al-Hazred and the knowledge you display in your novels are the main reasons why you're being admitted to this department despite your sixty years."

He signed the forms and handed the card back to Desmond. "Take this to the cashier's office. Oh, yes, your family is a remarkably long-lived one, isn't it? Your father died accidentally, but his father lived to be one hundred and two. Your mother is eighty, but she should live to be over a hundred. And you, you could have forty more years of life *as you've known it.*"

Desmond was enraged but not so much that he dared let himself show it. The gray air became black, and the old man's face shone in it. It floated toward him, expanded, and suddenly Desmond was inside the gray wrinkles. It was not a pleasant place.

The tiny figures on a dimly haloed horizon danced, then faded, and he fell through a bellowing blackness. The air was gray again, and he was leaning forward, clenching the edge of the table.

"Mr. Desmond, do you have these attacks often?"

Desmond released his grip and straightened. "Too much excitement, I suppose. No, I've never had an attack, not now or ever."

The old man chuckled. "Yes, it must be emotional stress. Perhaps you'll find the means for relieving that stress here."

Desmond turned and walked away. Until he left the building, he saw only blurred figures and signs. That ancient wizard ... how had he known his thoughts so well? Was it simply because he had read the biographical accounts, made a few inquiries, and then surmised a complete picture? Or was there more to it than that?

The sun had gone behind thick sluggish clouds. Past the campus, past many trees hiding the houses of the city were the Tamsiqueg hills. According to the long-extinct Indians after whom they were named, they had once been evil giants who'd waged war with the hero Mikatoonis and his magic-making friend, Chegaspat. Chegaspat had been killed, but Mikatoonis had turned the giants into stone with a magical club.

But Cotoaahd, the chief giant, was able to free himself from the spell every few centuries. Sometimes, a sorcerer could loose him. Then Cotoaahd walked abroad for a while before returning to his rocky slumber. In 1724 a house and many trees on the edge of the town had been flattened one stormy night as if colossal feet had stepped upon them. And the broken trees formed a trail which led to the curiously shaped hill known as Cotoaahd.

There was nothing about these stories that couldn't be explained by the tendency of the Indians, and the superstitious 18th-century whites, to legendize natural phenomena. But was it entirely coincidence that the anagram of the committee headed by Layamon duplicated the giant's name?

Suddenly, he became aware that he was heading for a telephone booth. He looked at his watch and felt panicky. The phone in his dormitory room would be ringing. It would be better to call her from the booth and save the three minutes it would take to walk to the dormitory.

He stopped. No, if he called from the booth, he would only get a busy signal.

"Forty more years of life *as you've known it,*" the chairman had said.

Desmond turned. His path was blocked by an enormous youth. He was a head taller than Desmond's six feet and so fat he looked like a smaller version of the Santa Claus balloon in Macy's Christmas-day parade. He wore a dingy sweatshirt on the front of which was the ubiquitous M. U., unpressed pants, and torn tennis shoes. In banana-sized fingers he held a salami sandwich which Gargantua would not have found too small.

Looking at him, Desmond suddenly realized that most of the students here were too thin or too fat.

"Mr. Desmond?"

"Right."

He shook hands. The fellow's skin was wet and cold, but the hand exerted a powerful pressure.

"I'm Wendell Trepan. With your knowledge, you've heard about my ancestors. The most famous, or infamous, of whom was the Cornish witch, Rachel Trepan."

"Yes. Rachel of the hamlet of Tredannick Wollas, near Poldhu Bay."

"I knew you'd know. I'm following the trade of my ancestors, though more cautiously, of course. Anyway, I'm a senior and the chairperson of the rushing committee for the Lam Kha Alif fraternity."

He paused to bite into the sandwich. Mayonnaise and salami and cheese oozing from his mouth, he said, "You're invited to the party we're holding at the house this afternoon."

The other hand reached into a pocket and brought out a card. Desmond looked at it briefly. "You want me to be a candidate for membership in your frat? I'm pretty old for that sort of thing. I'd feel out of place...."

"Nonsense, Mr. Desmond. We're a pretty serious bunch. In fact, none of the frats here are like any on other campuses. You should know that. We feel you'd provide stability and, I'll admit, prestige. You're pretty well known, you know. Layamon, by the way, is a Lam Kha Alif. He tends to favor students who belong to his frat. He'd deny it, of course, and I'll deny it if you repeat this. But it's true."

"Well, I don't know. Suppose I did pledge — if I'm invited to, that is — would I have to live in the frat house?"

"Yes. We make no exceptions. Of course, that's only when you're a pledge. You can live wherever you want to when you're an active."

Trepan smiled, showing the unswallowed bite. "You're not married, so there's no problem there."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing, Mr. Desmond. It's just that we don't pledge married men unless they don't live with their wives. Married men lose some of their power, you know. Of course, no way do we insist on celibacy. We have some pretty good parties, too. Once a month we hold a big bust in a grove at the foot of Cotaahd. Most of the women guests there belong to the Ba Ghay Sin sorority. Some of them really go for the older type, if you know what I mean."

Trepan stepped forward to place his face directly above Desmond's. "We don't just have beer, pot, hasish, and sisters. There're other attractions. Brothers, if you're so inclined. Some stuff that's made from a recipe by the Marquis Manuel de Dembron himself. But most of that is kid stuff. There'll be a goat there, too!"

"A goat? A *black* goat?"

Trepan nodded, and his triple-fold jowls swung. "Yeah. Old Layamon'll be there to supervise, though he'll be masked, of course. With him as coach nothing can go wrong. Last Halloween, though...."

He paused, then said, "Well, it was something to see."

Desmond licked dry lips. His heart was thudding like the tom-toms that beat at the ritual of which he had only read but had envisioned many times.

Desmond put the card in his pocket. "At one o'clock?"

"You're coming? Very good! See

you, Mr. Desmond. You won't regret it."

Desmond walked past the buildings of the university quadragle, the most imposing of which was the museum. This was the oldest structure on the campus, the original college. Time had beaten and chipped away at the brick and stone of the others, but the museum seemed to have absorbed time and to be slowly radiating it back just as cement and stone and brick absorbed heat in the sunlight and then gave it back in the darkness. Also, whereas the other structures were covered with vines, perhaps too covered, the museum was naked of plant life. Vines which tried to crawl up its gray-bone-colored stones withered and fell back.

Layamon's red-stone house was narrow, three stories high, and had a double-peaked roof. Its cover of vines was so thick that it seemed a wonder that the weight didn't bring it to the ground. The colors of the vines were subtly different from those on the other buildings. Seen at one angle, they looked cyanotic. From another, they were the exact green of the eyes of a Sumatran snake Desmond had seen in a colored plate in a book on herpetology.

It was this venomous reptile which was used by the sorcerers of the Yan tribes to transmit messages and sometimes to kill. The writer had not explained what he meant by "messages." Desmond had discovered the meaning in another book, which had required him to learn Malay, written in the Arabic script, before he could read it.

He hurried on past the house, which was not something a sightseer would care to look at long, and came to the dormitory. It had been built in 1888 on the site of another building and remodeled in 1938. Its gray paint was peeling. There were several broken windows, over the panes of which cardboard had been nailed. The porch floor boards bent and creaked as he passed over them. The main door was of oak, its paint long gone. The bronze head of a cat, a heavy bronze ring dangling from its mouth, served as a door knocker.

Desmond entered, passed through the main room over the worn carpet, and walked up two flights of bare-board steps. On the grey-white of a wall by the first landing someone had long ago written, *Yug-Sothoth Sucks.* Many attempts had been made to wash it off, but it was evident that only pain could hide this insulting and dangerous sentiment. Yesterday a junior had told him that no one knew who had written it, but the night after it had appeared, a freshman had been found dead, hanging from a hook in a closet.

"The kid had mutilated himself terribly before he committed suicide," the junior had said. "I wasn't here then, but I understand that he was a mess. He'd done it with a razor *and* a hot iron. There was blood all over the place, his pecker and balls were on the table, arranged to form a T-cross, you

know whose symbol that is, and he'd clawed out plaster on the wall, leaving a big bloody print. It didn't even look like a human hand had done it."

"I'm surprised he lived long enough to hang himself," Desmond had said. "All that loss of blood, you know."

The junior had guffawed. "You're kidding, of course!"

It was several seconds before Desmond understood what he meant. Then he'd paled. But later he wondered if the junior wasn't playing a traditional joke on a green freshman. He didn't think he'd ask anybody else about it, however. If he had been made a fool of, he wasn't going to let it happen more than once.

He heard the phone ringing at the end of the long hall. He sighed, and strode down it, passing closed doors. From behind one came a faint tittering. He unlocked his door and closed it behind him. For a long time he stood watching the phone, which went on and on, reminding him, he didn't know why, of the poem about the Australian swagman who went for a dip in a waterhole. The bunyip, that mysterious and sinister creature of down-under folklore, the dweller in the water, silently and smoothly took care of the swagman. And the tea kettle he'd put on the fire whistled and whistled with no one to hear.

And the phone rang on and on.

The bunyip was on the other end.

Guilt spread through him as quick as a blush.

He walked across the room glimpsing something out of the corner of his eye, something small, dark, and swift that dived under the sagging mildew-odorous bed-couch. He stopped at the small table, reached out to the receiver, touched it, felt its cold throbbing. He snatched his hand back. It was foolish, but it had seemed to him that she would detect his touch and know that he was there.

Snarling, he wheeled and started across the room. He noticed that the hole in the baseboard was open again. The Coke bottle whose butt end he'd jammed into the hold had been pushed out. He stopped and reinserted it and straightened up.

When he was at the foot of the staircase, he could still hear the ringing. But he wasn't sure that it wasn't just in his head.

After he'd paid his tuition and eaten at the cafeteria — the food was better than he'd thought it would be — he walked to the ROTC building. It was in better shape than the other structures, probably because the Army was in charge of it. Still, it wasn't in the condition an inspector would require. And those cannons on caissons in the rear. Were the students really supposed to train with Spanish-American War weapons? And since when was steel subject to verdigris?

The officer in charge was surprised when Desmond asked to be issued his uniform and manuals.

"I don't know. You realize ROTC is

no longer required of freshmen and sophomores?"

Desmond insisted that he wanted to enroll. The officer rubbed his unshaven jaw and blew smoke from a Tijuana Gold panatela. "Hmm. Let me see."

He consulted a book whose edges seemed to have been nibbled by rats. "Well, what do you know? There's nothing in the regulations about age. Course, there's some pages missing. Must be an oversight. Nobody near your age has ever been considered. But ... well, if the regulations say nothing about it, then ... what the hell! Won't hurt you, our boys don't have to go through obstacle courses or anything like that.

But, jeeze, you're sixty! Why do you want to sign up?"

Desmond did not tell him that he had been deferred from service in World War II because he was the sole support of his sick mother. Ever since then, he'd felt guilty, but at least here he could do his bit — however minute — for his country.

The officer stood up, though not in a coordinated manner. "Okay. I'll see you get your issue. It's only fair to warn you, though, that these fuck-ups play some mighty strange tricks. You should see what they blow out of their cannons."

Fifteen minutes later, Desmond left, a pile of uniforms and manuals under one arm. Since he didn't want to return home with them, he checked them in at the university book store. The girl put them on a shelf alongside other belongings, some of them unidentifiable to the noncognoscenti. One of them was a small cage covered with a black cloth.

Desmond walked to Fraternity Row. All of the houses had Arabic names, except the House of Hastur. These were afflicted with the same general decrepitude and lack of care as the university structures. Desmond turned in at a cement walk, from the cracks of which spread dying dandelions and other weeds. On his left leaned a massive wooden pole fifteen feet high. The heads and symbols carved into it had caused the townspeople to refer to it as the totem pole. It wasn't, of course, since the tribe to which it had belonged were not Northwest Coast or Alaskan Indians. It and a fellow in the university museum were the last survivors of hundreds which had once stood in this area.

Desmond, passing it, put the end of his left thumb under his nose and the tip of his index finger in the center of his forehead, and he muttered the ancient phrase of obeisance, *"Sheshcotoaahd-ting-ononwa-senk."* According to various texts he'd read, this was required of every Tamsiqueg who walked by it during this phase of the moon. The phrase was unintelligible even to them, since it came from another tribe or perhaps from an antique stage of the language. But it indicated respect, and lack of its observance was likely to result in misfortune.

He felt a little silly doing it, but it couldn't hurt.

The unpainted wooden steps creaked as he stepped upon them. The porch was huge; the wires of the screen were rusty and useless in keeping insects out because of the many holes. The front door was open; from it came a blast of rock music, the loud chatter of many people, and the acrid odor of pot.

Desmond almost turned back. He suffered when he was in a crowd, and his consciousness of his age made him feel embarrassingly conspicuous. But the huge figure of Wendell Trepan was in the doorway, and he was seized by an enormous hand.

"Come on in!" Trepan bellowed. "I'll introduce you to the brothers!"

Desmond was pulled into a large room jammed with youths of both sexes. Trepan bulled through, halting now and then to slap somebody on the back and shout a greeting and once to pat a well-built young woman on the fanny. Then they were in a corner where Professor Layamon sat surrounded by people who looked older than most of the attendees. Desmond supposed that they were graduate students. He shook the fat swollen hand and said, "Pleased to meet you again," but he doubted that his words were heard.

Laymon pulled him down so he could be heard, and he said, "Have you made up your mind yet?"

The old man's breath was not unpleasant, but he had certainly been drinking something which Desmond had never smelled before. The red eyes seemed to hold a light, almost as if tiny candles were burning inside the eyeballs.

"About what?" Desmond shouted back.

The old man smiled and said, "You know."

He released his grip. Desmond straightened up. Suddenly, though the room was hot enough to make him sweat, he felt chilly. What was Layamon hinting at? It couldn't be that he really knew. Or could it be?

Trepan introduced him to the men and women around the chair and then took him into the crowd. Other introductions followed, most of those he met seeming to be members of Lam Kha Alif or of the sorority across the street. The only one he could identify for sure as a candidacy for pledging was a black, a Gabonese. After they left him, Trepan said, "Bukawai comes from a long line of witch doctors. He's going to be a real treasure if he accepts our invitation, though the House of Hastur and Kaf Dhal Waw are hot to get him. The department is a little weak on Central African science. It used to have a great teacher, Janice Momaya, but she disappeared ten years ago while on a sabbatical in Sierra Leone. I wouldn't be surprised if Bukawai was offered an assistant professorship even if he is nominally a freshman. Man, the other night, he taught me part of a ritual you

wouldn't believe. I...well, I won't go into it now. Some other time. Anyway, he has the greatest respect for Layamon, and since the old fart is head of the department, Bukawai is almost a cinch to join us."

Suddenly, his lips pulled back, his teeth clenched, his skin paled beneath the dirt, and he bent over and grabbed his huge paunch. Desmond said, "What's the matter?"

Trepan shook his head, gave a deep sigh, and straightened up.

"Man, that hurt!"

"What?" Desmond said.

"I shouldn't have called him an old fart. I didn't think he could hear me, but he isn't using sound to receive. Hell, there's nobody in the world has more respect for him than me. But sometimes my mouth runs off...well, never again."

"You mean?" Desmond said.

"Yeah. Who'd you think? Never mind. Come with me where we can hear ourselves think."

He pulled Desmond through a smaller room, one with many shelves of books, novels, school texts, and here and there some old leather-bound volumes.

"We got a hell of a good library here, the best any house can boast of. It's one of our stellar attractions. But it's the open one."

They entered a narrow door, passed into a short hall, and stopped while Trepan took a key from his pocket and unlocked another door. Beyond it was a narrow corkscrew staircase, the steps of which were dusty. A window high above gave a weak light through dirty panes. Trepan turned on a wall light, and they went up the stairs. At the top, which was on the third floor, Trepan unlocked another door with a different key. They stepped into a small room whose walls were covered by b[illegible] shelves from floor to ceiling. Trepan turned on a light. In a corner [illegible]s a small table and a folding chair. The table had a lamp and a stone bust of the Marquis de Dembron on it.

Trepan, breathing heavily after the climb, said, "Usually, only seniors and graduates are allowed here. But I'm making an exception in your case. I just wanted to show you one of the advantages of belonging to Lam Kha Alif. None of the other houses have a library like this."

Trepan was looking narrow-eyed at him. "Eyeball the books. But don't touch them. They, uh, absorb, if you know what I mean."

Desmond moved around, looking at the titles. When he was finished, he said, "I'm impressed. I thought some of these were to be found only in the university library. In locked rooms."

"That's what the public thinks. Listen, if you pledge us, you'll have access to these books. Only don't tell the other undergrads. They'd get jealous."

Trepan, still narrow-eyed, as if he were considering something that perhaps he shouldn't, said, "Would you mind turning your back and stick-

ing your fingers in your ears?"

Desmond said, "What?"

Trepan smiled. "Oh, if you sign up with us, you'll be given the little recipe necessary to work in here. But until then I'd just as soon you don't see it."

Desmond, smiling with embarrassment, the cause of which he couldn't account for, and also feeling excited, turned his back, facing away from Trepan, and jammed his fingertips into his ears. While he stood there in the very quiet room — was it soundproofed with insulation or with something perhaps not material? — he counted the seconds. One thousand and one, one thousand and two....

A little more than a minute had passed when he felt Trepan's hand on his shoulder. He turned and removed his fingers. The fat youth was holding out to him a tall but very slim volume bound in a skin with many small dark protuberances. Desmond was surprised, since he was sure he had not seen it on the shelves.

"I deactivated this," Trepan said. "Here. Take it." he looked at his wrist watch. "It'll be okay for ten minutes."

There was no title or byline on the cover. And, now that he looked at it closely and felt it, he did not think the skin was from an animal.

Trepan said, "It's the hide of old Atechironnon himself."

Desmond said, "Ah!" and he trembled. But he rallied.

"He must have been covered with warts."

"Yeah. go ahead. Look at it. It's a shame you can't read it, though."

The first page was slightly yellowed, which wasn't surprising for paper four hundred years old. There was no printing but large handwritten letters.

*"Ye lesser Rituall of Ye Tahmmsiquegg Warlock Atechironunn,"* Desmond read. *"Reprodust from ye Picture-riting on ye Skin lefft unbirnt by ye Godly.*

*"By his own Hand, Simon Conant. 1641.*

*"Let him who speaks these Words of Pictures, first lissen."*

Trepan chuckled and said, "Spelling wasn't his forte, was it?"

"Simon, the half brother of Roger Conant," Desmond said. "He was the first white man to visit the Tamsiqueg and not leave with his severed thumb stuck up his ass. He was also with the settlers who raided the Tamsiqueg, but they didn't know who his sympathies were with. He fled with the badly wounded Atechironnon into the wilderness. Twenty years latter, he appeared in Virginia with this book."

He slowly turned the five pages, fixing each pictograph in his photographic memory. There was one figure he didn't like to look at.

"Layamon's the only one who can read it," Trepan said.

Desmond did not tell him that he was conversant with the grammar and small dictionary of the Tamsiqueg language, written by William Cor Dunnes in 1624 and published in 1654.

It contained an appendix translating the pictographs. It had cost him twenty years of search and a thousand dollars just for a xerox copy. His mother had raised hell about the expenditure, but for once he had stood up to her. Not even the university had a copy.

Trepan looked at his watch. "One minute to go. Hey!"

He grabbed the book from Desmond's hands and said, harshly, "Turn your back and plug your ears!"

Trepan looked as if he were in a panic. He turned, and a minute later Trepan pulled one of Desmond's fingers away.

"Sorry to be so sudden, but the hold was beginning to break down. I can't figure it out. It's always been good for at least ten minutes."

Desmond had not felt anything, but that might be because Trepan, having been exposed to the influence, was more sensitive to it.

Trepan, obviously nervous, said, "Let's get out of here. It's got to cool off."

On the way down, he said, "You sure you can't read it?"

"Where would I have learned how?" Desmond said.

They plunged into a sea of noise and odors in the big room. They did not stay long, since Trepan wanted to show him the rest of the house, except the basement.

"You can see it sometime this week. Just now it's not advisable to go down there."

Desmond didn't ask why.

When they entered a very small room on the second floor, Trepan said, "Ordinarily we don't let freshmen have a room to themselves. But for you...well, it's yours if you want it."

That pleased Desmond. He wouldn't have to put up with someone whose habits would irk him and whose chatter would anger him.

They descended to the first floor. The big room was not so crowded now. Old Layamon, just getting up from the chair, beckoned to him. Desmond approached him slowly. For some reason, he knew he was not going to like what Layamon would say to him. Or perhaps he wasn't sure whether he would like it or not.

"Trepan showed you the frat's more precious books," the chairman said. It wasn't a question but a statement. "Especially Conant's book."

Trepan said, "How did you...?" he grinned. "You felt it."

"Of course," the rusty voice said. "Well, Desmond, don't you think it's time to answer that phone?"

Trepan looked puzzled. Desmond felt sick and cold.

Layamon was now almost nose to nose to Desmond. The many wrinkles of the doughy skin looked like hieroglyphs.

"You've made up your mind, but you aren't letting yourself know it," he said. "Listen. that was Conant's advice, wasn't it? Listen. From the moment you got onto the plane to Boston,

you were committed. You could have backed out in the airport, but you didn't, even though, I imagine, your mother made a scene there. But you didn't. So there's no use putting it off."

He chuckled. "That I am bothering to give you advice is a token of my esteem for you. I think you'll go far and fast. If you are able to eliminate certain defects of character. It takes strength and intelligence and great self-discipline and a vast dedication to get even a BA here, Desmond.

"There are too many who enroll here because they think they'll be taking snap courses. Getting great power, hobnobbing with things that are really not socially minded, to say the least, seems to them to be as easy as rolling off a log. But they soon find out that the department's standards are higher than, say, those of MIT in engineering. And a hell of a lot more dangerous.

"And then there's the moral issue. That's declared just by enrolling here. But how many have the will to push on? How many decide that they are on the wrong side? They quit, not knowing that it's too late for any but a tiny fraction of them to return to the other side. They've declared themselves, have stood up and been counted forever, as it were."

He paused to light up a brown panatela. The smoke curled around Desmond, who did not smell what he expected. The odor was not quite like that of a dead bat he had once used in an experiment.

"Every man or woman determines his or her own destiny. But I would make my decision swiftly, if I were you. I've got my eye on you, and your advancement here does depend upon my estimate of your character and potentiality.

"Good day, Desmond."

The old man walked out. Trepan said, "What was that all about?"

Desmond did not answer. He stood for a minute or so while Trepan fidgeted. Then he said good-by to the fat man and walked out slowly. Instead of going home, he wandered around the campus. Attracted by flashing red lights, he went over to see what was going on. A car with the markings of the campus police and an ambulance from the university hospital were in front of a two-story building. Its lower floor had once been a grocery store according to the letters on the dirty plate-glass window. The paint inside and out was peeling, and plaster had fallen off the walls inside, revealing the laths beneath. On the bare wooden floor were three bodies. One was the youth who had stood just in front of him in the line in the gymnasium. He lay on his back, his mouth open below the scraggly mustache.

Desmond asked one of the people pressed against the window what had happened. The gray-bearded man, probably a professor, said, "This happens every year at this time. Some kids get carried away and try something no one but an M.A. would even think of

trying. It's strictly forbidden, but that doesn't stop those young fools."

The corpse with the mustache seemed to have a large round black object or perhaps a burn on its forehead. Desmond wanted to get a closer look, but the ambulance men put a blanket over the face before carrying the body out.

The gray-bearded man said, "The university police and the hospital will handle them." He laughed shortly. "The city police don't even want to come on the campus. The relatives will be notified they've OD'ed from heroin."

"There's no trouble about that?"

"Sometimes, Private detectives have come here, but they don't stay long."

Desmond walked away swiftly. His mind was made up. The sight of those bodies had shaken him. He'd go home, make peace with his mother, sell all the books he'd spent so much time and money accumulating and studying, take up writing mystery novels. He'd seen the face of death, and if he did what he had thought about, only idly of course, fantasizing for psychic therapy, he would see her face. Dead. He couldn't do it.

When he entered his room in the boarding house, the phone was still ringing. He walked to it, reached out his hand, held it for an underterminable time, then dropped it. As he walked toward the couch, he noticed that the Coca-Cola bottle had been shoved or pulled out of the hole in the baseboard. He knelt down and jammed it back into the hole. From behind the wall came a faint twittering.

He sat down on the sagging couch, took his notebook from his jacket pocket, and began to pencil in the pictographs he remembered so well on the sheets. It took him half an hour, since exactness of reproduction was vital. The phone did not stop ringing.

Someone knocked on the door and yelled, "I saw you go in! Answer the phone or take it off the hook! Or I'll put something on you!"

He did not reply or rise from the couch.

He had left out one of the drawings in the sequence. Now he poised the pencil an inch above the blank space. Sitting at the other end of the line would be a very fat, very old woman. She was old and ugly now, but she had borne him and for many years thereafter she had been beautiful. When his father had died, she had gone to work to keep their house and to support her son in the manner to which both were accustomed. She had worked hard to pay his tuition and other expenses while he went to college. She had continued to work until he had sold two novels. Then she had gotten sickly, though not until he began bringing women home to introduce as potential wives.

She loved him, but she wouldn't let loose of him, and that wasn't genuine love. He hadn't been able to tear loose,

which meant that though he was resentful he had something in him which liked being caged. Then, one day, he had decided to take the big step toward freedom. It had been done secretly and swiftly. He had despised himself for his fear of her, but that was the way he was. If he stayed here, she would be coming here. He couldn't endure that. So, he would have to go home.

He looked at the phone, started to rise, sank back.

What to do? He could commit suicide. He'd be free, and she would know how angry he'd been with her. He gave a start as the phone stopped ringing. So, she had given up for a while. But she would return to it.

He looked at the baseboard. The bottle was moving out from the hole a little at a time. Something behind the wall was working away determinedly. How many times had it started to leave the hole and found that its passage was blocked? Far too many, the thing must think, if it had a mind. But it refused to give up, and some day it might occur to it to solve its problem by killing the one who was causing the problem.

If, however, it was daunted by the far greater size of the problem maker, if it lacked courage, then it would have to keep on pushing the bottle from the hole. And....

He looked at the notebook, and he shook. The blank space had been filled in. There was the drawing of Cotaahd, the thing which, now he looked at it, somehow resembled his mother.

Had he unconsciously penciled it in while he was thinking?

Or had the figure formed itself?

It didn't matter. In either case, he knew what he had to do.

While the eyes passed over each drawing, and he intoned the words of that long-dead language, he felt something move out from within his chest, crawl into his belly, his legs, his throat, his brain. The symbol of Cotaahd seemed to burn on the sheet when he pronounced its name, his eyes on the drawing.

The room grew dark as the final words were said. He rose and turned on a table lamp and went into the tiny dirty bathroom. The face in the mirror did not look like a murderer's; it was just that of a sixty-year-old man who had been through an ordeal and was not quite sure that it was over.

On the way out of the room, he saw the Coke bottle slide free of the baseboard hole. But whatever had pushed it was not yet ready to come out.

Hours later he returned reeling from the campus tavern. The phone was ringing again. But the call, as he had expected, was not from his mother, though it was from his native city in Illinois.

"Mr. Desmond, this is Sergeant Rourke of the Busiris Police Department. I'm afraid I have some bad news for you. Uh, ah, your mother died some hours ago of a heart attack."

Desmond did not have to act stunned. He was numb throughout. Even the hand holding the receiver felt as if it had turned to granite. Vaguely, he was aware that Rourke's voice seemed strange.

"Heart attack? Heart...? Are you sure?"

He groaned. His mother had died naturally. He would not have had to recite the ancient words. And now he had committed himself for nothing and was forever trapped. Once the words were used while the eyes read, there was no turning back.

But...if the words had been only words, dying as sound usually does, no physical reaction resulting from words transmitted through that subcontinuum, then was he bound?

Wouldn't he be free, clear of debt? Able to walk out of this place without fear of retaliation?

"It was a terrible thing, Mr. Desmond. A freak accident. Your mother died while she was talking to a visiting neighbor, Mrs. Sammins. Sammins called the police and an ambulance. Some other neighbors went into the house, and then...then...."

Rourke's throat seemed to be clogging.

"I'd just got there and was on the front porch when it...it...."

Rourke coughed, and he said, "My brother was in the house, too."

Three neighbors, two ambulance attendants, and two policemen had been crushed to death when the house had unaccountably collapsed.

"It was like a giant foot stepped on it. If it'd fallen in six seconds later, I'd have been caught, too."

Desmond thanked him and said he'd take the next plane out to Busiris.

He staggered to the window, and he raised it to breathe in the open air. Below, in the light of a street lamp, hobbling along on his cane, was Layamon. The gray face lifted. Teeth flashed whitely.

Desmond wept, but the tears were only for himself.

*In which we learn about some pretty awful doings at a mud show at the Goober City Fairgrounds from a master of the horror story. A new Bloch collection, SUCH STUFF AS SCREAMS ARE MADE OF, was published recently.*

# *Freak Show*

**BY**
**ROBERT BLOCH**

Goober City Fairgrounds lay out in the boondocks and came to life only during the county fair. Nothing ever happened on the premises the rest of the year, aside from a few muggings and an occasional rape.

But on this particular morning, as Sheriff Higgs drove up in the patrol car, he noticed signs of other activity.

Parked right spang in the middle of the main arena was a big red van. And standing next to it was a man.

Sheriff Higgs knew every four-wheeled contraption or two-legged critter in Mayhem County, but he'd never seen this van or man before. He pulled up about fifty feet away, climbed out, and walked over slow and easy.

The van was unmarked and had an out-of-state license, so that didn't give him much to go on. The man was nothing to write home about, either — tall, on the skinny side, dark hair and eyes — he could be young or well into middle age, depending on the face under the beard. But his shirt and pants were too clean for a hippy-type, and there just wasn't anything about him you could get a handle on.

Sheriff Higgs decided to feel his way. "Morning," he said. "Mighty warm day and fixing to get worse. Folks say it's so hot you can fry eggs on the sidewalk."

"Bad for your health," said the man. "Too much cholesterol."

"Don't worry about my health," the sheriff told him. "I'm here on official business."

The stranger smiled. "And what might that be?"

Sheriff Higgs held up a printed placard and squinted at its bright red lettering in the sunlight. *Carnival Of Life*, he read. *The Greatest Show On*

*Earth. Adults Only — Fairgrounds, Tonight.*

The man nodded. "Went up late last night when I arrived. You'll find them on every telephone pole in Goober City. Forty-seven, as I recall."

"That's forty-seven violations," the sheriff told him. "Law says you can't post bills in public property without a permit."

"Sorry," said the man. "I thought that was merely a formality. And since my stay is short I'm rather pressed for time. But I suppose law and order is the name of the game." And he winked.

Sheriff Higgs looked him straight in the eye. "It's not a game with me. Like I said, I'm here on business."

"I agree," said the stranger. "Let's shake on it." He stuck out his hand and Sheriff Higgs took it, feeling the crisp crackle of folding-money against his palm as he slid the bill into his trouser pocket.

The man turned away. "Now that the proprieties are observed I must ask you to excuse me. There's work to be done."

"Hold it," said the sheriff. "I got to know a little something about this carnival of yours before I give you the go-ahead."

The man shrugged. "No problem. It's just a mud-show. Been doing these one-night stands for years, like Dr. Lao or Cooger and Dark."

"Never heard of them," the sheriff said. "Or you either. Mind giving me your name?"

"Fall," said the stranger. "Fall's the name — though I'm a man for all seasons, so to speak."

Sheriff Higgs cocked his head at the red van. "Where's the rest of your outfit, Mr. Fall?"

"They'll be along shortly. Once I get the tent up —"

"Not so fast. Suppose you tell me just what goes on inside that tent of yours. Handbill here says Adults Only. Is this here one of them sex shows?"

"Certainly not."

"What about gambling?"

"I'm not partial to games of chance."

"You bringing in any wild animals?"

"I have no dealings with animals."

"Then just what do you deal with?"

"It's a ten-in-one," said Mr. Fall. "What you'd call a freak show."

"What kind of freaks?"

"Come back tonight and see for yourself." Mr. Fall smiled. "I think you and the good people of Goober City will find it a most unusual attraction."

The good people of Goober City must have expected sex, gambling and wild animals, because they came swarming onto the fairgrounds right after dark.

Sheriff Higgs saw that just about everybody was there, from the folks who worked in the mill to the big wheels who lived on the hill — banker Fence, lawyer Tudd, even Mayor Stooldrayer. Brought their wives along, too; it wasn't the kind of a show they'd choose for their girlfriends.

The arena lights were on and loud music blasted from an amplifier outside the tent. But that's all Sheriff Higgs noticed — there weren't any rides or shooting galleries or guess-your-weight outfits, no fortune-teller booths, no Keeno concessions, not even a stand where you could buy a chiliburger or a Dr. Pepper.

There was just this one tent, not all that big, either. It had a platform out front, and the sheriff spotted Mr. Fall standing on it with his back turned, putting up banners all along the side of the canvas wall. When Fall turned around, the sheriff saw he was wearing a fancy red suit that looked to be velvet, with shirt and tie to match. Even his shoes were red and he carried a red cane in the crook of his arm. He'd slicked his hair back with little puffs standing up on either side of his forehead, and with that beard of his he was a dead ringer for the label on a bottle of Pluto Water.

"Good evening," he said, coming down to the edge of the platform. "Glad you could make it."

"That's some getup you're wearing," Sheriff Higgs told him. "You look like one of those old-time stage magicians."

"All part of the act." Mr. Fall smiled. "If you mean to succeed in this world, you've got to cater to your customers' wants. And what they want most is illusion."

"What kind of tricks do you do?"

"Just the basics. No complicated gimmicks, no phoney effects, no walking on water or changing water into wine. I leave cheap miracles to the opposition. Experience has shown me that most people don't require much in order to be fooled. All they need is the opportunity for self-deception."

Sheriff Higgs frowned. "Well, you don't put over anything on me with that scam," he said. "Notice you still only got one tent. Where's the other stuff you said was coming?"

"Everything's inside," Mr. Fall told him. "And the show is ready to begin."

He turned away and walked to the center of the platform, pounding on the wooden planks with his cane.

The cane must have been rigged up with some kind of remote-control amplifier because it made quite a racket. And Mr. Fall's voice came through loud and clear.

"This way," he called out. "This way, ladies and gentlemen, for the free show."

The ladies and gentlemen began to gather around the platform, pushing and shoving and fighting for a place up front, the way people aways do when they figure on getting something for free.

There was quite a bit of cussing, and some of the older folks got their toes tromped on, but no one was seriously hurt, from what Sheriff Higgs could see. He was right up front himself, of course; nobody gets ahead of the law.

"Good evening one and all," said Mr. Fall. "And welcome to the Carnival of Life."

"Some carnival!" mumbled a voice

from behind the sheriff. "Where's the belly-dancers?"

Sheriff Higgs didn't bother to look around; he knew who was speaking because he could smell his breath. Clay Tolliver, the mortician's son, always got pretty well bombed by this time of evening.

Mr. Fall smiled and nodded. "In answer to the question regarding the performers, allow me to call your attention to the pictorial displays directly behind me. In the quaint jargon of the old-time carny, they are known as 'the bloody banners.' If there happen to be any Englishmen in the audience, I trust they will take no offense."

There were no Englishmen or any other foreigners present and no offense was taken; everyone peered up at the painted panel of an enormously fat woman indicated by Mr. Fall's cane.

"Big Bertha," he said. "Five hundred pounds of pulsing pulchritude — a quarter of a ton of solid human flesh — the fattest female figure in the firmament."

Down in front, Mrs. Agatha Crouch stood bulking before the billowing poster, one hamlike hand gripping her husband's arm and the other encircling an open jar of garlic dills. Raising the jar to her gaping mouth, she snagged one of the pickles between her teeth and began to munch on it.

Mr. Crouch was a feisty little man and he swore a blue streak as a squirt of pickle juice sprayed the top of his head.

"God-diddly-damn-it!" he yelled. "You dribbling all over me!"

"Okay, then you hold it," said Mrs. Crouch, thrusting the jar into his hand and fishing another dill from the brine with her pudgy fingers.

Mr. Crouch scowled. "Bringing pickles to a carnival," he muttered. "Eat, eat, eat, that's all you ever do. Don't you get enough food at home?"

Agatha Crouch's chins quivered with righteous indignation as she popped the pickle into her mouth. "I don't get me enough of anything at home, you miserable runt! Now shut up and listen to the man."

The man was indicating another portion of the panel, where a tiny figure rested on the fat woman's lap, almost obscured by her bulging belly.

"Big Bertha's diminutive darling," he chanted. "Little Leo — a minuscule mite of mankind mated to a mountain — a marvel of mirth and merriment!"

"Haw!" remarked Agatha Crouch, squinting at the small shape lost in the flabby folds of the fat lady's lap. "Sure looks funny, don't it?"

"Yeah." Mr. Crouch nodded as he craned his neck to see the banner. But he was staring at the picture of the fat woman.

Up on the platform Mr. Fall moved to another panel. This one depicted a strangely garbed, grinning creature with a chinless face, pointed ears, pale skin and a shaved, oddly pointed skull. As a fanciful touch the poster artist had added a dozen white mice crawling over the

creature's head and shoulders; a thirteenth dangled by its tail from between his teeth.

"Pooky the Pinhead!" said Mr. Fall. "Actually a microcephalic — one of Mother Nature's little mistakes. But as you can see by his smile, he's a cheerful fellow and doesn't mind playing the game of life without a full deck."

Somebody in the crowd let out a cackle, and the sheriff turned to see who was responsible. But it was only Junior Dorkin; you couldn't hardly call him responsible, seeing as how he was the village idiot and an albino to boot. He just kept laughing and pointing up at the picture, same as usual. Junior laughed just about all the time, even when he was cutting up a stray cat.

"Huh-huh-huh!" he wheezed, wiping a gob of spittle from his receding chin. "Wanna see him eat mouses —"

Now Mr. Fall was gesturing at another banner, even more lurid than the others. It showed a hulking hairy monster with ape-like features, leering down at a cowering, scantily clad girl.

"Out of the primeval past," he was saying. "A bestial being emerges from the misty mystery of prehistoric time. Behold the living, breathing ancestor of human kind — Horneo Porneo, the Wild Man of Borneo!"

"Man, that's weird!"

Sheriff Higgs glanced around to see Fuzz Foskins grinning up from his place in the crowd, wearing his usual outfit of tank top and soiled jeans. Bushy hair sprouted from his head in an enormously unnatural natural, a bushy beard tangled with the matted hair on his chest. His armpits were bushy too, and from them welled a fetid scent which mingled with the reeking odor emanating from his open mouth.

Probably high on angel dust again, the sheriff figured. If Fuzz's father wasn't the county judge, he'd have been busted long ago.

Sheriff Higgs recognized the girl clinging to Fuzz's arm — Mamie Keefer, a sallow-faced little snip with stringy cornsilk hair. Worked in the mill off and on when she wasn't riding shotgun on Fuzz's motorcycle.

"Whaddya mean, weird?" she said. "Look at that built!"

"I am looking," Fuzz told her. And he sniggered at the half-naked girl on the poster. "Some built, man! This I gotta see."

Several of the older people standing nearby started to frown disapprovingly — mostly the wives, of course. Sheriff Higgs took note of it and so did Mr. Fall up on the platform. He moved along to a row of banners hanging before the entrance of the tent and gestured again with his cane.

"If you folks will kindly move in a little closer, I'd like to give you a glimpse of our more cultural attractions," he announced.

"That must be the belly dancers," Clay Tolliver murmured. "Now we're getting somewhere!"

Mr. Fall's eyes narrowed slightly, just enough to indicate that he'd heard

the remark, but his smile never wavered. "All that is strange or unusual in the world derives from two sources," he continued. "The curiosities of nature originate in mystery, while the idiosyncracies of mankind are found in history."

"What's he saying?" sniffed Mrs. Tudd.

Lawyer Tudd shrugged. "Doubletalk," he said. "Sounds like one of those smartass civil rights troublemakers to me."

Mr. Fall didn't miss a thing. He nodded down at the solid citizens in the front row. "I assure you there is nothing political about this spectacle. Naturally I cannot reproduce the actual events of a bygone era. These are merely representations, a few simple samples of man's freakish pastimes in the past." His cane stabbed out at one of the canvas panels behind him. "May I have your attention, please? Here, from long ago and far away — King Atahualpa and the Room of Gold!"

There must have been a light behind the banner, for now its colors blazed forth so brightly that the crowd gasped.

What they saw was a regal-looking man in flowing robes, standing with arms upraised in the center of a stone chamber.

"Awful dark-complected for a king," Mrs. Fence whispered to her husband. "Looks like some kind of a nigra to me."

Banker Fence just nodded but did not reply. He was staring at the gold heaped around the figure — the glittering glut of jewelry, ornaments, plate, goblets, coins and virgin ingots crammed into the chamber from wall to wall and rising halfway to the ceiling.

"I'm sure you all remember Francisco Pizarro, the conqueror of Peru," Mr. Fall was saying. "In 1532 he captured the Inca, Atahualpa, and imprisoned him in Cajamarca. As a ransom for their king's release, his faithful followers promised to fill the prison chamber — measuring ten feet long and sixteen feet in width — with enough gold to reach the level of Atahualpa's raised arms."

"Do tell," breathed banker Fence.

Mr. Fall nodded towards the panel. "Loyal followers came from all over the land, bringing their most precious possessions to lay at the feet of the Inca, impoverishing themselves to secure the freedom of their living god. The task took many months, but at last it was completed. Never before and never since did men behold such an array of radiant riches — this roomful of glittering gold. Still, they kept their word and the bargain was fulfilled."

"Great God in the morning," banker Fence murmured. "What happened then?"

Mr. Fall shrugged. "The inevitable," he said. "Pizarro had King Atahualpa strangled to death in the marketplace. Not too long afterwards, Pizarro himself was murdered."

"Never mind the details," said banker Fence. "What became of the gold?"

"No one knows," Mr. Fall said.

"Somewhere along the line it just disappeared."

"Poor security," banker Fence grunted to his wife. "Gold is a bad risk anyway. Now you know why I keep telling the kids to invest in comics."

"I'd still like to see that room," said Mrs. Fence. "With that jewelry and all, it sounds real educational."

But now the light was flickering up behind another banner, and again the crowd gasped at what appeared — a gigantic bulldozer cutting a swath through a mountainous pile of naked, emaciated human corpses.

"For those who prefer something more contemporary," Mr. Fall proclaimed. "Auschwitz — the Holocaust!"

Lawyer Tudd nodded. "Concentration camp," he told his wife. "Read about it in law school. Some monkey business of a trial over in Nuremberg, as I recall."

"Oh, how horrible!" his wife murmured. "Look at those poor people!"

"Now don't go getting so uptight. Like he says, it's only history."

"Well, in that case I suppose it's not so awful." Mrs. Tudd stared intently at the bodies, and her tongue flicked over her parted lips as her breathing quickened. "You know, I always wondered just how they did such things, all those tortures and such. I hear tell they used to make lampshades out of the skins, stuff like that."

"Legal points involved," said lawyer Tudd. "Might be kind of interesting at that."

He turned to seek Mayor Stooldrayer's opinion, but that dignitary and his wife were both gaping at another blazing banner directly over the entrance to the tent.

Mr. Fall was already pointing up at the familiar figure, bearded and nude except for a loincloth, hanging impaled upon a cross.

"No monstrosity spawned by nature, no man-made marvel, can possibly compare to the fantastic reality of divine inspiration," he said. "*Ecce Homo* — the Passion Play!"

Mrs. Stooldrayer turned and whispered to her husband. "Icky homo? Does he mean Jesus was some kind of morphodite, like? And what's all this stuff about passion?"

"It's just a play," the mayor told her. "Well, I'm not sure I want to see it," Mrs. Stooldrayer mused. "After all, I'm working with the PTA and we're supposed to be against violence, to say nothing of gays." She hesitated. "On the other hand, we don't get a chance to see a real live play around here very often."

"That's the spirit," said Mayor Stooldrayer. "Way I figure, we're entitled to a little entertainment."

Mr. Fall must have been listening, because now he tapped his cane on the platform and nodded.

"Entertainment!" he cried. "It's all waiting for you here on the inside. Step right up, ladies and gentlemen — the show is about to begin!"

Mr. Fall jumped down from the platform and parted the curtain flaps

before the entrance as the crowd began to surge forward.

"What about tickets?" Sheriff Higgs called out to him.

"Law always gets a free pass," Mr. Fall murmured. Then he raised his voice. "As you folks can see, I'm a little short-handed here and there's no one operating the ticket booth. So just keep moving, go right ahead — you can pay on the inside."

"Didn't say how much," banker Fence muttered to lawyer Tudd. "Think we ought to take a chance?"

Lawyer Tudd nodded. "No problem." He grinned. "Law says you got to establish a price in advance. We don't have to pay him a red cent if we don't want to."

Chuckling, he moved into the tent, holding his wife's arm tightly to keep from being separated from her in the jostling throng. Behind him came the banker and the mayor with their spouses, Mr. and Mrs. Crouch, Junior Dorkin, Mamie Keefer, and all the rest.

The assorted effluvia of Fuzz Foskins and Clay Tolliver mingled in the darkness of the tent's interior as the rest of the crowd pushed on inside until the tent was packed solid, wall to wall.

For a moment everyone stood silent, and then little indications of irritation began to arise.

"Hey, what gives?" somebody grumbled. "I can't see."

"Lights!" yelled Clay Tolliver.

Sheriff Higgs was always prepared for such emergencies and he responded now, pulling forth a flashlight from his pocket.

The beam played over the sea of faces scowling across the confines of the tent, then came to rest on the rear wall.

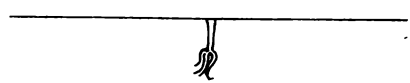
The wall was blank. Below it stood the sole object of furnishing — a bare platform.

The crowd stared and its murmurs rose to a roar.

"Hell!" someone shouted angrily. "What kind of a show you call this? They ain't no freaks in here!"

"There are now," murmured Mr. Fall, as he finished sewing the entrance flaps together from outside and poured the kerosene.

Then, smiling, he lit the match.

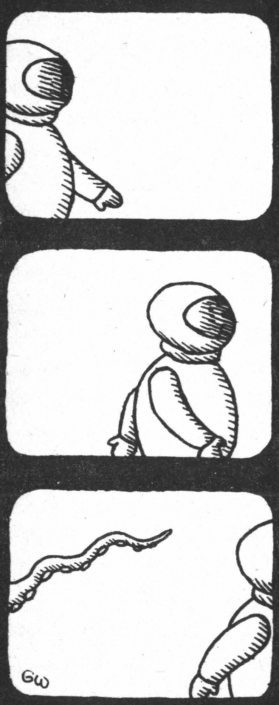


**Attention SF Teachers**

**The third annual Intensive English Institute on the Teaching of Science Fiction will be held from July 9-27 at The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas. Lecturers are James Gunn, Gordon R. Dickson, Theodore Sturgeon and Frederik Pohl. For further information (before May 1), write to: James Gunn, English Dept., Univ. of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045.**

# Films

## BAIRD SEARLES



## Od's Podkins!

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is, of course, a classic of that particular cycle of science fiction films that happened in what are almost universally referred to as "the paranoid '50s." Despite some good reasons, I did not find myself in the '50s all that paranoid, certainly no more than the '60s or '70s. But I do concede that most of the s/f films from that period can be described, loosely, as "paranoid," mainly because they dealt with the incursions of (usually) non-humanoid aliens who are out to get us.

This is not all that unlikely considering the handy rule of thumb that cinematic science fiction is usually about 25 years behind the literature. There, until the '30s, almost any extraterrestrial that did not wear a human shape was evil, and it took writers such as "Doc" Smith and Stanley Weinbaum to quash what was (and is) the ancient human tribal xenophobia about them that looks different.

Filmmakers particularly liked scripts about aliens that could adopt the shape of humans, because then they could save on special effects, merely hiring inept actors whose lack of talent could be passed off as alien behavior.

So, *Body Snatchers* and its ilk.

As a matter of fact, I must confess that I have never been part of the cult

for that film. While conceding that it is neatly and niftily made, I cannot forgive a lapse of logic toward the end that totally destroys the artfully built premise of the pods from Out There that can grow into exact simulacra of anybody, replace him, and proceed with the purpose of planting more pods.*

So far as I'm concerned, to be frightening a movie must be believable. There are a lot of ways to achieve this, such as extreme *verismo* in acting and direction *(The Thing)*, but a prime necessity is absolute logic: set your ground rules and play by them. If you start making the rules as you go, believability goes down the drain.

Now, thanks to *Star Wars*, we are getting remakes of golden oldie s/f movies. Producers, instead of taking the trouble to find out *why Star Wars* was so good (and so money making), simply decided that science fiction was in, dusted off old properties and remade them.

So — a *new Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. It not only contains the prime error of the old one, it adds a lot of fresh ones.

I'll cite just a few. Where BS #1 took place in a small town, therefore building a sort of enclosed, siege mentality atmosphere for the non-podded principals, BS #2 decided that San Francisco would be a dandy locale. If the whole thing had been rethought in terms of big-city anonymity, it might have worked. But no — BS #2, while it looks a lot different, is almost a scene by scene replay of #1.

As I think of it, in fact, the small town to big city switch is indicative of a lot that's wrong here. There's too much of everything — too much color (to repeat my unprovable thesis that color has been a strong factor in the ruination of the horror film), too many chases (the entire last half of the film is one chase after another), too many significant shots signifying nothing (the director [Philip Kaufman] seems hung up on the symbology of cleanliness: lots of meaningful shots of garbage trucks, building cleaning personnel, and one of the first poddy people is noticed in a dry cleaners).

And just too much film. BS #2 runs just short of two hours. And brevity is the soul of the horror film. (I wait to see what Mr. Kubrick does with *The Shining* before I decide that to be an unbreakable rule.)

There are a few more things to be noted. Kevin McCarthy (hero of BS #1, for the uninitiated) makes a sudden appearance out of the San Francisco traffic, still pounding on cars and making a scene. This is a fun idea, bringing cheers, whistles and mad applause from

*OK, if you must know. As briefly as possible, it's that it has been carefully set up that the pods must be strategically placed to duplicate, and there's no way in the world that the pod people could know Becky was going to be in that cave.

the audience (much to the bafflement of my screening companion, who is not up on old movies). Unfortunately, funny ideas do not help a horror film. Again, believability down the drain. (Has he been running in the traffic since 1955?)

The special effects are quite handsome: the spores departing into space from some unknown world (under the credits, regrettably); the tiny gels coming with the rain and forming on leaves; and an extended sequence of the pods giving birth (as it were). But special effects do not a good movie make.

And after all this — two hours of too much — the final 60 seconds are absolutely, irresistably reminiscent of a moment from Monty Python. And there's no way in the world to explain it. Maybe it's worth seeing it just for that.

Last month, in my valiant effort to be dispassionately negative about *The Lord of the Rings*, I rather short changed *Watership Down*. I would like to pay tribute to the late Zero Mostel's vocal performance as Kehaar, the seagull. It is hilarious, and what's more, a total original. I have never heard anything quite like it, and never expect to again.

*Things-to-come-dept.* ... A reputable source has clued us in to the fact that The Muppets and Brian Froud (*Fairies*) may be working together on a film ... And speaking of Monty Python, that august assemblage is preparing something called *Monty Python's Life of Brian*. Who's Brian? Well, he's a chap that lived from barely minus B.C. to about 33 A.D. in the Near East. Involved are his mother, shepherds, Wise Men, Pontius Pilate, and other familiar trappings. Any resemblance to the popular founder of a currently viable religion might well be coincidental.

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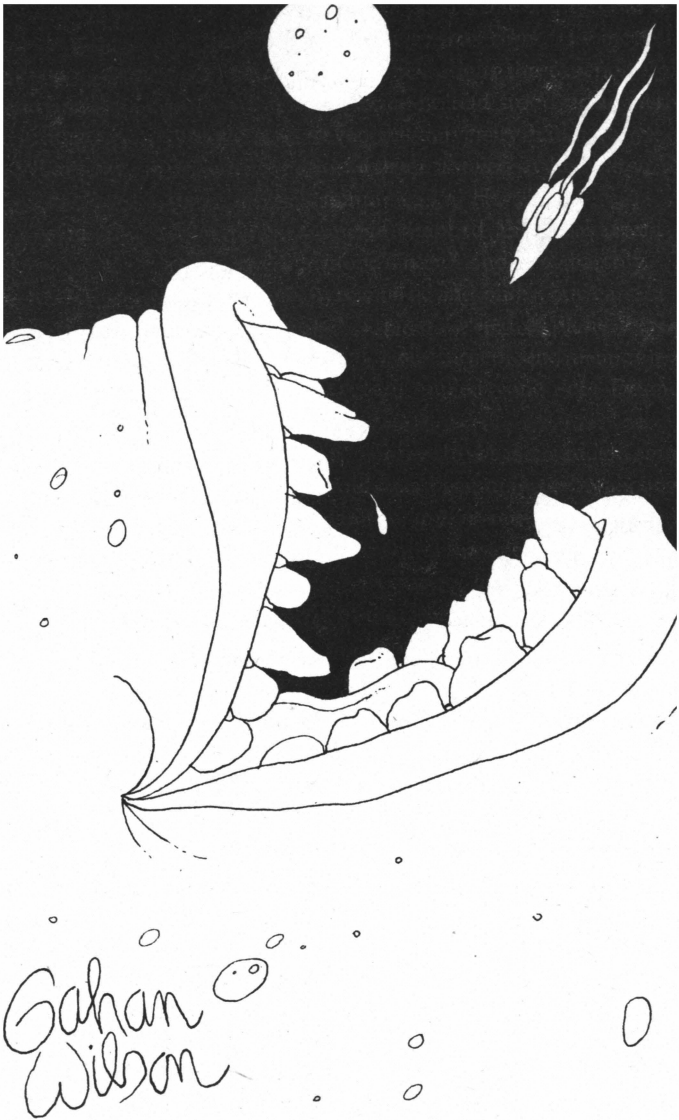
*("Camps" from page 157)*

"Josie," Stephen asks, "let me see that old photograph again. Just one last time."

"Remember, this is the last time," she says as she hands him the faded photograph.

He recognizes Viktor and Berek, but the young man standing between them is not Stephen. "That's not me," he says, certain that he will never return to the camp.

Yet the shots still echo in his mind.




*"Oh, oh!"*

*Gordon Eklund ("Points of Contact," June 1978) returns with a suspenseful story about a couple who are sent to a commune in the Amazon basin to investigate a flying saucer sighting.*

# The Anaconda's Smile

BY

## GORDON EKLUND

1

The military jeep came racing down the narrow winding driveway, splashing through pools and tossing clumps of mud against the tinted windshield that concealed the driver and his passenger from view. Ahead, the sprawling ranchhouse stood against the background of green jungle like a slice of suburban California in a primeval world. Clusters of high grass grew crazily near the front of the house, and as the jeep drew close, the driver observed a succession of blank young faces peering at him through the tall blades like spirits disturbed in their graves.

"Kids," the driver said. "What's Miller running here? A boarding school?" He was thirty-two years old, with bushy black hair and a pencil-thin mustache. He wore olive-drab fatigues, a bushman's hat, and a leather holster. There was a gun in the holster. The insignia on his collar was that of a colonel in the Federal Army of Brazil.

The woman beside him was a major. She was thirty-five, well-built, with the drawn white face of an ascetic. She said, "What do you make of that, Ed?"

Beyond the grass was a burnt patch of ground ten meters in diameter. "What should I make of it?" the driver said.

"Well, if there really was a flying saucer out here, that could be where it landed."

"Crap."

"Just a suggestion. We're here. You don't have to drive so fast."

He was Ed Rice. She was Amanda Starkey. Both were American-born.

Rice skidded the jeep to a halt at a place where the driveway wound past the front porch of the house. He hop-

ped over the side, landing in the mud, and cupped a hand over his lips. "Miller!" he called. "Hey, Miller! You here?"

"Wouldn't it be more polite to ring the front bell?" Amanda Starkey said.

The kids half-concealed in the grass continued to stare. Rice looked back at them. A dozen, probably more hidden. Hippies, he thought, digging a term out of the past. Mud-caked, dirt-faced, tattered jeans, matted hair, saucer eyes. Drugs were common enough along the Amazon basin. Rice had investigated several instances where intoxicated workmen late at night stumbled into the big river. The bodies were a mess, when recovered.

"Are you Colonel Rice?"

It was one of the kids. She got to her feet and came toward him. Strawberry blonde hair — the sort that got darker later on. Thin lips. No chin. Skinny as a beanpole. Complexion as pale as a baby. (How did she manage that, here where the sun burned like Hades whenever it wasn't raining?) Faded jeans cut at the crotch exposed bony legs. She was naked, otherwise. From the size and shape of her breasts, he guessed she was fourteen. Maybe older. Kids didn't develop as fast as they once had.

He heard Amanda gasp.

Far away, near the front gate, a dog was barking.

"I'm looking for Mr. Miller," Rice said. "You don't happen to know where he is."

"This is his home."

"I know that. I want to see him."

"Try New York." She seemed surly. The other kids were standing now, too. One pair — a boy and a girl most likely — passed a smoldering cigarette between them. Even marijuana remained illegal in Brazil. Still, he wasn't here to hassle kids.

"He can't have gone."

"He's not here."

In the jeep, Amanda politely said, "Who are you?"

"I'm Cassie."

"His daughter?"

"Yes."

"Isn't there an adult in charge here?" said Rice, looking around and realizing how officious he must sound. Rice had never had much use for young kids.

Cassie was trying to curl her lip. "I'm in charge."

"And who do all these belong to?" he said, indicating the kids in the grass.

"To themselves, I suppose." She stood less than a meter away, bare feet buried in mud, bony hands on skinny hips.

"Look, your father called my office, the project security office, and asked to have someone come out. If he was going away, he should have said something."

"You must be talking about the flying saucer."

"You know about it?"

"Sure. I live here, don't I? I'm not blind, am I?"

Shit, she could be surly. The dog was barking louder, coming closer. Rice spotted it cutting across the burnt spot. Some kind of big hound. He liked dogs less than kids.

"You'll have to show me the general vicinity where the object has appeared."

She pointed straight overhead. "Try there."

"In the sky? At night? Only at night?"

"Ed...the dog," Amanda said softly.

"I never looked in the day."

Some of the other kids had gathered around. Rice knew damn well they were doped up. Well, it wasn't his problem.

"What size is it? Can you give me an estimate? As big as an airplane? Bigger?"

"Ed, the dog!"

Her voice snapped him awake. Spinning, he looked in time to see the dog spring. Mouth open. Fangs bared. The damn thing was coming straight for his throat.

Rice dived to the left. He reached for his holster but hit hard on his shoulder and cried out in pain. He felt the air as the dog went flying past. The mud soaked his pants and shirt. For a moment, he couldn't see. The dog, turning, came at him again.

"Spot, no!" Cassie cried. "Not him! He's not —!"

Rice drew his gun. There wasn't time to aim. He fired off three rounds, *bam, bam, bam.* When the smoke cleared, he saw the dog. It wasn't more than a few inches from him. Its head was half blown away, and there was a huge pink wound in its belly. Cassie and the other kids couldn't pull their eyes away.

"Jesus Christ!" said Rice, trembling as he stood. "That damned thing was...." He glared at the girl. "What's going on here?"

"Rice, put your gun away," said Amanda.

"Not until I get some answers to —"

Cassie leaped gracefully over the dead dog. Her gesture served as a signal. The others turned away. "You're not hurt, are you?" she told Rice. "You're going to live, aren't you?"

"Your goddamn dog nearly tore out my throat."

"It's not my dog," she said evenly.

"Then it belongs —"

"It belongs to nobody. It's a stray. We've never seen that dog before."

He knew she was lying. There weren't any stray dogs in the Amazon basin. He had heard her call it by name. Spot. Christ, the dog was pure brown.

"Ed," Amanda said patiently from the jeep, "maybe we ought to go inside and discuss this with Cassie."

2

The rest of the hippie crew came, too. Rice nearly laughed out loud when he got a look at the living room. It was plushly furnished, like a refugee from Beverly Hills. Well, Miller could afford that, even on the Amazon. He

was chief engineer for the entire reclamation project and made more money in a year than Rice had seen in half a lifetime. The Brazilian government had built his house. Rice tracked mud across the inch-thick carpet. He enjoyed the sensation of despoilment, like a barbarian in Rome.

Kids wandered past, occupying chairs and couches. There was no place left for him to sit. Amanda slid onto a couch between two half-naked girls. One was a Negro and the other had red hair.

He and Cassie were the only ones left standing. She spoke first: "The cold facts are these, Colonel, sir. My father was called away to New York. It was business, important business, and I don't know what it was. These people are friends of mine who have come to stay. We're alone here. There are no servants in the house because my father opposes native exploitation. We cook and clean for ourselves and sleep when and where we want. If you want to see the saucer tonight, you're welcome to stay."

"That's my job here." He moved in a circle, poised and ready. "We've received scattered reports in the past, but your father was the first to say he'd seen anything up close. What I need to know is exactly what it is he saw."

Cassie grinned, as if sharing a private joke with the others. "It was a flying saucer. What more do you need to know? Like in the movies. Big and round and silver. Unless it's close, you only see the flashing lights. There's six of them. Red and white and blue. Like the flag."

"How often have you seen the saucer?"

Her smile didn't fade. "I don't know. Most nights. Forty or fifty times."

"Your father just reported it the other day."

"Some of us saw it first. We go out at night a lot."

"And you never told him?"

"He never asked." This time she laughed — aloud.

Rice frowned. He wouldn't let her exasperate him. "Then you think, if we stay tonight, we'll see whatever it is that you've seen."

"Sure, but your best bet," Cassie said, "would be to stay a week or so and get a really good look."

He didn't appreciate her advice. Reports of flying saucers didn't much interest him. He expected to solve this particular mystery in a single night or less. His primary duties involved those Indians who had avoided resettlement. He didn't like wasting time here in the jungle when there was work to be done on the river. "Maybe we'll just look tonight and then decide."

"I'll get you a room."

"Two rooms," Amanda put in quickly.

"Sure, two," said Cassie, with more than a hint of a smile.

* * *

3

Without knocking, Amanda came into Rice's room and found him naked except for a pair of shorts. His bare chest and legs revealed a hundred tiny scars, like the crisscrossing lines on a road map.

Amanda frowned.

Rice laid down the hot iron he was using to put a crease in a pair of pants. "If you don't like it, knock next time."

"It doesn't mean anything. I was talking to Cassie. She says it would be better if we stayed longer. She's seen this thing — this saucer — more than anyone. I don't think she's hallucinating."

"Neither do I. That's not the point." He sat on the edge of the bed. The sheets were rumpled and dirty — someone else had slept here before. "I told you before we left what this was. It's a helicopter, a shooting star, river gas. A flying saucer isn't the worst of it."

"Suppose it isn't a helicopter."

"Then it's a weather balloon."

"Suppose it's not that either."

He frowned, disliking her direction. "Amanda, what are you trying to say?"

"Just this. Just that I think we ought to plan to stay several days."

"And why?"

"Because of the saucer."

"And that's the only reason?"

She glared at him coldly. "Ed, I don't like what you're saying."

He met her gaze. He knew it was the damned dog. That had shaken him more than he liked to admit. It was such a hell of a way to die. "Then forget I said anything."

"No," she said sharply. "Hell, no. I want to know if you're thinking what I think you're thinking. It's the girl. Right?"

"I saw you looking at her."

"No, you did not. That's a goddamned lie, and you know it is."

He couldn't let her talk that way. "She's cute, isn't she? She parades around like Adam and Eve, doesn't she?"

Amanda glowered at him. He knew it was the rage built up during their last year together threatening to blow all at once. Rice had known Amanda before, in other countries, other armies: Liberia, Paraguay, the Australian outback. Until last year, he hadn't known she was a Lesbian. They had slept together a few times. He liked her. When she'd come here and he'd heard what she was, it was a real shock. It wasn't any of his business. Still, he drew the line at young kids:

"You are a real son of a bitch," she said.

"Then give me your word."

"You bastard. She's thirteen."

"Then forget it."

"I don't want her. I won't rape her."

"I said forget it."

"You bastard."

He got up and went back to the iron. He felt vulnerable, dressed as he

was. "I said all right, let's just forget it. You're what you are and I'm what I am, and we're not supposed to understand each other. Okay?"

"No, you bastard, no, it's not okay." She stood with big hands on her hips. "I used to like you, Rice. I thought you were different, better educated, smarter than the average soldier. You're a dumb shit like all the rest. You think I'm some kind of monster."

"No, I don't think that."

She went past him in silence. With the door half open and her half out, she paused dramatically. "Are you certain it's me, Rice? Are you sure it's not you who's tired of river whores and wants something fresh? I'll leave her alone if you'll leave her alone. The first person who touches her gets his head blown away."

"I doubt either one of us would be the first."

She stared at him. He had tried a joke and it hadn't taken. "I think you're a real asshole," she said and finally went out.

## 4

Rice observed the colored lights high in the sky and knew at once there was no easy way he could explain this. They were too high, too big, too bright, and too patterned.

The kids in the high grass around him puffed their weed, went *oohh* and *aahh*, cried out in fear and delight. He felt like a visitor at a religious rite. He could have been twenty again, in college. The psychedelic years. Light shows. Christ, that was history now.

This was real. The sky directly overhead burned with peculiar clarity. Six round globes of colored light arranged in a neat circle. Two red, two white, two blue. Fuzzy at the edges. The lights came closer. He could see the outline of the ship now. If it was a ship. Could it be a secret weapon of some kind? Here? In Brazil? Where the local army hired mercenary soldiers to exterminate errant Indian bands?

The lights hovered. Perhaps three hundred yards overhead. The burnt patch of ground glittered with an ethereal glow. The lights winked. On and off, on and off. He blinked. It was hypnotic.

"Now do you see what I meant?" Cassie said, slowly, softly, from faraway. Her knee pressed against his thigh. She had changed into a green dress which made her seem even younger. "See how they don't really move? On and off, on and off. It's like ... like music."

"How long will it stay?" he said.

"How ... what?"

"How long?" He felt he had only part of her attention; she acted as though she heard other voices.

"As long as you want, Colonel. All night. All day. We watch as long as we can." A cigarette burned in her fingers. She sucked smoke and air. Marijuana, he knew from the odor. She passed it without offering him a share. "It's so

easy to fall asleep out here the way we do it."

He nodded. "Where did Amanda go?" He had noticed for the first time that he and the girl were alone.

"She whispered something about a camera."

"A good idea. A camera won't lie."

"Will you?"

He looked at the sky — at the lights. At the saucer, he forced himself to think. There could be no doubt now. Something was up there, something big and something very real.

"It's like science fiction. Do you ever read science fiction, Colonel Rice?"

"I haven't in years."

"There's a story I read once. It's my favorite. I don't remember the title, but it was about these aliens called the Galaxy Judges. They went everywhere, from star to star, and when they found a planet with life on it, they'd stop and judge. If the people were found good, they'd reveal themselves and the planet would get to join the Federation. If the people weren't good, then the Judges would just blow up their planet. The story was about the Earth. We weren't judged good enough."

"And that's what you think this saucer is doing?" He didn't know whether to be amused or frightened. Whatever else, that thing in the sky, it was real enough.

"No way," Cassie said. "You see, that's why the story is dumb. When the Judges blew up the Earth, they killed everything. They made the innocent die with the guilty."

"Who was innocent?"

"Well, the animals for one. A dog doesn't start wars. A snake doesn't massacre Indians."

"Only animals, then?" He had to keep looking away from the lights. The glare was beginning to hurt his eyes.

"And children," she said. "Children are exploited, too."

"You ought to talk to Amanda. She would tell you to add women to your list."

"She's odd, isn't she?"

"A little, I suppose."

"She's a Lesbian."

"How did you know that?"

"I didn't. I'm asking."

He saw no reason to lie for Amanda's sake. "She's one."

"How come?"

He shrugged. "Because she hates men, I suppose."

"That doesn't make much sense."

"You'll have to ask her about that part."

"If I did, what do you think she'd say?"

He shook his head. "Probably that she hates men because she wishes she were one."

The girl laughed. It wasn't a pleasant sound, not really hysterical, just uncontrolled. The noise made Rice uncomfortable but faded as suddenly as it had come.

"What's so funny?" he asked her.

"What you just said."

"Why? Don't you believe me?"

"Sure. Why not? It's just...." The laughter again. "It's just so silly. You men and women. Always arguing about it. My mother was the same way. What's supposed to be the big difference between a man and a woman?"

"If you don't know that already, you will in time."

"Nope," she said, with utter seriousness, "I haven't the slightest inkling."

Amanda returned then, grass rustling at her approach. She turned the camera on the sky and snapped off a series of quick pictures. The glare of the flash cubes helped break the hypnotic effect of the saucer's lights.

"I wish I had a movie camera," Amanda said.

"We'll have to be satisfied with this for now."

"For now? Does that mean we're staying?"

"After this, I haven't much choice. I'll call Mendoza in the morning. Explain."

"Does that mean you've decided to trust me?"

He shrugged. "I told you to forget about that."

When she raised her camera for another shot, he turned to Cassie, whose eyes were fixed on the sky. He started to say something but saw it was hopeless. The girl's face was an utter blank. She might have been in a trance. "Cassie," he said softly. "Hey, Cassie." He touched her bare shoulder. It was as cold as winter.

It was then Rice realized how quiet it was. Not a sound anywhere around. Silence was as rare as snow along the Amazon basin.

It was then, for the first time, that he felt really afraid.

5

Rice awoke shortly after dawn and wandered out and found the kitchen full of kids. He excused himself, maneuvering through them, and went to the refrigerator.

While he fixed a bowl of cold cereal, he took time to observe the kids closely. He counted eleven packed into this single room, none much past sixteen. The girls outnumbered the boys almost three-to-one, though it wasn't always easy to tell which was which. He thought maybe that was what Cassie had meant last night with her talk about there being no difference between men and women. Maybe for a kid like her the difference didn't really exist, just as, for himself, there was less of a difference than the one his father had known. He supposed these kids were either friends of Cassie down from the States on vacation or else the sons and daughters of other American workers. Mendoza would probably want to know. He decided it was time to go call Mendoza.

He finished his cereal and went out to the living room, where he found Cassie seated alone, her hair hidden

beneath a pale bandana scarf.

"I want to use your phone. I've got to call my superior officer on the river and tell him why I'm staying."

"We don't have a phone." She was as surly as the day before, her body sprawled across the chair.

"Then what do you call that?" He nodded toward a telephone on a nearby table.

"That, Colonel, we call a broken phone."

"Are you sure about that?" He crossed over to the phone and picked up the receiver. There was only silence. He couldn't raise a tone. "It is dead," he said, with surprise.

"I told you, Colonel."

"But this is a special line. It's spliced into the central system. Your father called my office on it."

"Maybe a rat chewed a hole in the cable. No, not a rat. A snake. A big snake."

"An awfully big one."

"I've seen anacondas up to forty feet around here."

"Around the river. We —"

"Ed." It was Amanda. She stood in the arch of the doorway leading from the hallway, with a striken look on her face he didn't like at all. Could Amanda possibly be afraid? "Ed, you've got to come here," she said breathlessly. "There's something — you've got to come and see."

* * *

6

He followed her down the hall past his own room towards hers, which was next door. "Now what is it?" he asked, as they walked.

"It's — I can't believe it myself." She was actually trembling. "In my room. Ants. Thousands of them."

"That's common enough around here," he said reasonably.

"Not like this. Not these. You'll have to see for yourself."

He was willing. When they reached her room, Rice opened the door quickly and peeked inside. At first he saw nothing. The thin curtains were drawn to allow the morning light to invade the room with a ghostly sheen. Stepping inside, he heard Amanda's excited breathing at his ear. The room was a twin to his own: double bed, wood dresser, vinyl hassock. Beside the bed on the floor lay a black-and-red throw rug. Everything was fine till Rice took another step. Then the rug moved.

He stopped, staring. "Christ," he murmured. His flesh crawled, tickly all over. It was the way he felt whenever he found a bug crawling up his arm.

The rug wasn't a rug. What it was was several thousand ants bunched so snugly together that their mass actually formed a rectangle. Even the corners were neatly squared. Rice knew how disciplined ants could be. Once in Africa he had seen a whole mountain engulfed by a foraging army that consumed everything in its path, even men. This wasn't the same. This wasn't

a disciplined army. He didn't know what in hell it was. A feeling in the pit of his stomach said it was something damn wrong.

Amanda hugged his arm. "It was here when I woke up," she said softly. "I could have stepped in the middle of them. Can you imagine, Ed?"

He could.

She slipped past him, bolder now, her fear at low ebb. Beckoning with a finger, she said, "This is what you'd better see."

"What?" He edged slightly closer.

"No, you've got to be able to see."

"Here?" He stood beside her.

"Yes. Now look closely. Do you see what I mean? They're not the same. That's what makes the rug look so strange. They're different sizes, shapes, colors. This isn't just a single species of ant. This is every kind imaginable."

Rice nodded. She was right. A few of the ants were six-inch monsters, but most were no bigger than a fingertip. "That is odd."

"It's not just odd. It's impossible. Incredible. Fantastic. Even you ought to know that. Ants make war upon one another just like people. Different species don't cooperate. They ought to be tearing each other apart."

The more he watched the ants, the less Rice liked what he saw. Amanda knew what she was saying. This wasn't just strange; it was impossible. He was starting to feel sick.

Rice edged forward and raised a booted foot.

Amanda's eyes grew wide. "What are you going to do?"

"Put an end to this," he said tightly.

"Are you sure you —?"

"Well, I'm not just going to stand here." He brought his heel down hard in the middle of them. There was an ugly squishing sound. He raised his boot, brought it down. He would have to act quickly. Up, then down. Dead ants stuck to the sole of his boot. Rice moved like a crazed dancer, crushing and killing. The ants didn't scatter. That was what disturbed him. They held their formation, unafraid of death.

He heard a noise behind and turned. Cassie stood in the doorway, her face distorted in a look of horror. He stood with his foot raised, unable to move.

"Killer!" she cried. "Murderer! Look what you've done!"

They're only ants, Rice thought.

## 7

After Cassie swept the dead ants out of Amanda's room, Rice said he was going to take a nap. He wanted to be alert tonight in case the saucer reappeared, but when he got to his room and locked the door and stretched out on the wide bed, his mind was racing too quickly for sleep.

I don't like this, he thought. Not any of it. Not one damned bit.

Too many things were wrong, too many things he couldn't explain. Miller's disappearance. All these kids. The

mad dog. The broken phone. The ants. Cassie. And, above all else, that thing, that saucer in the sky.

What was going on here? What had he stumbled upon?

His eyes shut, he heard a sound. It came from next door, Amanda's room. A knock. He heard her voice. "Ed?" she said.

"No, it's Cassie," said another voice, from the hall.

"Do you want something? I'm trying to rest."

"I want to talk to you."

"All right. Come in."

The door creaked slightly. Rice heard soft footsteps — shoeless Cassie. There was a squeak. Bedsprings.

"What do you want?" said Amanda.

"I just wanted to be sure you were all right."

"Of course I'm all right. Why shouldn't I be?"

"Because of the ants. I was afraid they frightened you."

"Well, they did. A little."

"There was no reason to be afraid."

"No, I suppose not."

"Rice was the one who went crazy, who tried to kill them all."

"He was just ... he overreacted."

"Yes, he did. Amanda...." There was a lengthy pause. "Amanda, may I ask you a personal question?"

"If you wish, yes."

"Are you a Lesbian?"

Rice could picture her face. Surprise and anger. The bedsprings shook. She was sitting up. "Who said that?"

"Rice did."

"That black bastard."

"Then it's not true?"

"No, it's true."

"I wish you'd tell me exactly how it happened."

Rice heard laughter. It was Amanda. She laughed the way a man did, never superficially. "Why would you ever want to know that?"

"Because I'm curious. About people. Isn't that the way a kid is supposed to be? Wide-eyed and full of wonder?"

Rice knew he ought to leave. This was nothing he was meant to overhear. The walls were too damned thin.

Amanda said, "I was twenty-two the first time it happened, if that's what you mean."

"No, not really."

"Then let's start earlier. When I was a kid. I grew up a coal miner's daughter in Pennsylvania. Lesbians are supposed to hate their fathers. I hated mine and wanted to be just like him. Is that cheap psychology?"

"I don't know anything about psychology."

"I went away to college. A small, poor, state-run institution. I was never good-looking but I was intelligent and well-built. From the time I was twelve till I went away, boys screwed me. Remember, I'm talking about the nineteen-seventies. That was the time when every young woman supposedly knew how to get the most out of every possibility. Well, I never felt a damned thing — not once. In college, in my last

year, I decided to seduce my roommate. She was a lot like you. Rich, cute, and bored. We laughed about it together — we never really liked each other much — then one night it just happened. She said, for her, it was an intellectual exercise. For me, what it was, Christ knows. I won't say it was pretty because it hardly ever was. After a couple of months, she stopped coming to my bed and then moved out. Naturally, she talked. At first I was horrified. What would people think? I was embarrassed. Then I got to like it. For the first time in my life, people took notice of me. I was the center of notoriety on the whole damn campus. I had found an identity. A status. This is more cheap psychology. Being a Lesbian doesn't mean a damn thing. It was afterward, when I found out how to be a woman, that I learned something."

"Rice says you hate men."

"Rice would say that. I frighten him. Not because I'm a Lesbian. I frightened him years ago when he didn't even know. I don't hate men; I pity them."

"Why?"

"Because they can never be women."

"Are women better than men?"

"Yes. In every possible, every conceivable way. The only problem is, so damned few of them realize it. But they will. In time. Right now, if I had the power, I'd exterminate every man on the face of the Earth, but when I do, when enough women feel the way I do, then it won't be necessary anymore."

"You blame men for everything."

"I do."

"Women do bad things, too."

"Who doesn't?"

"Kids. Kids and animals. They don't do things, they just are."

"Don't kids grow up?"

"And what if they didn't?"

He heard Amanda's reassuring laughter. "That's not possible."

He heard the door. Cassie was leaving. "But don't you see, Amanda, that's the way it's got to be." The door shut. She was gone.

8

When Rice awoke in his room, it was night. He sprang out of bed, fully dressed, and strapped on his holster and gun. He went through the house, out the door, and into the yard. The moon had recently risen, and he made out the pale young faces gazing at him from the grass. "Amanda?" he said. "Amanda, are you here?"

He knew she had to be. Cutting through the grass, he finally found her. Cassie was with Amanda. Rice dropped into the grass beside them. It was a warm night, but the air was wet, promising rain. "I must have fallen asleep," he said apologetically. He didn't want either one of them to know he had ove.heard their talk. Until he fully understood what was happening here, he didn't intend to tell anyone anything.

Amanda said, "You didn't miss anything."

"That's right, Colonel," said Cassie, surly again. "The saucer's waiting for you."

"Is something wrong?" he asked Amanda. Her attitude — their attitude — disturbed him. It was as if the two of them stood together. He was alone, isolated. Maybe sleeping had been a mistake.

"Nothing's wrong," Amanda said.

"Are you sure?"

"Why? Should something be wrong?"

"No, I guess not. Did you —?" He was going to ask whether Cassie had told Amanda the story of the Galaxy Judges. He didn't really want to do it while Cassie was here. Besides, he was pretty sure she had. "No, forget it."

Cassie gazed at the sky. "It should be coming soon."

"If it doesn't rain."

She giggled. "Rain won't matter, Colonel Rice."

She was right. A moment after she spoke, there it was. Suddenly. And close, too. Closer, Rice thought, than the previous night. In spite of the low clouds, he could clearly see the saucer shape. The lights. All six glowed steadily. The saucer hovered directly overhead.

"Did you bring the camera?" he asked Amanda.

"I took enough pictures last night."

"We may need all the evidence we can get."

"Rice, shut up." The irritation in her tone surprised him. Now what was going on?

"Amanda, I —"

"Shut up. Can't you see I'm trying to concentrate?"

He couldn't see that, couldn't understand. He looked at the hovering saucer, then at Amanda. She and Cassie sat intimately apart from him, like lovers. He refused to let his suspicions run away again. He had hurt her badly that way once. It was none of his business what she was. And the girl — Cassie — he knew by now she wasn't just a kid.

The other kids, a faceless mass, went through their nightly paces. He heard them moan and shout. The smell of dope gave an acrid tint to the clean night air.

The lights began to flash. The pattern was the same as the other night. On and off. On and off. He glanced at Amanda. She sat with her head thrown back. Was she listening? A shiver ran through him. It certainly wasn't the cold. Christ, he felt like a goddamn kid at a monster matinee. All this was real. Too damned real.

Rice got to his feet. He didn't know where he was going. He staggered through the high grass. Once he disturbed two naked kids who scurried away at his approach. He saw he was heading toward the burnt patch of ground where the saucer had landed. That was Amanda's little joke. Rice no longer thought that it was funny. There

was a tree. He only dimly remembered seeing it before. He ducked his head to pass under. The snake fell around his throat.

It wasn't one of the big ones. One of the forty-foot monsters that sliced through the river at night like brown logs. This one wasn't more than ten or fifteen feet in length. But it had a firm grip on his throat. Rice reached up to pull it away. His fingers dug into the soft flesh. The snake squeezed tighter. He couldn't pry it loose. He fell to his knees, gagging. Christ, he thought, am I going to choke to death? He tried to cry for help. *Amanda. Amanda.* The snake wouldn't let him breathe.

He rolled on the grass under the tree. He could see the snake's head. It hung motionlessly inches from his own eyes. Lean snout. Tiny eyes. Broad, flat skull. The thing actually seemed to be smiling at him.

*The anaconda's smile,* he thought. (An Indian legend: he on whom the anaconda smiles shall die. He had always laughed. Snakes didn't smile.)

He knew he couldn't let himself die here. He had lived through too goddamn much to go this way. There was a gun at his waist, and he would use that to kill the snake.

He dropped his hand. He lay at an awkward angle, and at first his fingers failed to find the butt of the gun. He squirmed and wriggled, trying to ignore the pain that blotted out his vision and made it nearly impossible for him to breathe. Finally, his fingers closed. He felt the warming touch of steel. The gun slid neatly free of the holster. He started to raise it.

The snake moved. Caught by surprise, Rice gasped and moved, too. The gun slipped out of his limp fingers. He didn't hear it strike the ground.

In the dark, caught like this, weakened, he knew he'd never be able to find the gun again.

*Christ, I am going to die,* he realized. A drop of rain struck his face. He could hear it falling all around, saturating the ground in seconds. The smell of the snake filled his nostrils. All of this was wrong. He knew a little about snakes, about anacondas. They never attacked humans. Never.

He remembered once, soon after his arrival on the river, he had joined two Brazilian officers in a small boat. All three had carried big, high-powered rifles. Snake hunting, they said. Rice had brought down two near the riverbank. One, from the shape he had seen, could have been as long as forty feet. Both carcasses sank before the boat reached them. Only a mad man went wading in the Amazon at night.

There was a shot.

The noise shocked him. He came awake. His cheek felt as if it were on fire. For a moment, he thought he might have been shot. It wasn't until now that he remembered how he had ceased to struggle, reconciled himself to death.

The weight on his throat suddenly lessened. Rice coughed, gasped, fought

to force clean air into his lungs.

He could see. Amanda stood over him. In one hand, she held the snake, its head blown away, and in the other, a smoking pistol. It must have taken a tremendous shot to kill the snake without harming him.

He wanted to thank her, but his throat refused to let the words pass.

"Rice," she said. "I'm damned sorry. I tried to reach you sooner, but...."

She crouched beside him. Christ, he thought, she saved my life. It made him feel good to realize that and so did the hot rain bathing his face, blinding him again.

He fought to retain his vision.

The sky past Amanda's shoulder seemed blank.

The saucer? Had it gone?

Behind Amanda stood another shape. For a long time, Rice refused to admit it was there. He knew it was Cassie. Cassie, who stood glaring down at him. Cassie, her face a mask of hatred. He knew she had meant to kill him. It was Amanda who had saved his life.

9

Rice lay on his back in bed as bright light streaming through an open window told him it was morning. His hand went involuntarily to his throat, where he felt the skin rubbed raw. He couldn't touch the wound without flinching.

"Ed?"

He turned his head. Amanda sat stiffly on a chair in front of the dresser. Her arms and legs were crossed, and there was a bright glow in her eyes he had not noticed before.

"You're still here?"

"I wanted to give you time to rest."

"Yeah, thanks." He touched his neck again. "God, that was close."

"You feel better now?"

"I feel all right."

"You've got to get out of here."

He stared at her, not moving. He had figured out that funny glow in her eyes. Amanda must know. Whatever he had managed to guess, she knew for certain. When had she found it out? Last night, with the saucer, or before, with Cassie, as he napped? "We've both got to get out of here."

"No, not me. I'm staying."

"The hell if you are. They'll kill you."

"No, Ed, not me."

"You can't —"

She held up a hand to make him stop. "Ed, I'm a woman. Haven't you got the point? I'm safe with them."

Could he argue? Could he explain that he just didn't think it was enough. He knew Amanda. She was strange, unique, but not alien ... not like Cassie ... or an anaconda.

He made an attempt at being reasonable. "The other night, the first night, Cassie told me a story." Talking wasn't easy. The inside of his throat felt as raw as the torn flesh on the outside. "She claimed she had read it somewhere, but I know that's not true. It was something about the Galaxy

Judges, who came to Earth and decided who was supposed to live and who was supposed to die. I didn't pay much attention when she was talking about it, but I've seen that damned saucer now. She was telling the truth, wasn't she?"

Amanda hesitated. Rice knew how close to the edge she must feel. Even this much — saving his life last night — must have taken a tremendous effort. "Not the whole story, no. Not as I understand it."

"Then what part wasn't true?"

"About killing all the men. They don't have that power. All they can do is take us away."

"To another world?" It was hard even talking about this seriously. Sure, he'd seen the saucer twice, had glimpsed the anaconda's smile, but it was still hard to accept.

"They've come to save those who are capable of being saved. They're like gods. I talked to them ... last night."

He wouldn't dispute that, as much as one part of him kept wanting to laugh. It was like having a dream when a part of the mind said, hey, this is real and happening, while another, cooler part hung back, knowing all along it was just a crazy spangled fantasy. The difference was, this time, it was the first part that knew the truth.

"They must have killed Miller," he said. "I'll bet anything his body is somewhere around. The snake got him. Or the ants. Probably the dog. Cassie murdered her own father. Is that who you're going to trust?"

"He was a man. He would have stopped them."

"For Christ's sake, Amanda, you talk as if this is right!"

She shut him off. He could feel it in her eyes. She really did believe everything they'd told her.

He tried to reach her another way. "Look, Amanda, like it or not, this is still your world. You can't run away with a pack of crazy kids. Kids and animals. I've heard Cassie's little speech. That's what they're after."

"They want everyone who doesn't belong here. And that includes me as much as anyone."

"And it doesn't include me?" He held his hands out. "Haven't you ever noticed? Look here, Amanda, see this. See the skin. See how black it is. Like midnight. Like coal. Are you trying to tell me this world belongs to me?"

"More than it does to me."

He shook his head. She was making a terrible mistake, but how could he reach her?

She said, "Cassie doesn't know I'm here. She wanted the snake to kill you last night. I've got to go and talk to her. Get your things. Take the jeep. Get out of here as fast as you can. Until dark, you're safe. They come from a planet with a smaller sun and don't usually come down in the day."

He considered punching her. An old movie routine. A clip to the jaw. He'd carry her out till she came to her senses.

In a burst of emotion, she said, "They've come to Earth to save all the creatures who have been enslaved and exploited since the beginning of time."

Once she'd said that, ignoring everything that he was, Rice knew there was nothing he could do. "Amanda, I hope to God you're right."

10

Rice fled.

The kids in the living room made no effort to stop him.

He started the jeep, pumped the accelerator, and raced down the narrow, winding drive. At one point, in the rearview mirror, he thought he saw Cassie standing on the porch, watching him, but it was only a shadow and might have been something else.

It took him most of the day to traverse the broken local roads and reach project headquarters on the river. His own office was filled with frantic activity, for nearly two dozen ranking project officers had suddenly filed missing-person reports on their teen-aged children. Rice said he thought he knew where they might be. He asked for a detachment of twenty soldiers. He had to make up a story about marauding Indians. Mendoza, his immediate superior, asked about the flying saucer report. Rice told him it was a helicopter.

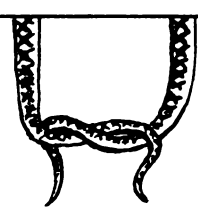
He got the men he wanted. The next day at dawn, five jeeps left the riverside. It took another full day to reach Miller's house. As soon as he saw it, Rice knew something had happened. There was a burnt circle on the ground. A second one. The saucer had landed again.

He led his men through the empty, silent house. He was standing in the living room when someone called him outside. It was Miller. His body lay hidden in the high grass behind the house.

"Looks like some big cat tore him to shreds," said a soldier.

"Or a dog," said Rice.

Rice went back into the house. He found Amanda in her own bedroom. It was the first time he'd seen the place. The ants had been at her and it wasn't a pretty thing to see. Three of his men had to hold him back. Christ, Rice thought, I warned her. I told her this was her world, too.



*Russell Kirk is well known as a writer on conservative thought and educational theory; he is the author of THE CONSERVATIVE MIND (1953). In the 1960's he wrote some especially fine and creepy supernatural fantasies for F&SF ("Sorworth Place," November 1962; "Balgrummo's Hell," July 1967), but we have not heard from him recently. We are delighted to learn that he is still at work on the creepy stuff, and you will be too, as you read this story about the strange death of a miser.*

# *Fate's Purse*

**BY**

## RUSSELL KIRK

"Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money."

—*Acts* VIII, 20, *c.* 75

Four miles west of Bear City, Cubby Hasper splashed up the gravelly bed of Brownlee's Creek, casting for trout. Although swift, the creek was very shallow this dry summer. It was a remote spot, the woods of the Brownlee farmstead extending densely on either side of the stream. Cubby, thirteen years old, trusted that he wouldn't encounter old Fate Brownlee, who had a short way with trespassers. Fate! It was a funny name to have given a Brownlee baby — if one could imagine old Fate as a baby — but as the man had turned out, the name was suitable enough.

Rounding a bend, Cubby saw something curious. A small tractor somehow had nosed down the low bank into the

creek and stood there silent and unmoving, the clear water eddying round the fore part of it, as if the machine had given up the ghost. Cubby reeled in his line and made his way to the tractor. Then he perceived what turned him white and shaking all over.

Just under the surface of the fast-flowing water, shadowed by the branches of an ancient willow, a few feet beyond the tractor's nose, lay a man's face. Cubby almost had stepped upon the dead thing. It was old Fate Brownlee's face. Cubby screamed and turned and ran for home, falling into two or three creek-bed potholes on the way.

In the considered judgment of the coroner, Fate Brownlee's death, as an act of God, was a case for the judge of probate, not for the county prosecutor. Apparently the old miser had intended to cut yet more cords of firewood in preparation for winter — even though already there must have been a hundred cords stacked close beside his damp farmhouse, the earlier cut cords among them already fungi-covered and rotting to punk. As best the circumstances might be reconstructed, it seemed that Fate must have driven his rusty tractor along the woods trail to the creek, intending to cross the stream at his ford and fell dead elms on the far side; his chain saw had been hanging upon the tractor when his body was taken from the water.

At the creek, something must have happened to the tractor, the coroner speculated — one of its treads snagged on a dead water-logged branch, perhaps. Old Fate, presumably, had waded into the creek to clear the way. Then his tractor, its engine left running, must have begun to move again when Fate had freed the tread; or else the tractor may have slid down the bank, unexpectedly, so pinning Fate Brownlee to the creek bed, cruelly imprisoned under great weight nearly to his waist, but his head and arms and chest free to flounder in the stream.

It had been a hard way to go. For it appeared that Fate may have lain alive and conscious in the creek for some time — possibly for hours. There had been lacerations on his hands, as if he had tried to hold his head above water by grasping willow twigs that strayed down from the vast old willow overhanging the ford; some willow branches had been broken off. But when Fate's strength had failed, and he had been able to grip the branches no longer, then his head had sunk beneath the shallow water.

The corpse may have lain there for as much as three days before little Cubby came upon it: Fate Brownlee, a loner, a bachelor all his life, sometimes had not gone into Bear City for weeks on end, and there had been no important reason why anyone should have bothered to seek him out. Fate's chickens, unfed, had scattered into the woods. His dog somehow had vanished

altogether. The dead man's cattle had browsed unperturbed in the pastures, and the bees from his dozens of hives had buzzed about the honeysuckle hedges, at their business as usual. Few people in Bear City seemed more concerned at Fate's passing than had been the cows and the bees: in seventy years, Fate had made no friends, although he had accumulated (according to rumor) plenty of hard cash. "An act of God," the postmaster said in private, was just the right phrase for Fate's end.

Only one circumstance had puzzled the coroner a trifle: Fate's purse had been found nowhere. It had been a very big oldfangled leather change purse or pouch with steel fasteners at the mouth, from the time when everybody used silver dollars, and it had been in evidence when Fate had deposited money in the bank or had sold honey at people's doors. Although Fate had carried the purse with him always — it had been fastened to his overalls by a contraption of chain and that big purse had not been found on his body, nor near the tractor, nor in the decayed farmhouse. Could it have come loose from his overalls and have been washed down the creek? Cubby was an honest boy who wouldn't steal pennies off a dead man. Two neighbors had gone down the creek bed with rakes, at the coroner's request, but had not found the purse. Presumably there would have been only small change in it, anyway, for Fate had been popularly supposed to bury at least as much of his money as he put into the bank and not to lug cash about with him recklessly. An odd circumstance, this, but a small one: one of God's little jokes, conceivably, poetic justice. So much for Fate's fate. With that witticism, the coroner resigned the business to the county judge of probate.

Mr. Titus Moreton, sometime lieutenant colonel of cavalry in the Army of the United States, had been judge of probate in Pottawattomie County for more than a decade. He was a burly outdoor man, strong in defiance of his years, popular enough, who kept three horses, collected weapons, and understood how to manage young wards of the court competently and humorously. The judge had known Fate Brownlee slightly, as he knew most of the odd characters in Pottawattomie County. Niggardly old Fate, he suspected, must have stashed away a tolerable fortune somewhere: if a hard-fisted bachelor buys next to nothing for most of his life, and doesn't drink or smoke or treat, and owns a good farm and mortgages on other people's farms, and works his land as if somebody had him under the lash — why, in the nature of things, the money accumulates. The judge's wife couldn't believe that a ragged scarecrow in overalls like Fate Brownlee might have been by far the richest man in his rural township, but the judge could and did.

Judge Moreton had appointed as

administrator of the estate of the late Fate Brownlee the township supervisor, Abe Redding, whose probity was undoubted: a sensible lean man with a weathered face, jolly and resourceful. There might be a will in Fate's safety-deposit box at the bank. Undoubtedly there was an heir presumptive — the dead man's brother, Virgil Brownlee, who lived in the big city and sold real estate. The judge had not seen this Virgil, but Abe Redding said that the brother, who dressed well enough and had made plenty of money on his own, was nearly as miserly as Fate had been, except that Virgil had indulged himself in a spouse and a daughter. Fate and Virgil, Redding went on, had not been at all fond of each other, but the city miser had visited the country miser two or three times a year, according to the neighbors; perhaps he had felt some attachment to the old family farmstead, though the house was sufficiently bleak. If Fate had died intestate, the inheritance would go to Virgil, his wife and child; even had Fate made a will, Redding suggested, probably Virgil was the sole legatee.

"Why?" the judge wished to know. "If, as you say, the brothers fought every time they met...."

"Because, Judge, Fate knew that Virgil would save his money."

"Save it for what?"

"Just to put a cool million into the hands of Virgil's daughter and Fate's niece, Judge — an ugly little thing called Dorcas."

"And what would the niece do with it, Abe?"

"Save it, if she's a chip off the old block, and she is."

The judge had snorted — he was open-handed to a fault, himself — and had bought Abe a drink. "Here's to you, Administrator. If there's a will, it's up to you to unearth it. So far as I know, Fate had no lawyer. Do you think there's really a will?"

"Maybe, Judge. They say that after one or two fights the brothers had, old Fate threatened to draw up a new last will and testament and leave money, farm, and the whole kaboodle to the Salvation Army. He told Matt Heddle, at the post office, how he might do just that. Yet it wasn't in his nature: the Salvation Army would have spent the money on bums. Still, the talk of it was a good way to put the fear of God into Brother Virgil."

Fate and Virgil, the judge reflected — what incongruous names! The Brownlee parents, with such classical affectations in the backwoods, must have been as odd as their precious offspring. Fate — *fatum* — destiny; and Virgil, the poet of destiny, mission! The brothers had looked much alike, Abe said, but Virgil had been the younger by ten years.

As matters had turned out, there *had* been an old will in the safety-deposit box; and everything had been bequeathed to "my brother, Virgil H. Brownlee." Also it had turned out that Fate's savings account had been sur-

prisingly small. Redding had contrived to track down certain very substantial investments of Fate's in stocks and bonds, made late in his life, and there were also the mortgages on half the farms in the township. All this had made the deceased's estate plump and happy, as the judge had expected, Fate's lifelong woeful facade of desperate poverty notwithstanding. Yet Redding suspected, and the judge agreed, that very possibly there lay concealed in the farmhouse, or round about, currency and coin exceeding all the tangible and intangible assets which Redding had uncovered so far. Persistent and long-standing report among the neighbors had it so. And before ruling upon that old will from the safety-deposit box, the judge meant to find what — or at least part of what — lay behind those rumors.

The Brownlee farm, isolated and unguarded, was more than four miles distant from little Bear City. But happily an undersheriff, Buck Tuller, lived on a hardscrabble holding only half a mile distant from the dead man's house. Redding had prevailed upon Buck to keep an eye on the Brownlee place, feeding the cattle, taking the chickens into custody at his own chicken house, and making sure no rough boys might tip over the many beehives. (Redding had hinted to Tuller that perhaps the bee swarms might be given to him, on settlement day, as reward for these services.) Also, of course, Buck Tuller was to watch for any two-footed predators: two or three unoccupied lake cottages in the county had been plundered this season, a nocturnal burglary unsuccessfully attempted at the Bear City bank, and it was sufficiently notorious that old Fate had kept the green stuff and the silver dollars ready to hand. Money does not breed, but its proximity warms the cockles of miserly hearts that are too stingy to keep a fire burning on cold nights in a sooty old wood stove.

Still, Buck Tuller could not be always keeping a weather eye on the Brownlee place, round the clock; so some search of the premises ought to be made soon, Redding had declared. The judge had concurred. Mr. Virgil Brownlee, heir presumptive, had been invited to attend and witness on this occasion. On the appointed day, a Saturday, they had gathered at the Bear City post office to start out upon the formal search: Redding, the judge, and Virgil Brownlee. Buck Tuller would be waiting for them at the gaunt farmhouse, and Buck would be armed. The judge thoughtfully brought along a long spade and wore in a holster at his belt his old army revolver. In these days, precautions were prudent even in farm townships. The gang which had looted the cottages and attempted the bank in recent months just conceivably might turn up at the Brownlee farm, and the judge was a practiced quick-draw man.

They drove out to the farm in Red-

ding's car, Virgil Brownlee talking volubly. He was a long-nosed man, in physiognomy and figure nearly the spit and image of Fate, but clean-shaven and attired in black suit and black tie, as if in mourning. Mourning did not quite become Virgil. Now and again, this Virgil Brownlee bit his nails, but he smiled a great deal, even when speaking of his brother's untimely end and the melancholy character of it. And how Virgil did run on — a compulsive talker if ever there was one! He babbled of the dear boyhood intimacy between him and his brother.

"I suppose, Mr. Brownlee, that you two got along famously all your long lives, eh?" inquired the judge, a trifle dryly.

Virgil Brownlee looked sharply at him. "He left me everything, didn't he? Oh, brothers have their spats, you know, but deep down underneath, Judge Moreton, the bond lasted — right up to the end." Here Virgil sniffed and put his right hand over his eyes, as if in sharp sorrow, peering between his fingers at the judge.

Redding turned the car into a rutted driveway. "Here we are, gentlemen. You haven't seen the Brownlee place before, Judge?"

It was no delightful sight. The barns and sheds were well enough maintained; a perfectly astounding array of hives stood in long rows behind the chicken house, and fairly neat orchards stretched along either side of the honeysuckle-lined drive to the farmhouse. But that house itself was neither picturesque nor old, though it stood apparently upon the squared-boulder foundations of an earlier dwelling. The windows were uncurtained, and the afternoon sun glared back from their dull dirty panes. The chimney looked about ready to fall. It was a smallish house of a single story, the paint long ago peeled away from the warped siding.

"Your brother didn't bother much about appearances, Mr. Brownlee," Abe Redding offered.

"If you fix up the outside of a house, they raise your property taxes. My brother saved his money." Virgil spoke as if this retort were crushing. He kept up a flow of talk as they walked toward the house — having left their car near the road, the ruts of the farm lane being bone-bruising.

Meanwhile the judge was surveying the orchards on either side of the track. Here and there, under one old apple tree or another, he noticed a little heap of stones, and touched Virgil's arm. "What do you suppose those stone piles are?"

"Just Fate's way of making it easier to plough," Virgil told him, smoothly. But it had passed through the judge's mind that these might be cairns marking — or some of them, only Fate knew which — burials of something of value.

Taking a ring of keys from his

pocket, Redding unlocked the front door. "You first, friend, as next of kin," he told Virgil Brownlee, motioning toward the doorway. Brownlee hesitated, shook his head, again covered his eyes with the fingers of one hand:

"Let somebody else step in first; it's too sad for me."

What a rat's nest the place was! The judge had seen many filthy hovels in Pottawattomie County, but none so abominable as this. The four of them stared at the barren living room, with old newspapers pasted on the walls instead of regular wallpaper, no carpet or linoleum on the bare floorboards, the scanty cheap furniture damaged or broken. What had been meant for the dining room was perfectly empty. In the smeared, cheerless kitchen was the house's only source of heat, the battered wood range, looking as if it might explode were a fire lit. There was one fairly new, fairly serviceable thing: a big white freezer, doubtless acquired secondhand. Redding opened its lid: the freezer was full to its brim with loaves of store bread.

"Fate used to buy week-old bread cheap at the supermarkets in the county seat," Virgil commented, "and keep it here for a year or more. He said he didn't grudge eating it if it was a year old, even if he'd had to pay cash for it. Fate didn't waste." Virgil said this with fraternal pride.

To conceal anything in these squalid rooms, with their naked walls of unpainted plaster, would have been almost impossible, unless under the floorboards, which had many cracks; and besides, the judge ruminated, the place was a perilous firetrap, as even its owner must have perceived. Whatever Fate had hidden could not be above ground in this house.

The main bedroom was next for inspection, a dark hole. As they crowded in, some shape loomed at the foot of the bed. "O God!" Virgil Brownlee cried but recovered swiftly.

Fate had possessed but two outer garments aside from his ragged black overcoat, and those two identical: pairs of worn blue overalls. He had been buried in one pair, decently laundered for the ceremony by Mrs. Tuller. The remaining pair of overalls, caked with dried sweat and grime so that they were permanently filled out to their owner's proportions, hung suspended on a coat hanger from a ceiling hook and swayed slightly in the draught caused by the opening of the bedroom door. In the dimness, it had seemed as if Fate himself had been swaying there.

"Gives a man a turn, don't it?" Virgil sighed. Indeed it did.

On the cot bed's thin mattress lay a single frayed blanket and a pillow without a slip. A cheap straight chair stood beside the bed. Some grimy underclothing, socks, and shirts lay on the floor of the closet. Otherwise the bedroom was empty. The man who had lived thus could have bought and sold nearly everybody in the county.

The house, though some light bulbs dangled from their cords, had no running water, let alone a bathroom. "Fate didn't complain about going out to the pump and using the backhouse," Virgil explained.

All the money they found in these rooms was contained in a glass jar atop the kitchen range: one dime, one nickel, two pennies. Perhaps even that sum had been left exposed there in the hope of persuading conceivable burglars that it was the whole of Fate's savings.

"There's nothing here," said Abe Redding. "Where'd we ought to look, Mr. Brownlee?"

"Why, I couldn't just say." Virgil's long nose twitched, and again he stared at the three of them through his fingers. "I don't have the least idea where my brother kept his money — supposing he had any, and I don't know that he did. But if I was you, I'd go down into the cellar."

It was an old Michigan cellar, surviving from the earlier farmhouse on this site — very deep and high-ceilinged, its walls in part rubble from the fields, in part packed earth rudely plastered over. As they went down the rickety stairs, the judge noticed here and there in the stone staircase walls certain patches which looked as if holes had been opened and then sealed up again: the mortar round the stones at these spots was newer and of a different hue. But they had no picks ready to hand, and it was uncertain how much authority even a judge of probate and a duly appointed administrator held, when causing actual damage to a house's fabric was in question.

This cellar had several rooms, and all but one of them crammed with rough shelving, and on the shelves lay food enough to feed a cavalry regiment for a whole month. There were hundreds, perhaps thousands, of glass jars of preserves — meat, fruit, berries, vegetables, fish, jellies, jams. Some of this unmistakably had spoiled, and growths of exotic tints oozed from beneath their jar lids. This must be an accumulation of decades. "Fate was the great one for home canning," Virgil offered. Into the judge's mind came the image of old Fate: a bag of bones in overalls, an effigy of Famine. What power of self-denial — or, rather, denial of the flesh; what lunacy!

Another cellar room contained tier upon tier of combs of honey, thick with dust, enough concentrated sweet to sicken every child in Pottawattomie County for a year at least. "Fate was handy with the bees," Virgil continued, "though he didn't eat much honey himself, except for reasons of health. He liked to see the stuff available here in case of need."

"About them bees," Buck Tuller broke in, awkwardly. "Now I could use the hives, and Mr. Redding here was suggestin'...."

Virgil spoke with abrupt force and venom. "Yes, I sure heard what Abe Redding had in mind, and I can tell

you, Buck Tuller.... Well, look at the thing this way. For my part, you'd be welcome to Fate's bees. But I don't know for sure yet that they belong to me; and even if I did know, there's others to consider — my wife, and our kid Dorcas, and I don't know who else. Now it wouldn't be fair of me to just give away other folks' property, would it? Anyway, Buck Tuller, them hives is going to stay just where they set, and I'm not going to have you lay hand on them, officer of the law though you be."

This at first surprised the judge. Giving Tuller the hives might have saved the estate the modest cash bill for services as watchman that Tuller could submit. But now it occurred to the judge — who kept his peace — that hives alive with stinging bees would be the last place which thieves might search for hidden money.

The four of them came to the last room in the cellar, a long narrow space running parallel with the front of the house. They had to use the flashlights that Redding and Tuller had brought. The floor here was of sand, and the room was empty of shelves or junk.

"I see you fetched a good spade, Judge Moreton," Virgil Brownlee commented. "Now, like I say, I don't have no notion as to where Fate buried his money, if he had any." His speech has grown hurried and blurred, and his grammar rougher. "But if I was you, Judge, I'd dig *right over there.*" He indicated the northern end of the room.

The judge thrust his spade into the sand. At the second spadeful of earth, the sharp spade-edge struck against something that rang. Bending down, the judge extracted from the sand a sealed glass jar. It was packed tight with little cylinders of something, sewn up neatly in newspaper. Redding held the jar, and the judge thrust in his spade afresh, again successfully. Altogether, he dug up some twenty-nine jars, buried fairly close together. Spade where he would in the rest of the cellar, he could discover no more.

They carried the jars to the living room and set them on a pine table. Strong in his fingers, the judge screwed open the first jar and extracted the several cylinders and cut them carefully with his pocket knife. Underneath the integument of stitched newspaper was a tight roll of hundred-dollar bills.

The judge let Abe Redding open the other jars. Not all contained hundred-dollar bills, but there was nothing so small as a one-dollar bill. All were currency issued during the twenties and thirties.

But when Redding removed the newspaper wrapping from the cylinders in the ninth jar, there were no notes inside. Instead the jar was packed with dry corncobs, sewn up as neatly as the rolls containing money.

"I'll be a monkey's uncle," Buck Tuller declared. "Now why did Fate save them old corncobs?"

Virgil Brownlee, previously so loquacious, had fallen silent, and his face

was expressionless. But he did not seem really astonished or chagrined. The judge wondered cynically whether this fellow, years ago, might not have got into this cellar when his brother had been absent for a few hours, say, and have made substitutions not easy to detect, so many as he dared.

Only eight of the jars contained corncobs; the rest were stuffed with bills. Putting all the jars on the floor, Redding proceeded to count their take, jotting down the contents of each jar in his notebook. He had opened his mouth to announce the grand total when the boards of the porch floor creaked, and something rattled the knob of the front door.

"For Christ's sake, don't let him in!" Virgil Brownlee shrieked.

What Virgil meant, the judge did not know; for his own part, he thought immediately of the gang who had attempted the bank. Visions of an autumnal glory suffused his judicial imagination; he could see the headline in the county daily — "Probate Judge Wipes Out Robber Band."

Faster than Bat Masterson, as the front door swung inward and Virgil fled to the inner rooms, Judge Moreton had his pistol out and was thumbing back the hammer. A gray bulk occupied the doorway.

"Hold it, please, Judge!" Buck Tuller implored him. "That's a federal man!"

So it was. With a slight sigh, the judge slid his gun back into its holster, not fancying a headline like "Probate Judge Slaughters IRS Agent."

"I was just seeing what might be up," the federal man muttered apologetically. "Afternoon, everybody. Judge, did you know that Fate Brownlee, for years back, had written 'no income' on his federal returns?"

Virgil, his composure recovered, had returned from the back of the house. "What you see here ain't income," he put in, tartly. "It's capital, and it's old money. And I don't need to tell you that there's a three-year limit on investigating income-tax returns."

"I know that," the federal man admitted, not happily. "Judge Moreton, you're going to give this house a real thorough search?"

The judge, like other judges of probate whose authority is indefinite but ample, was easily put on his mettle; and he was zealous for state and local powers. "You're intervening in the proceedings of a duly constituted court of probate," he retorted in his colonel's tones of yesteryear, "and I'll not allow it. You go out that door and sit on that porch until we've finished our business, or I might find you in contempt."

The federal man having obeyed, Virgil Brownlee clapped the judge approvingly on the shoulder. "That's the way to handle them meddlers, Judge."

"Take your hand off me," the judge said. "Abe Redding, what's your total?"

In those glass jars there had been found the sum of $17,490. "Deposit it

in the bank under a special account for the estate, Abe," the judge told Redding. "Brownlee, don't stand so close to that table."

Whatever might lie still behind those patches in the stone walls or under orchard cairns or in hives — why, this was a clammy house, a presence brooding over it, and already the sun was going down. And why should the Treasury get its fingers, through arrears of income tax or extortionate inheritance tax, upon the hoard for which dead old Fate has sacrificed comfort, pleasure, friends, even true humanity? Fate had paid for his ignoble treasure. Why, should he linger longer in this deathly house, the judge thought, he might turn miser himself.

As they left, Redding locking the door behind them, the judge told the waiting federal man, "Unless you have a warrant, keep off this property, or I'll warrant *you*. Scat, now! Mr. Redding's in charge of all this."

They waited in their car until the federal man had driven off. Behind them, against its background of neglected woods, the farmhouse looked lonely enough to give anyone the shivers.

"You being in real estate, Mr. Brownlee," Abe Redding said as they parted at the Bear City post office, "I guess you'll be selling the old place once it's settled that it's all yours."

"Wouldn't think of selling," Virgil informed him. "Not a farm that's been in the family a hundred years! Why, the wife and daughter may not care for the place, but I might spend a good deal of time up here by myself, just loafing around, thinking of dad and mom and — and Fate."

"It has a hold on you, Brownlee?" The judge did not shake his hand. "I can imagine why. Well, if Abe's work goes along smoothly, we should be able to settle this estate about a month from now. My clerk will send you a notice in sufficient time. Meanwhile, stay off that property. Keep everybody else off it, Tuller. It's not a healthy place to be alone."

On the day of the settlement, in September, everyone concerned with the Fate Brownlee estate met at the judge's chambers in the courthouse. The chambers were paneled in old oak, and portraits — well, photographs, mostly — of earlier judges of probate hung on the walls, in heavy frames, high up; and there was set into one wall the splendid painted cast-iron door of the old strongroom. The judge felt majestic here.

Virgil's wife and daughter were present along with Virgil, the judge noticed; also a scruffy-looking lawyer whom Virgil Brownlee had fetched from the big city. The judge secretly regretted having to turn over so much money and land to such dubious-looking characters.

Fate's will was valid, no later will having been discovered, and every-

thing was to pass to Virgil Brownlee, after any charges against the estate had been paid in full. Abe Redding's labors as administrator had turned up a respectable fortune for the heir, quite as the judge had anticipated — a fortune subject to federal and state inheritance taxes, necessarily. Virgil very privily might turn up a second fortune for himself, clear of taxes, mining that ancestral farmstead so dear to Virgil's sentimental heart. But the judge spoke no word of that. A curious thought came casually into his head, just before he opened the proceedings: why hadn't they found Fate's purse anywhere at all? It had been a big, rather conspicuous thing.

Virgil's city lawyer sat close beside his client as bills against the estate were presented for settlement. Fate had paid for everything by cash or check, lifelong; so the only charges against the patrimony were those incurred since Fate's drowning. Abe Redding, as administrator, presented his bill for a sum very tidy indeed — yet only the minimum fee authorized by statute for so substantial an estate. The judge rather had expected Virgil and his household to protest so whopping a deduction from their inheritance; but Virgil sat wooden-faced, allowing the bill to be approved; presumably his lawyer had advised him that Redding could have made bigger charges, had he been greedy, with an excellent chance for approval of the court; let well enough alone, Mr. Brownlee.

Buck Tuller's modest wage for watching over the farm, too, slipped by undiminished: Virgil did open his mouth, as if meaning to say something indignant, but thought better of it. Perhaps he recollected that he could have let Buck take the hives, by way of compensation, and did not care to have that alternative raised afresh.

And then Frank McCullough, who kept the garage and auto-parts emporium at Bear City, submitted his account for payment. Fate had been a customer of his ever since Frank had opened his garage — though not a very profitable patron. Once Fate had driven coughingly up to Frank's station and asked if Frank could repair his dragging ragged muffler. Frank had inspected it solemnly.

"I don't think so, Fate," he had pronounced. "Now I could sell you a new one...."

"O Lord Jesus, man, don't say that!" Fate had ejaculated in anguish. "Just give it a hit with a board or something, and maybe it'll be all right."

Now Frank McCullough's bill went to the judge's desk. It had been Frank who had pulled the tractor off Fate Brownlee's corpse in the creek, had taken the murderous thing to his garage, had put it back in working order, and had returned it to the Brownlee barn. For these services he requested the compensation of twenty-nine dollars and seventy cents.

At that demand, Mr. Virgil Brownlee rose up in wrath, ignoring his city

lawyer. "Outrageous!" he shouted. "Scandalous! We can't pay that much! Why, a bill like that just shows you what people won't do for money."

Nearly a month after Virgil Brownlee had entered upon possession of his brother's goods and chattels, the judge, in an idle hour, decided to pay a visit to the Brownlee farm. It was his custom, nearly every Sunday, to saddle one of his horses and take a long ride along the back roads and sand trails of Pottawattomie County, often exchanging some pleasant words with farmers and pensioners he passed along the way — a tactic useful for one who meant to be re-elected judge of probate, term upon term. It had been more than a year since he had ridden the country west of Bear City, and he felt a hankering to see what Virgil might have done with his tangible inheritance. If the judge himself had owned both the Brownlee farm and Hell, he would have rented out the Brownlee place and lived in Hell. He put into his pocket a detailed map of the county.

As he saddled his mare Diane, his wife came out to hand him a thermos of coffee for the ride on this brisk fall day. "Titus, you silly," said Charlotte, "you've put on that nasty pistol of yours. You'd look a fool, and what if you fell off Diane and the gun shot you?"

It was the judge's long sorrow that Charlotte disliked horses and guns. "There's a safety on it, my darling, and a hard trigger pull." But not being quite sure why he had happened to belt on the revolver, anyway, the judge put the gun back on the shelf in his bedroom. Sometimes he called Charlotte by the pet appellation of Ozymandia, Queen of Queens — "Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair."

She supplied him with a sandwich well-wrapped, an orange, and a chocolate bar, and compelled him to don a heavy riding jacket, and would have thrust more impedimenta upon him, until he protested that she meant to make him look like the White Knight. She demanded to know what way he was bound, and he told her that he would ride to Brownlee's.

"Why do you want to see that smirking Virgil Brownlee?"

"I don't want to see him, my darling; it's just that I want a long ride, and I might have a glance at what he's done to that sad house. They say he comes up alone from the city on weekends. I hear he's sold the herd and rents out the pastures and most of the fields, but threatens trespassers, like Fate before him."

"Don't quarrel with him, if he's there; a judge is supposed to be above that. You're so aggressive and domineering, Titus."

"Yes, my darling."

Then the uxorious judge, astride Diane, went on his cheerful way to the west of Bear City, occasionally putting the mare to a canter or a trot, keeping

to the gravel roads and sand trails, greeting an elector or an electress now and again — but not many, this township being scantily peopled. Halfway to his destination, he tied Diane to a tree, sat upon a stump, ate his sandwich and drank his coffee, and read an old pocket edition of Cicero's *Offices* — he had retained classical tastes from college — for more than half an hour.

He rode on. Finding himself about a mile, presumably, from the Brownlee homestead, he consulted his map and ascertained that he could approach the place by a forgotten lumberman's road which must cross Brownlee's Creek a few hundred rods to the rear of the farmstead.

Kept open at all only by venturesome hunters and fishermen, this track was overgrown. Now he could hear the rippling of the creek, and he emerged upon a ford of sorts overhung by a giant willow. Why, this must be the very spot where old Fate had drowned; he never had happened upon it before.

Without warning, Diane neighed, and shied so violently that she almost threw him, inveterate rider though he was. Close at hand, on his left, something fairly big retreated through the thickets, more heard than glimpsed. A deer it must be, or just possibly a large raccoon. "Easy, Diane!"

Bur the mare was behaving badly, almost hysterical. She reared and plunged; she did not mean to cross that ford. Ordinarily as gentle with good horses as with good women, the judge refrained from using his full strength on Diane's mouth. "Why, girl! Easy, easy!" She tried to swing back toward the trail by which they had come.

He might as well humor her this once, as he humored Charlotte. Dismounting with some difficulty, he led Diane a hundred yards back from the creek and fastened her to a silver birch; he patted her, and she seemed more at ease away from the ford. It would be only a short walk to the farmstead.

In his riding boots, he crossed the creek without trouble and strolled up the track toward the Brownlee place. He ascended a low hogback; the woods ended on the far side of that ridge; and standing in scrub at the edge of the tangle, head and shoulders above a thick clump of wild blackberry bushes, he had a good view of the farm. On his rides he carried field glasses, and now he took these from their case at his belt and surveyed the field between him and the farm buildings.

He could see a part of one of the orchards; he thought he could make out piles of fresh earth under some trees. He could see very clearly that a number of the beehives back of the chicken house had been overturned and lay on the ground. Then across his line of vision a man moved: a man in old overalls, gaunt, with a rifle in his hand. He saw him in profile and was not perceived himself. For a silly instant, the judge took the man for Fate Brownlee *redivivus;* then he knew it must be Virgil. He

was startled when the man abruptly brought the stock up to his shoulder and fired toward a sugarbush grove to the north. The rifle crack echoed mightily over the desolation.

What might Virgil be hunting with a rifle in October — deer out of season? The judge could not trust a city man's discretion or aim, and he didn't mean to be taken for a buck; he must make his presence known. "Virgil!" the judge shouted, hoarsely.

The man started conspicuously, swung around, hastily took aim, and pulled the trigger before the judge grasped his intention. The judge felt a swift stinging blow, reeled, and fell forward to earth, among the bushes.

If he had fainted, it could have been only for a moment. He had been hit in the head: Virgil Brownlee was a crack shot, or a lucky one. How badly? Half dazed, the judge sensed that blood was running thickly down his right cheek and his chin. He thought that he could have stood up, but he didn't mean to try it; for the moment he was invisible behind the blackberry bushes. He remembered, relevantly, how last December one deer hunter had fired at another, taking him for game; and when the wounded man had screeched, stood up, and tried to run, the whiskey-swigging first hunter had pumped bullet after bullet into him, blind with hunter's lust.

The judge heard a shrill voice, happily still some distance off. "Come on out! Come on out of there, Fate!"

The judge had been wounded twice in New Guinea, and on one of those occasions had played possum while the Japanese poked about the jungle to finish him off. Four of his own men had come to his rescue then, but no one could help him here. He felt his bloody head with his right hand: there was a flesh wound in his cheek, and the cheekbone must be broken, and the lobe of his right ear was missing. As yet, the pain was surprisingly endurable, but the bleeding was profuse. Confound darling Charlotte for depriving him of his pistol! There was not even a stick or a big stone ready to hand — nothing to defend him against Virgil Brownlee's damned rifle. The judge wouldn't sing out a second time, not he. Would Virgil come into the brush after his trophy?

He would. Close now, too close, there came a second wild shout: "Fate, you in there? You come on out of there, or I'll give it to you in your belly like I gave it to your dog after you got caught in the creek. I ain't scared of you, live or dead!" It was a maniac shriek.

There was a trampling in the brush; and peering eagerly through the lower part of the bushes without raising his head or stirring a finger, the judge could see a pair of muddy farm boots only a few yards distant from him. But he judged from the boots' angle that the man was staring somewhat to his left, his rifle at the ready. The judge held his breath.

"Fate," the frantic voice cried, "it's all mine now, by law. You think you can scare me out of it by peeking in windows and rattling knobs? You can't take it with you, Fate!"

At that moment, there occurred some slight noise in the woods off to the left, and perhaps some slight movement, too; Virgil heard and perhaps saw, or thought he saw, and swung in that direction, crouching, so that his back was fully turned upon the judge. Staring at the man's boot heels, the judge tensed himself for action.

"Fate," the shriek came, "you let me off, I'll let you off. Hell, I didn't start up the tractor; all I done was walk away after you got caught. Fate, I wouldn't of done that if you hadn't said you'd give the whole shebang to them Salvationers. I ain't scared to look at you in daylight — come on out and show your dirty old face. Come on out, now, or I'll give it to you in the belly!"

Nobody answered. The judge rose on hands and knees, most stealthily. Blood was streaming down his arm and his side.

After what seemed like an hour but must have been seconds, the shouting was resumed. "What you after, Fate? You want what I took off you in the creek? All right — take it, then!"

Something must have been flung toward the grove of maples, for there was a faint clinking thud. Then came a second rustling of bushes — from that deer or coon which had frightened Diane at the ford? "And take this, Fate!" Pow! The rifle cracked again and again and again.

Rising desperately to his feet, the judge hurled himself through the bushes and rushed at Virgil's back. He made it. Flinging all his weight upon the man, he hit Virgil's spine with his knee and clamped his blood-dripping hands over Virgil's averted face. In a voice that seemed like someone else's, the judge roared, "Got you, Virgil!"

The man collapsed, the judge tumbling upon him, and the rifle fell just beyond Virgil's head. The judge pounded Virgil's face against the earth, and then he poked the lunatic. "Get up, Brownlee: I'm taking you to jail."

Virgil did not stir. Another possum? The judge tore off his own necktie and bound Virgil's wrists behind his back; still no resistance. Virgil's hands felt cold. "Get up, you brother killer!"

No movement at all. The judge rolled the man over and ripped open his clothes: he could detect no heartbeat, no breathing. Virgil's unattractive face was close to his, and the fixed, open eyes were sightless. No possum! In his time, the judge had seen many dead men, but all the others had borne wounds.

Buck Tuller's house stood less than half a mile distant, the judge contrived to recollect in his confusion, and he thought he might get there before fainting from loss of blood. He had clapped his handkerchief to ear and cheek. Ride Diane? No, he was in no shape to force

her across the creek. He must foot it to Tuller's, even if already his legs quivered ominously under him.

Keeping his handkerchief pressed hard against his cheek and ear, he took three or four steps; and then his foot struck something. Part of it glittered. It was Fate's old steel-mouthed purse, lying among ferns: this was what Virgil had flung out as bait to the invisible. Virgil must have taken it from his brother trapped in the creek, perhaps while Fate still had clung to the willow-branches and begged for life. The judge nudged the thing with his foot; coins clinked inside.

Let it lie, for the moment: if he bent over, giddiness might undo him. Let it lie, for more reasons than one. Two months before, at the Brownlee house, there had come upon him the sense of a hungry presence; that sense descended again upon him now, more powerful and more malign, and he enfeebled. Was he alone with one corpse and two dead things?

Did those woods creatures stir again at the edge of the field? Deer or raccoon, of course; keep telling yourself that, Titus Moreton: coon or deer. Let the purse lay where it had fallen.

Come on, Titus: you walked out of the jungle at Buna, with grenade-fragments in both arms, and even now you can walk as far as Tuller's. Walk as fast as you can, not showing fear. Pay no heed to that deer, or that coon, or whatever it may be, scrunching somewhere behind you. A bullet to the head can inflict hallucinations even upon a steady-nerved man. Don't look back: walk!

Buck's eldest son and Buck's wife drove the judge to the hospital, and Buck Tuller and his second boy took the panel truck and went after Virgil Brownlee's body. It was there, all right, cold stone dead, clad in the pair of overalls that Virgil had inherited from his brother. Then Buck and his boy searched in the ferns and elsewhere for Fate's purse, the judge having said it was a piece of evidence. They did pick up the judge's binoculars, fallen when he was shot, but no purse. They looked until sundown, glancing over their shoulders often, but they could not find it. Buck gave up when his son's teeth began to chatter.

When, a fortnight later, the judge had mended sufficiently, Charlotte drove him out to the Brownlee place, and he poked through the scrub for two hours or more, kicking aside masses of fallen maple leaves. He was perfectly sure of the spot. Defying Ozymandia's commands and entreaties, he went down on his hands and knees, feeling all over for the purse. No luck. With the coins in it, the purse would have been too heavy and awkward for any squirrel to carry off. Yet the thing had been taken, and no pack rats live in Pottawattomie County.

Charlotte now had grown as skittish as Diane had been at the ford,

glancing back and forth from the judge among the leaves to the house so silent and derelict. "Give it up, silly," she demanded, almost *sotto voce*. "Is anybody in that house?"

The judge straightened up and joined her at the car. "Ask me what songs the sirens sang, darling."

"Who wants that old purse, anyway?"

"I won't speak his name here, Charlotte, if you'll excuse me. I suppose he has his heart's desire, and the iron in his soul withal."

"You make me angry when you're so obscure, Titus." She started up their car. "Oh! What's that toward the creek?" She stepped hard on the gas, and the car bounced so over the ruts that the alert judge, his head craned backward, could make out nothing.

"Did you see anything, darling?"

"Not exactly." Her hands trembled on the wheel.

"I suppose it was some obscure hungry thing, Ozymandia, needing an obol or two for Charon. It was a poor thing; let it fade."

*Welcome back, Poul Anderson, with a short sf tale about The Old Phoenix, surely the most colorful and interesting tavern in the universe. The story first appeared in a book published by The New England Science Fiction Association.*

# House Rule

BY

## POUL ANDERSON

Look for it anywhere, anytime, by day, by dusk, by night, up an ancient alley or out on an empty heath or in a forest where hunters whose eyes no spoor can escape nonetheless pass it by unseeing. Myself, I found its doorhandle under my fingers and its signboard creaking over my head when I was about to enter the saloon of a ship far at sea. You cannot really seek this house; it will seek you. But you must be alert for its fleeting presence, bright or curious or adventurous or desperate enough to enter, that first time. Thereafter, if you do not abuse its hospitality, you will be allowed to come back every once in a while.

The odds are all against you, of course. Few ever get this chance. Yet, since nobody knows what basis the landlord has for admitting his guests, and when asked he says merely that they are those who have good stories wherewith to pay him, you too may someday be favored. So keep yourself open to everything, and perhaps, just perhaps, you will have the great luck of joining us in the tavern called the Old Phoenix.

I'm not quite sure why the innkeeper and his wife the barmaid think I deserve it. There are countless others more worthy, throughout the countless dimensional sheaves, whom I have never met. When I suggest such a person, mine host shrugs, smiles, and amiably evades the question, a tactic in which he is skilled. Doubtless I've simply not happened on some of them. After all, a guest may only stay till the following dawn. Then the house won't reappear to him for a stretch which in my case has always been at least a month. Furthermore, I suspect that be-

sides being at a nexus of universes, the hostel exists on several different space-time levels of its own.

Well, let's not speculate about the unanswerable. I want to tell of an incident I can't get out of my mind.

That evening would have been spectacular aplenty had nothing else gone on than my conversation with Leonardo da Vinci. I recognized that tall, golden-bearded man the instant he stepped into the taproom and shook raindrops off his cloak, and ventured to introduce myself. By and large, we're a friendly, informal bunch at the Old Phoenix. We come mainly to meet people. Besides, of the few who were already present, nobody but landlord, barmaid, and I knew Italian. Oh, Leonardo could have used Latin or French with the nun who sat offside and quietly listened to us. However, their accents would have made talk a struggle.

The goodwife was busy, pumping out beer for Erik the Red, Sancho Panza, and Nicholas van Rijn, interpreting and chattering away in early Norse, a peasant dialect of Spanish, and the argot of a spacefaring future, while now and then she helped herself to a tankardful. Mine host, among whose multiple names I generally choose Taverner, was off in a dim corner with beings I couldn't see very well, except that they were shadowy and full of small starlike sparkles. His round face was more solemn than usual, he often ran a hand across his bald pate, and the sounds that came from his mouth, answering those guests, were a ripple of trills and purrs.

Thus Leonardo and I were alone, until the nun entered and shyly settled down at our table. I include medieval varieties of French in my languages; being an habitué of the Old Phoenix mightily encourages such studies. But by then we two were so excited that, while we greeted her as courteously as Taverner expects, neither of us caught her name, and I barely noticed that within its coif her face was quite lovely. I did gather that she was from a convent at Argenteuil in the twelfth century. But she was content to sit and try to follow our discourse. Renaissance Florentinian was not hopelessly alien to her mother tongue.

The talk was mainly Leonardo's. Given a couple of goblets of wine to relax him, his mind soard and ranged like an eagle in a high wind. Tonight was his second time, and the first had naturally been such a stunning experience that he was still assimilating it. But the drink at our inn, like the food, is unearthly superb. (It should be; Taverner can ransack all the worlds, all the ages of a hypercosmos which, perhaps, is infinitely branched in its possibility-lines.) Leonardo soon felt at ease. In answer to a question, he told me that he was living in Milan in the year 1493 and was forty-one years old. This squared with what I recollected; so quite likely he was the same Leonardo as existed in my continuum. Cer-

tainly, from what he said, he was at the height of his fame, brilliance, powers, and longings.

"But why, Messer, why may you not say more?" he asked. His voice was deep and musical.

"Maybe I could," I replied. "None has ever given me a hard and fast catalogue of commandments. I imagine they judge each case singly. But ... would *you* risk being forever barred from this place?"

His big body, richly clad though in hues that my era of synthetic dyes would have found subdued, twisted around in his chair. As his glance traveled over the taproom, I caught the nun admiring his profile — the least bit wistfully? She was indeed beautiful, I admitted to myself. A shapeless dark habit of rather smelly, surely heavy and scratchy wool could not altogether hide a slim young figure; her countenance was pale, delicately sculptured, huge-eyed. I wondered why, even in her milieu, she had taken vows.

The room enclosed us in cheer, long, wide, wainscotted in carven oak, ceiling massively beamed. A handsome stone fireplace held a blaze of well-scented logs, whose leap and crackle gave more warmth than you'd expect, just as the sconced candles gave more light. That light fell on straight chairs around small tables, armchairs by themselves, benches flanking the great central board, laid out ideally for fellowship. Along the walls, it touched books, pictures, and souvenirs from afar. At one end, after glowing across the bar where my lady hostess stood between the beer pumps and the racked bottles and vessels, it lost itself beyond an open doorway; but I made out a stair going up to clean, unpretentious chambers where you can sleep if you like. (People seldom do. The company is too good, the hours too precious.) Windows are always shuttered, I suppose because they would not look out over any of the worlds on which the front door opens, but onto something quite peculiar. That thought makes the inside fell still more snug.

"No," Leonardo sighed. "I daresay I too will grow careful. And yet ... 'tis hard to understand ... if we are mainly here for colloquy, that Messer Albergatore may enjoy the spectacle and the tales, why does he set bounds on our speech? I assure you, for instance, I do not fear your telling me the date and manner of my death, if you know them. God will call me when He chooses."

"You utter a deep truth there," I said. "For I am not necessarily from your future. For all we can tell, I may be from the future of another Leonardo da Vinci, whose destiny is, or was, not yours. Hence 'twould be a pointless unpleasantness to discuss certain matters."

"But what of the rest?" he protested. "You bespeak flying machines, automatons, elixirs injected into the flesh which prevent illness — oh,

endless wonders — Why must you merely hint?"

I said into his intensity: "Messer, you have the intellect to see the reason. If I gave you over-much knowledge or foresight, what might ensue? We lack wisdom and restraint, we mortals. Taverner has a — a license? — to entertain certain among us. But it must strictly be entertainment. Nothing decisive may happen here. We meet and part as in dreams, we at the Old Phoenix."

"What then can we do?" he demanded.

"Why, there are all the arts, there are stories real and imaginary, there are the eternal riddles of our nature and purpose and meaning, there are songs and games and jests and simply being together — But it is wrong that I act pompus toward you. I feel most honored and humble, and would like naught better than to hear whatever you with to say."

Humanly pleased, he answered, "Well, if you'll not tell me how the flying machine works — and, indeed, I can understand that if you did, 'twould avail me little, who lack the hoarded lore and instrumentalities of four or five hundred years — pray continue as you were when I interrupted. Finish relating your adventure."

I reminisced about a flight which had been forced down above the Arctic Circle, and how some Eskimos had helped us. His inquiries concerning them were keen, and led him on to experiences of his own, and to remarks about the variety and strangeness of man — As I said, had nothing else happened, this would still have been among the memorable evenings of my life.

The door opened and closed. We heard a footfall, caught a whiff of city streets which also served as garbage dumps and sewers, glimpsed crowded wooden houses on a cloudy day. The man who had appeared was rather short by my standards or against Leonardo, and middle-aged to gauge by features deeply lined though still sharply cut. Grizzled brown hair fell past his ears from under a flat velvet cap. He wore a monastic robe, with rosary and crucifix, but shoes and hose rather than sandals. His form was slender and straight, his gaze extraordinarily vivid.

Taverner excused himself from his conversation and hurried across the floor to give greeting. "Ah, welcome, welcome anew," he said in Old French — *langue·d' oïl*, to be exact. "At yonder table sit two gentlemen whose campanionship will surely pleasure you." He took the monk's arm. "Come, let me introduce you, my learned Master Abélard —"

The nun's voice cut through his. She surged to her feet; the chair clattered behind her. "Pier!" she cried. "O Jésu, O Maria, Pier!"

And he stood where he was for an instant as if a sword in his guts had stopped him. Then: "Héloise," cracked

out of his throat. "But thou art dead." He crossed himself, over and over. "Hast thou, thou, thou come back to comfort me, Héloise?"

Taverner looked disconcerted. He must have forgotten her presence. The noise and dice-casting at the bar died away. The starry gray ones became still. Alone the hearthfire spoke.

"No, what art thou saying, I, I am alive, Pier," the nun stammered. "But thou, my poor hurt darling —" She stumbled toward him. I saw how he half flinched, before he gathered courage and held out his arms.

They met, and embraced, and stood like that: until our plump, motherly barmaid suddenly shouted, "Well, good for you, dears!" They didn't notice, they had nobody but each other.

The rest of us eased a trifle. Evidently this wasn't a bad event. Erik lifted his drinking horn, Sancho guffawed at such behavior of ecclesiastics, van Rijn held out his mug for a refill, the strangers in the corner rustled and twinkled, Taverner wryly shrugged.

Leonardo leaned across the table and whispered to me, "Did I hear aright? Are those in truth Héloise and Abélard?"

"They must be," I answered, and knew not what to feel. "Belike not from your history or mine, however."

He had grasped the idea of universes parallel in multi-dimensional reality, in some of which magic worked, in some of which it did not, in some of which King Arthur or Orlando Furioso had actually lived, in some of which he himself had not. Now he murmured, "Well, quickly, lest we say unwitting a harmful thing, let's compare what our chronicles tell about them."

"Peter Abélard was the greatest Scholastic of his century," ran from me, while I tried to take my eyes off the weeping pair and could not. "He was in his forties when he met Héloise, a girl in her twenties. She was the niece and ward of a powerful, high-born canon. They fell in love, had a child, couldn't marry because of his career in the Church but — Anyway, her uncle found out and was enraged. He hired a gang of bullies to waylay Abélard and castrate him. After that, Héloise entered a convent — against her uncle's wish, I believe — and never saw her lover again. But the bond that held them was unchanged — the world will always remember the letters that passed between them — and in my day they lie buried together."

Leonardo nodded. "Yes, that sounds like what I read. I seem to recall that they did marry, albeit secretly."

"Perhaps my memory is at fault."

"Or mine. It was long ago. For us. God in Heaven, though, they two yonder —!"

Maybe they consciously recalled this was the single place they could meet; or maybe they, like most people in their age, had scant notion of pri-

vacy; or maybe they didn't give a damn. I heard what they blurted forth through their tears.

They were from separate timelines. She might belong to Leonardo's and mine, if ours were the same; her story was familiar to us both. But he, he was still a whole man. For him, three years before, she had died in childbirth.

Meanwhile Taverner led them to an offside couch; and the barmaid fetched refreshments, which they didn't see; and host and hostess breathed to them what no one else could hear. Not that anybody wanted to. As if half ashamed, they at the bar returned to their boozing, Leonardo and I to our talk; they in the corner waited silent.

My campanion soon lost his embarrassment. Tender-heartedness is not notably a Renaissance trait. Since we knew equally little about the branchings of existence, we were free to wonder aloud about them. He got onto constructing such a world-of-if (suppose Antony had triumphed at Actium, because the library at Alexandria had not caught fire when Julius Caesar laid siege, and in it were Heron's plans for a submersible warcraft ... well, conceivably, somewhere among the dimensions it *did* happen) that I too, chiming in here and there, well-nigh lost awareness of the nun and her Schoolman.

Again the door interrupted us — half an hour later, an hour, I'm not sure. This time I spied a lawn, trees, ivy-covered red brick buildings, before it shut. The man who had arrived was old and not tall; yet much robustness remained to him. He wore an open-necked shirt, fuzzy sweater, faded slacks, battered sneakers. A glory of white hair framed the kind of plain, gentle, but thoughtful and characterful Jewish face that Rembrandt liked to portray.

He saw Héloise and Abélard together, and smiled uncertainly. "*Guten Abend,*" he ventured; and in English: "Good evening. Maybe I had better not —"

"Ah, do stay!" exclaimed Taverner, hurrying toward him, while the eyes popped in van Rijn's piratical visage and my pulse ran wild.

Taverner took the newcomer by the elbow and steered him toward us. "By all means, do," he urged. "True, we've had a scene, but harmless, yes, I'd say benign. And here's a gentleman I know you've been wanting to meet." He reached our table and made a grand flourish. "Messer Leonardo da Vinci ... Herr Doktor Albert Einstein. ..." I suppose he included me.

Of course, the Italian had not heard of the Jew, but he sensed what was afoot and bowed deeply. Einstein, more diffident, nevertheless responded with similar grace and sat down amidst polite noises all around. "Do you mind if I smoke?" he asked. We didn't, so he kindled a pipe while the barmaid brought new drinks. Neither of my tablemates did more than sip, how-

ever, and I wasn't about to spoil this for myself by getting drunk the way they were doing over at the bar.

Besides, I must be interpreter. Einstein's Italian was limited, and of a date centuries later than Leonardo's, who had neither German nor English. *I* interpreted. Do you see why I will never risk my standing at the Old Phoenix?

They needed a while to warm up. Einstein was eager to learn what this or that cryptic notation of Leonardo's referred to. But Leonardo must have Einstein's biography related to him.

When he realized what that signified, his blue eyes became blowtorches, and I had trouble following every word that torrented from him. We thus got some pauses. Furthermore, occasionally even those chain lightning minds must halt and search before going on. Hence, unavoidably, I noticed Héloise and Abélard anew.

They sat kissing, whispering, trembling. This was the sole night they could have, she alive, he his entire self — the odds against their ever chancing to meet here were unmeasurably huge — and what was allowed them, by the law of the hostel and the law of their holy orders? Tick, said a grandfather clock by the wall, tick, tick; here too, a night is twelve hours long.

Taverner scuttled around in the unobtrusive way he can don when he wants to. They started trading songs at the bar. The taproom is big enough that that doesn't annoy anyone who hasn't a very good ear; and Einstein and Leonardo, who did, were too engaged with each other.

*What does the smile mean upon Mona Lisa and your several Madonnas?*

*Will you give to me again that melody of Bach's?*

*How did you fare under Sforza, how under Borgia, how under King Francis?*

*How did you fare in Switzerland, how against Hitler, how with Roosevelt?*

*What physical considerations led you to think men might build wings?*

*What evidence proves that the earth goes around the sun, that light has a finite speed, that the stars are also suns?*

*What makes you doubt the finiteness of the universe?*

*Well, sir, why have you not analyzed your concept of space-time as follows?*

Taverner and the barmaid spoke low behind their hands. Finally she went to Héloise and Abélard. "Go on upstairs," she said through tears of her own. "You've only this while, and it's wearing away."

He looked up like a blind man. "We took vows," came from his lips.

Héloise closed them with hers. "Thou didst break thine before," she told him, "and we praised the goodness of God."

"Go, go," said the barmaid. Almost by herself, she raised them to their feet.

I saw them leave, I heard them on the stairs.

And then Leonardo: "Doctor Alberto, you waste your efforts."

He grimaced; the hands knotted around his goblet. "I cannot follow your mathematics, your logic. I have not the knowledge —"

But Einstein leaned forward, and his voice too was less than steady. "You have the brain. And, yes, a fresh view, an insight not blinkered by four centuries of progress point by point ... down a single road, when we know in this room there are many, many...."

"You cannot explain to me in a few hours —"

"No, but you can get a general idea of what I mean, and I think you, out of everybody who ever lived, can see where ... where I am astray — and from me, you can carry back home —"

Leonardo flamed.

"No."

That was Taverner. He had come up on the empty side of our table; and he no longer seemed stumpy or jolly.

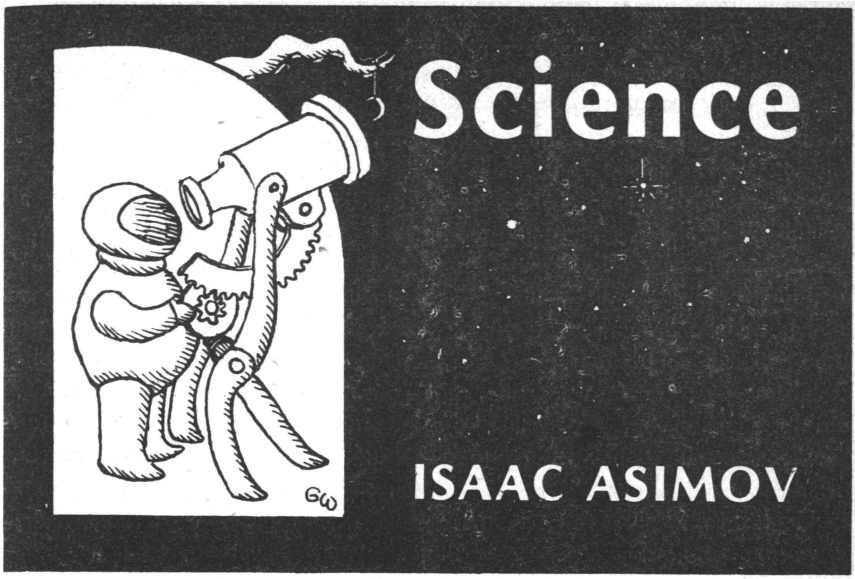
"No, gentlemen," he said in language after language. His tone was not stern, it was regretful. But it never wavered. "I fear I must ask you to change the subject. You would learn more than should be. Both of you."

We stared at him, and the silence around us turned off the singing. Leonardo's countenance froze. Finally Einstein smiled lopsidedly, scraped back his chair, stood, knocked the dottle from his pipe. Its odor was bittersweet. "My apologies, Herr Gastwirt," he said in his soft fashion. "You are right. I forgot." he bowed. "This evening has been an honor and a delight. Thank you."

Turning, his small stooped form departed.

When the door had shut on him, Leonardo sat unmoving for another while. Taverner threw me a rueful grin and went back to his visiting mysteries. The men at the bar, who had sensed a problem and quieted down, now cheered up and grew rowdier yet. When Mrs. Hauksbee walked in, they cheered.

Leonardo cast his goblet on the floor. Glass flew outward, wine fountained red. "Héloise and Abélard!" he roared. "*They* will have had their night!"




## THE INCONSTANT MOON

When I was twenty years old I was in love for the first time. It was the palest, most feckless and harmless love you can imagine, but I was only twenty and backward for my age.*

At any rate, I took the worshipped object to the fairgrounds, where there were all sorts of daredevil rides, and paused before the roller-coaster.

I had never been on a roller-coaster, but I knew exactly what it was — in theory. I had heard the high-pitched female screams that rent the air as the vehicle swooped downward, and the manner in which each young woman clung with calculated closeness to the young man next to her had been observed by me.

It occurred to me that if my date and I went on a roller-coaster, she would scream and cling closely to me, and that sensation, I was sure (even though I had not yet experienced it) would be a pleasant one. I therefore suggested the roller-coaster and the young woman, with unruffled composure, agreed.

As we were slowly cranked up to the first peak, I remember speculating on the possibilities of kissing her while she glued herself to me in helpless terror. I even

**Don't feel bad, Gentle Reader, I've made up for it since.*

tried to carry out this vile scheme as we topped the rise and started moving downward.

What stopped me was the agonizing discovery that I was possessed of a virulent case (till then unexpected) of acrophobia, a morbid fear of heights and falling.

It was I who clung to the young lady (who seemed unaffected by either sensation, that of falling or that of being clung to), and I did not enjoy it, either. What I wanted the young lady to be, with every fiber of my being, was the solid Earth.

I survived the voyage, but the impression of macho coolness that I had been trying to cultivate was irretrievably ruined and, needless to say, I did not get the girl. (I probably wouldn't have, anyway.)

Of course, you mustn't make this out worse than it is. It is only my own falling that I am averse to and consider to be a bad idea. I don't lose my sleep over other things falling. I have never, for instance, worried about the Moon falling.*

As it happens, though, the Moon is not falling. The fact is, indeed, quite the reverse, which brings me to the topic of this month's essay.

Last month, I discussed the manner in which the tides sapped the rotational energy of the Earth, causing the Earth's rotation to slow and the day to increase in length at the rate of 1 second every 62,500 years.

I explained that the Moon, with a smaller rotational energy than Earth, and subjected to a stronger tidal influence from the more massive Earth than we are from the less massive Moon, had its day lengthen at a more rapid rate. The Moon's period of rotation is 27.32 days now, a period that is exactly equal to its period of revolution about the Earth (relative to the stars).

With the period of its rotation equal to the period of its revolution, the Moon faces one side always to the Earth. One tidal bulge on the Moon always faces directly toward us and the other directly away from us. The Moon does not rotate through the bulges and the tidal action has ceased. Therefore, its day is no longer lengthening after the fashion of the past.

The Moon is still subject to a *little* tidal influence from Earth, however.

The Moon's orbit is slightly elliptical. That means that it is closer to the Earth during one half of its orbit than during the other. When the Moon is closer than average to the Earth, it moves a bit faster than average; when it is farther away, it moves a bit slower.

On the other hand, its rate of rotation is absolutely steady, regardless of the Moon's distance from the Earth.

**Not that it's such a bad thing to worry about. Newton did, and one thing leading to another, he ended with the theory of universal gravitation.*

When the Moon is in the close half of its orbit, its faster orbital speed outpaces its rotational speed, and the Moon's surface (as viewed from Earth) seems to drift very slowly from east to west. In the far half of its orbit, the slower orbital speed falls behind the rotational speed, and the Moon's surface (again as viewed from Earth) seems to drift very slowly from west to east.

This slow oscillation of the Moon's surface, first in one direction for two weeks and then in the other direction for two weeks more, is called "libration" from the Latin word for "scales." (The Moon seems to be swaying slightly back and forth around an equilibrium point, as scales do when a small weight has been placed in one pan or the other.)

Because of libration, the tidal bulge does move slightly and consumes rotational energy. This tends to damp the libration very slowly and tends to lock the Moon more tightly in place. The only way this can happen is for the Moon's orbit to become less elliptical and more nearly circular. If the Moon's orbit were perfectly circular, the rate of rotation and of revolution would match precisely, and libration would end.

The fact that the Moon does not revolve in the plane of the Earth's equator introduces an off-center pull of the Earth's equatorial bulge, which again produces a tidal influence that can be countered by the Moon's slowly shifting into the equatorial plane.

These secondary tidal influences I have just described are weaker than the one which gradually slows a world's rotation, so that although there has been plenty of time to slow the Moon's rotation to its period of revolution, there has not yet been time to change its orbit into a circular one in the equatorial plane.

Consider Mars's two satellites, though. These were captured*, possibly late in Martian history. They would surely have been circling Mars, originally, in rather elliptical and sharply inclined orbits. They are small bodies, though, with very little rotational energy, and Mars's tidal influence has had its way with them. Not only do they face one side eternally toward Mars, but they move in circular orbits in Mars's equatorial plane.

But shouldn't Earth's rotation become gravitational locked, eventually, under the influence of the Moon's tidal effects?

We know that the Earth's period of rotation is slowing. Because the Moon has a smaller tidal effect on Earth than Earth has on the Moon, and because the Earth has considerably more rotational energy than the Moon ever had, the Earth's rate of rotation slows at a much more gradual pace than the Moon's did.

**See DARK AND BRIGHT, December, 1977*

Still, someday, *someday*, won't Earth's rate of rotation slow to the point where it equals the Moon's revolution about the Earth? Won't one side of the Earth always face the Moon, just as one side of the Moon always faces the Earth today? When that happens, the tidal bulge on Earth will also be stationary, and neither the Earth nor the Moon will be subject to each other's tidal influence, and doesn't that mean there will be no further change?

When that happens, the Earth might (one would suppose) have a month that was 27.32 days long, and Earth and Moon would circle each other rather like a dumb-bell; all in one piece, with the connecting rod being the insubstantial tidal influence.

Well, not quite right. When the dumb-bell rotation comes into existence, the period of Earth's rotation will not then be 27.32 days long.

To see why not, let's consider.

When rotational energy disappears, it can't *really* disappear, thanks to the law of conservation of energy, but it can (and does) change its form. It becomes heat. The loss of rotational energy is so slow that the heat formed is not significant and just adds, insensibly, to the heat gained from the Sun (which must be, and is, radiated away at night).

The Earth, as its rotation slows, also loses rotational angular momentum, and this, too, can't really disappear — thanks to the law of conservation of angular momentum. The loss must somehow be made up for by a gain elsewhere.

Angular momentum, without going into the mathematics of it, depends on two things: on the average speed of rotation about the axis of all parts of the rotating body, and on the average distance from the axis of all parts of the rotating body. The angular momentum goes up, or down, as the speed increases, or decreases, and also goes up, or down, as the distance increases, or decreases.

As the rotational angular momentum goes down through the loss of rotational speed, thanks to tidal action, this could be made up for, and the law of conservation of angular momentum preserved, if the average distance of all parts of the Earth from the axis of rotation were to increase. In other words, all would be well if a slowing Earth could expand in size — but it can't. The Earth is not going to expand against the pull of its own gravity.

Where does that leave us?

Well, the Earth and Moon circle each other in a monthly revolution so that there is a revolutionary angular momentum, as well as rotational ones for each body. The two bodies circle the center of gravity of the Earth-Moon system.

The location of the center of gravity depends on something that we would recognize as the principle of the seesaw. If two people of equal mass were on op-

posite ends of a seesaw, that seesaw would balance if the fulcrum were under the exact middle of the plank. If one person were more massive than the other, the fulcrum would have to be nearer the more massive person. To be exact, the mass of person A multiplied by his or her distance from the fulcrum must be equal to the mass of person B multiplied by his or her distance from the fulcrum. If person A is 10 times as massive as person B, person A must be only 1/10 as far from the fulcrum as person B.

Imagine Earth and Moon at opposite edges of a seesaw and with the fulcrum replaced by "center of gravity." Earth is 81.3 times as massive as the Moon. Therefore, the distance from the center of the Earth to the center of gravity must be 1/81.3 times as far as the distance from the center of the Moon to the center of gravity. The average distance of the center of the Earth from the center of the Moon is 484,404 kilometers (238,869 miles). If we take 1/81.3 of that, we get 4,728 kilometers (2,938 miles).

This means that the center of the Earth is 4,728 kilometers (2,938 miles) from the center of gravity, while the center of the Moon is, naturally, 379,676 kilometers (235,931 miles) from it. Both Moon and Earth revolve about this center of gravity once each 27.32 days, the Moon making a large circle, and the Earth a much smaller one.

In fact, the center of gravity, being only 4,728 kilometers (2,938 miles) from the Earth's center, is closer to the Earth's center than the Earth's surface is. The center of gravity of the Earth-Moon system is located 1,650 kilometers (1,025 miles) *beneath* the surface of the Earth.

One can therefore say, without too great a lie, that the Moon is revolving about the Earth. It is not, however, revolving about the Earth's center.

If the Moon's orbit were an exact circle, the Earth's center would also describe an exact circle though one with only 1/81.3 times the diameter. Actually, the Moon's orbit is slightly elliptical, which means that the distance between Moon and Earth increases and decreases slightly in the course of the month. The position of the center of gravity moves slightly farther and closer to the Earth's center in consequence.

At its farthest, the center of gravity of the Earth-Moon system is 5,001 kilometers (3,107 miles) from Earth's center; and at its closest, it is 4,383 kilometers (2,724 miles) from the Earth's center. Its position, therefore, varies from 1,377 to 1,995 kilometers (867 to 1,240 miles) beneath the surface of the Earth.

It is therefore perfectly possible to balance the loss of rotational angular momentum with an equal gain in revolutionary angular momentum. This will take place if the distance of the Earth and the Moon from the center of gravity increases.

This is another way of saying that as the tidal influence of the Moon very gradually slows the Earth's rotation, it very gradually increases the Moon's distance from us. So, as I said at the beginning of this essay, the Moon is not falling, it is rising.

As the Moon recedes from us, its apparent angular diameter decreases. In the far past, it was distinctly closer and, therefore, larger in appearance. In the far future, it will be distinctly farther and, therefore, smaller in appearance.

That means that in the future, total eclipses of the Sun will cease being visible from the surface of the Earth. At the present moment, the Moon is already somewhat smaller in apparent diameter than the Sun is, so that even when the Moon is directly in front of the Sun, it tends not to cover it all. A thin rim of the Sun laps beyond the Moon all around, and an "annular eclipse" is formed.* That's because the average angular diameter of the Sun is 0.533° and that of the Moon is 0.518°.

If the Moon's orbit about the Earth were exactly circular and the Earth's orbit about the Sun were exactly circular, that would be it. There would be only annular eclipses at best and never any total eclipse.

However, Earth's orbit is slightly elliptical, so that its distance from the Sun varies. The Sun therefore tends to be a little farther than average during one half the year and a little nearer than average the other half. I've already mentioned that this is true of the Moon in its monthly cycle.

The Sun is smallest in appearance when it is farthest and its angular diameter is then 0.524°. The Moon is largest in appearance when it is nearest and its angular diameter is then 0.558°. There is therefore the possibility of a total eclipse of the Sun, when the Sun is farther off (and smaller) than usual, or the Moon is nearer (and larger) than usual or both.

As, under tidal influence, the Moon recedes, its apparent diameter throughout its orbit will decrease, and, if we assume the Sun will remain at its present distance in the meanwhile (as it will) then the time will come when the Moon, even at its closest, will have an angular diameter of less than 0.524°. After that, no total eclipse will be visible from the Earth's surface at any time.

The Moon will have to recede from a closest approach of 356,334 kilometers (221,426 miles) as at present, to a closest approach of 379,455 kilometers (235,793 miles) if it is to appear, even at its largest, no larger than the Sun at its smallest. The Moon must recede 23,121 kilometers (14,367 miles) for this to happen.

How long will it take the Moon to recede by so much?

*See *THE ECLIPSE AND I, January 1974.*

At the present moment the Moon is receding from us at the rate of 3 centimeters (1.2 inches) per year or, roughly 2.5 millimeters (0.1 inch) each revolution.

At that rate, it will take the Moon about 750,000,000 years to recede that far. Actually, it should take longer, since as the Moon recedes, its tidal influence weakens and its rate of recession slowly declines. I should suspect it would take closer to a billion years for the recession.

The situation, it appears, would not be so bad. The number of total eclipses per century will slowly decline, the number of annular eclipses will slowly increase, and the duration of the total eclipses that do occur will gradually shorten, but it will be nearly a billion years before the total eclipses cease altogether.

And, for that matter, allowing for stronger tidal influences in the past, it may have been only 600,000,000 years ago, when the first trilobites were evolving, that annular eclipses were impossible. Every time the Moon, then slightly larger in appearance than it is now, would pass squarely in front of the Sun, the eclipse had to be total.

Let's get back now to the slowing rotation of the Earth.

As the Earth's rotation rate slows, the Moon's distance increases and its time of revolution about the Earth also increases. (In addition, tidal influences will see to it that the Moon's period of rotation will slow in time with the slowing of its period of revolution.)

Thus, by the time that the Moon has receded to a distance which will make total eclipses impossible, the month will no longer be 27.32 days long relative to the stars, but will be 29.98 days long. And as the Moon continues to recede, the month will continue to grow longer.

By the time that the Earth's period of rotation has lengthened to 27.32 days — the length of the present period of revolution of the Moon — the then-period of revolution will be substantially longer, and the Earth's rotation will have to continue to slow before the dumb-bell rotation will be set up.

Is it possible that the Earth will never catch up? That no matter how slowly it rotates, the Moon will retreat so far that its period of revolution will always be longer?

No, the Earth's rotation *will* catch up. When the Earth's rotation has slowed to the point where the day is equal to 47 present-days, the Moon will have receded so far that its period of revolution will also be equal to 47 present-days.

At that time, the distance of the Moon from the Earth will be, on the average, 551,620 kilometers (342,780 miles), and its apparent angular diameter will be about 0.361°.

Then we will have Earth and Moon revolving about each other dumb-bell

fashion, and if there were no outside interference that would continue forever.

But there *is* outside interference. There is the Sun.

The Sun exerts a tidal effect on the Earth, as the Moon does, but to a different extent. The tidal effect on the Earth by each of two bodies varies directly with the mass of the two bodies and inversely as the *cube* of the distances.

The Sun's mass is 27,000,000 times that of the Moon. However, the Sun's distance from the Earth is 389.17 times the Moon's distance from the Earth, and the cube of 389.17 is about 58,950,000. If we divide 27,000,000 by 58,950,000, we find that the Sun's tidal effect on the Earth is only about 0.46 that of the Moon.

The tidal effect on Earth of all bodies other than the Sun and the Moon is insignificant. We can say, then, that the total tidal effect on Earth is roughly 2/3 Moon-caused and 1/3 Sun-caused.

The lengthening of the day by 1 second in 62,500 years is the result of the tidal effect of Moon and Sun combined, and it is the combined effect that is balanced by the recession of the Moon.

Once the Earth and Moon reach their dumb-bell revolution, however, the Moon's tidal effect virtually vanishes. That leaves the Sun's tidal effect alone in the field. Without going into details, the Sun's tidal influence on Earth and Moon together is such as to speed the rotation of both bodies and balance that increase in rotational angular momentum by a decrease in revolutionary angular momentum.

In other words, the Moon will begin to spiral closer to the Earth. (*Then*, finally, it will be falling.) The Moon will come closer and closer to the Earth, and there is apparently no limit on how close it can come — except that it will never actually crash into the Earth.

As the Moon approaches the Earth, the tidal effect of the Earth on the Moon will increase. By the time the center of the Moon aproaches to only about 15,000 kilometers (9,600 miles) from the center of the Earth, and the surface of the Moon is only 7,400 kilometers (4,600 miles) from the surface of the Earth, the Moon will be revolving about the Earth once every 5.3 hours. By then, the Earth's tidal effect on the nearby Moon will be 15,000 times as great as it is now, or 500,000 times the intensity of the Moon's present tidal effect upon us.

Under those conditions, Earth's tidal influence will begin to pull the Moon apart into a number of sizable fractions. These will collide and fragment and gradually, through continuing tidal effects, spread out over the entire orbit of the Moon, forming a flat, circular ring in the equatorial plane of the Earth.

In short, the Earth will acquire a ring, smaller in actual extent than Saturn's, but much denser in material, and much brighter, since Earth's rings will be much

closer to the Sun (despite the fact that the Moon-rings will be made up of dark rock rather than the ice of Saturn's rings).

Will there be human beings present on Earth to watch those beautiful rings? Not unless we had long since left Earth and were watching from a distance.

The Moon's tidal effect upon Earth at the time of its own breakup would be 15,000 times what it is now. That would not be enough to break up the Earth, since it would be far less than Earth's tidal effect on the Moon, and since the Earth would be held together by a stronger gravitational pull.

The Moon's tidal effect would, however, be strong enough to create tides several kilometers high and would send the oceans washing over the continents from one end to the other.

After the Moon's breakup, the tidal effect on us, coming, as it would, from all directions, would cancel out and disappear; but by then, after millions of years of enormous tides, the damage would have been done. It's hard to see how land life, or perhaps any life could survive under such conditions.

That point is, however, academic, since the Earth would have ceased to be habitable long before the Moon started approaching again.

Let's go back to the dumb-bell rotation, with Earth's day 47 present-days in length.

Imagine what it would mean having the Sun shine down for some 560 hours between rising and setting. It shines for longer than that at one time in the regions of the pole, of course, but the Sun is then skimming the horizon. Imagine 560 hours between Sunrise and Sunset in the tropics with the Sun riding high in the sky. There's no doubt that by mid-afternoon the oceans would be nearly (if not quite) boiling.

That alone would put into serious question the habitability of the Earth, without our having to regard the Antarctic conditions to which the Earth would sink in the course of a 560-hour long night.

The alternation in temperature between prolonged day and prolonged night would make it very difficult, if not impossible, for life to maintain a foothold on the planet.

And yet that point is academic, too, as we will find when we calculate the time it would take for the Moon to recede to a distance at which its period of revolution would be 47 days. It will by that time have receded 167,200 kilometers (104,000 miles) beyond its present distance.

If its present rate of recession of 3 centimeters a year were to continue year after year, then it would take something like 55,700,000,000 years for the Moon to recede to the point where Earth and Moon were revolving dumb-bell fashion.

The rate of recession will not continue at its present rate, however. As the Moon recedes, its tidal effect on Earth recedes, Earth's rate of rotational slowdown decreases and the Moon's rate of recession would decrease, too.

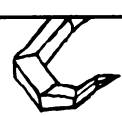
My guess is that it would take at least 70,000,000,000 years for the dumb-bell situation to be achieved.

And of what significance is such a period of time, when in 7,000,000,000 years (just one-tenth the time required for reaching the dumb-bell situation) the Sun will expand into a red giant and both Earth and Moon will be physically destroyed?

In the course of the 7,000,000,000 years before the Earth is made uninhabitable by the heating and expanding Sun, the Earth's period of rotation will have slowed down only to the point where the day would be 55 hours long. In fact, allowing for the slow decrease in intensity of the Moon's tidal effect, I suspect the day would be 48 hours long, or just twice its present length.

It will then get hotter during the day and colder during the night than it does now, and Earth won't be as pleasant a place then as it is today — but it will still be habitable, if that were all we had to worry about.

But there *is* the Sun, and assuming that humanity survives for seven billion years, it will be the expanding Sun that will drive us away from our planet and not the slowing rotation.



## ADDENDUM

In my article PROXIMA (F&SF, January 1979) I imagined the Sun to be having a close red-dwarf companion similar to Alpha Centauri C and wondered if there were any conclusive evidence that it doesn't exist.

Alas, I have received a letter from James D. Greenfield of Phoenix, Arizona to the effect that the evidence now available is indeed almost conclusive. He says —

"... of the 400 or so stars brighter than 4th apparent magnitude, all but 50 had their parallaxes measured by the mid-1950s, and most of those 50 were type B &blue giants). By now probably *all* the stars brighter than 4th magnitude have been checked, and (as far as I know) *none* of them has a parallax greater than 1". In fact, almost all the stars visible to the unaided eyes ... have been so checked."

The final paragraph of his letter read: "To conclude then: if the Sun does have a faint red-dwarf companion, it is almost certainly fainter than apparent magnitude 6, and almost certainly half a light year away or more. And, it is almost certainly on our lists and will be found."

—Isaac Asimov

*James Girard wrote "Something's Coming" (F&SF, May 1975) and since then has sold to NEW DIMENSIONS and* Penthouse, *among others. The idea behind his new story is this: What if it were possible for you to go back in time to visit your younger self. Could you pick a time, a piece of advice that might change your life? It turns into a surprising and moving story.*

# *In Trophonius's Cave*

BY

## JAMES P. GIRARD

The wire slipped off again, stinging the back of Max Kufus' hand, and he jerked backward with a grunt and then said, "Shit!" and sat back heavily on the shed's dirt floor, catching himself on one hand. He wiped the other across his forehead, then reached out absent-mindedly for the bottle standing on the busted chair against the wall, and took a swallow.

His hand was slippery with sweat, where he'd wiped his forehead, and he took care not to drop the bottle. He'd left one of the heavy wooden doors open, for light as well as air, but it was still dark and close in the shed. When he'd begun, a little after noon, there'd been a wind, and clouds had been racing overhead, but it was still now, and he knew that the clouds had bunched up overhead, even without seeing them.

He stared at the bicycle wheel a minute, thinking of saying the hell with it, then reminded himself of how he'd feel tomorrow, when he'd be completely sober, if he let himself give up. It had been bad enough when he'd

busted it, what with Dougie going around all day trying to pretend it didn't really matter to him, though he'd finally managed to put the guilt out of his mind — something he'd had a lot of practice at over the years. He sighed and put it away again, letting himself remember instead the moments he'd already spent enjoying Dougie's reaction when he found the spokes repaired, his own rare moment of self-congratulation. Over the years he'd come to know which disappointments hurt the most; this would be one, if he let it. He rocked forward onto his feet again, nearly losing his balance, and come to rest in a squat, fumbling at the bent spoke.

The other one had been fairly easy because the little metal socket had still been in the rim and there'd been enough wire to work with. So he'd been able to thread it and then nip the end enough to keep the wire from pulling back out. It looked like it ought to be soldered or something; it probably wasn't the way they'd do it at a bike shop. But it looked like the wheel would ride straight enough for the time being, especially if he could fix the other busted spoke. Maybe by the time it came loose again, he'd be able to figure out something better, or he'd have enough money to get it done right or to get a new wheel or even a new bike for the kid. He smiled and took another swallow of whisky; that was an old joke.

The problem with the remaining spoke was that the socket had pulled out along with the spoke and gotten lost, leaving only the hole in the rim — too much hole and not enough wire, so that no matter how he contrived to twist the end, it slipped out again. What he really needed was something to replace the socket with.

He laid the wheel down on its axle and rose stiffly to his feet, then picked his way gingerly through old paint buckets and odd lengths of wood, laid edgewise, getting close enough to the shelf holding the nail and screw jars to reach over and lift out the one he wanted, hooking two fingers inside the dusty rim. He carried it to the chair and poured out an assortment of odd-ball bits of metal beside the whisky bottle.

He frowned and pushed the stuff around with one finger, hunched over to peer at it in the half-light, but nothing suggested itself. There were some little L-shaped braces he'd once used to make a bookshelf for Georgette, a few rusty springs, some old brackets from the windowshades that had once hung in the kitchen, where the window now was unadorned, and a lot of other odd metal things whose uses were long lost to memory. He sighed and scooped the stuff back into the jar, along with dust from the chair, then left the jar sitting where it was and turned back to the bicycle wheel, beginning to feel defeated.

He had always been good at figuring things out, at thinking of ways to

do things that most people wouldn't have thought of. One year in school, they'd put him in a special class with all the gifted kids. But he hadn't been like them; he hadn't cared enough about it, and so he hadn't made good grades. Anyway, he'd known, as everyone else had, that he was only going to wind up working at the processing plant, like his old man. Being able to figure out different ways of doing things didn't count for much there.

If he could have figured out how to kick the booze, that would have been worth something to him at one time, but it had had him stumped, just like this damned bicycle wheel. He shrugged and took another drink.

Suppose his bigself showed up right now and told him to go on the wagon, even gave him some good reason for doing so? It was a fantasy he'd enjoyed for a while after the bigselves started coming around, as if it might somehow be a way out, although it was mostly little kids who got visited. Anyway, it hadn't taken him long to reason it out: If his bigself came back with that kind of advice, it would mean he hadn't kicked the habit, up ahead in the future, and was trying to go back and change things. And why should he take the advice from himself, 30 years older, that he wouldn't take from himself now? The thing to do would be to go back to when he was 17, when he'd started drinking, and give himself a good kick in the ass — except that there hadn't been any visits until two years ago, that anybody knew about. So it probably wasn't possible.

He stared at the far corner of the shed, not seeing it, thinking that a kick in the ass probably wouldn't be necessary; all he'd have to do would be to show himself where he was going to end up. You know what they call me? he'd say. Old Max, the alky, that's you, 30 years ahead. He remembered vividly the first time he'd heard it, down at the gas station when he was filling the car, from somebody talking in a normal tone of voice, not bothering to whisper, as if it wouldn't matter to him.

He shook his head sharply and grabbed the wheel, putting that too out of his mind. He spread his feet a bit, to brace himself, and got a better grip on the pliers. It looked like this job was going to boil down to brute force more than anything else — and strength had never been something he was long on.

Dougie Kufus walked home as slowly as he could, feeling the gray sky like a weight on the top of his head, pushing him into the earth. He didn't want to go home, but there was nowhere else he wanted to go either — especially not back to the schoolground, where the other kids were. And he couldn't just stand still; it'd get dark and some grown-up would come around and make him go home anyway. So he walked slowly, as if each step were the last.

Already he was thinking how it was going to be tomorrow in school — and not just tomorrow, but the whole rest of the seventh grade. He'd never in a million years figured on Jeff getting a visit from his bigself. They'd talked about it sometimes, imagining, but he'd always thought of it as one of those things that just happened to the kids on the other side of town, like stereoviewers and kiddicomputers and other expensive things. But now it was as if Jeff was one of those other kids, as if he'd changed somehow. What if all the other kids got visited, all over town, and he was the only one left? Suddenly he felt sure that was how it was going to be, that that was the way it was supposed to be for someone like him, Old Max's kid, the drunk's kid. Really, when he thought about it, Jeff had always been different from him: he had a mother, for one thing, and his father didn't drink much, even though he didn't work much either, and he was kind of mean; at least, he didn't get drunk all over town, so that the police had to bring him home sometimes, like Pop.

He kicked a rock hard, wanting it to smash against something, but it just skipped out into the street and bounced a couple of times and stopped. Maybe Jeff had just been fooling him all the time, pretending to be his friend; maybe everybody had been doing that, pretending he was just like them when really everybody knew that he was the only one different. He stopped for a moment, feeling desolate, on the verge of believing it, then shrugged and started walking again, thinking: maybe it's better to be that way. But it didn't make him feel any better.

When he got home the door was standing open even though it looked like it was going to rain, and he half expected to find Pop passed out on the couch or in the bedroom, but he wasn't anywhere around. Dougie went into the kitchen, feeling vaguely hungry, but all he could find was a package of the chipped beef Pop made gravy with sometimes. He tore it open and ate the thin slices one at a time, taking little bites to make it last longer, then went into the living room and flicked on the TV, throwing himself down on the armchair, sitting sideways against the sag so he'd be more or less upright.

The news was on, which he was supposed to watch for social studies, but he couldn't keep his mind on it. He wondered what Jeff's bigself had said. He hadn't asked because it was usually a secret and it wasn't polite to ask, though he'd wanted to. Jeff had told him that it happened while he was alone, while his mom and dad were out partying the night before. Everyone said that's how it always was — that the bigselves always showed up when you were by yourself because they couldn't stay very long, for some reason, and they didn't want to be interrupted. Jeff said his bigself had said he'd remembered that night because it was his parents' anniversary and they'd decid-

ed he was old enough to stay home by himself without a sitter. Jeff had said that was funny because they'd let him stay by himself a couple of times before, but he guessed his bigself must have forgotten about that.

It had never really occurred to Dougie before that the bigselves would have to remember when to show up, but it made sense, so they didn't have to waste time finding their littleselves or having to talk to a bunch of other people. He tried to think of when he'd go back and visit himself if he was a bigself now. It could be just about any night, he guessed, since he never knew whether Pop was going to be around or not. He frowned. If he had to figure out a time to visit himself, even just last week, he couldn't do it for sure. He was by himself a lot, but he wasn't sure exactly which days it had been. He tried to think back further, to some memorable time when he'd been all alone, but he couldn't remember the exact date of any particular time.

He leaned forward in the chair. That meant his bigself couldn't have visited him, up to now, because, if he couldn't remember a time for a visit, even last week, how was his bigself going to remember a time, 30 years from now?

He got up and walked distractedly into the kitchen, not with any purpose, just walking and thinking. Suppose he made a time for his bigself to visit — a time and a place he'd be sure to remember even if he had to scratch it on his skin. He stopped, his eyes growing suddenly wide. Whenever he did, it might be the time his bigself came, if he was ever going to come, and he could do it right now, tonight.

He put one thumb in his mouth and chewed at the nail, making a fist. It couldn't be here; Pop might show up anytime. He stared at the graying kitchen window, not seeing it, running down possibilities in his mind, then suddenly thought of the place where he and Jeff had made a hideout once, over on the far side of town, out past the houses along the river. But it was a long way away — a long way to ride a bike, let alone walk. He winced, remembering what had happened to the bike, and then realized for the first time that he was staring out the kitchen window at the shed, where the bike was, and he noticed that the big door was open and there was a light on inside.

He stood still for a moment, his lips pursed, wondering what to do about it. If he just slipped out the front door, he could be gone before Pop even knew he'd come home; on the other hand, Pop might be able to get the old car started. He probably wouldn't be willing to take Dougie where he really wanted to go, but he could tell Pop he had to go downtown for something, and that would get him halfway; he could figure it out from there.

He nodded to himself abruptly and headed out the back door and across the yard to the shed.

Pop was slumped against one wall, asleep, a pair of pliers in his hand and an empty whisky bottle lying beside him. Dougie's bike was sitting upside-down, balanced on the seat and handlebars, and the back wheel was off, lying at an angle in front of Pop. The tire and the deflated tube were hanging on the end of a shelf just above the busted chair.

Dougie stepped on into the shed, keeping quiet for the moment, and examined the wheel. One of the busted spokes looked like it had been fixed, but one was still disconnected. He licked his lips, then grabbed the wheel and slid it into the prongs of the bike frame, giving it a slight spin. It still wobbled from side to side but not nearly as badly as before; the one spoke seemed to make a lot of difference. It looked like it would turn, at least, without rubbing against the frame. He glanced around at the scattered parts. He'd never put a bike tire on from scratch, but he'd seen it done. He reached down and eased the pliers out of Pop's hand.

It was nearly dark outside by the time he finished, and it was growing windy again. Getting the tire onto the rim had had him baffled for a while until he'd figured out how to use a screwdriver to hold it down in one place while he forced it in the rest of the way around with the plier handle. Then he'd had to work on the axle nuts a long time to get the wheel centered enough not to rub. And when that was done, he'd realized that the disconnected spoke, which he'd tried to bend back out of the way, was going to come loose eventually and catch on the frame. So he'd gripped it with the pliers, down near the hub, and twisted it back and forth until it broke off. That left nothing but airing the tire, and he'd have to walk it down to the gas station to do that.

As he was wheeling it out, he glanced back at Pop and thought for a second that he ought to wake him up and make him go in the house and get in bed, but he didn't want to have to explain what he was up to or make up something. So he went on, closing the door behind him, in case it started raining.

Something loud woke Max up, and he struggled briefly, not recognizing the hot, dark place he awoke in, thinking it might be a jail cell. But then lightning struck again outside; thunder rattled the shed's roof, showing him where he was and reminding him of what he had been doing.

But the bike was gone, and the wheel with it — even the tire and tube. He licked his lips and looked around for the whisky bottle, found it lying empty beside the chair. The inside of his mouth was dry, and he needed something for it, but the rest of him was wet; sweat made his body itch all over.

He rose clumsily to all fours, then

to his feet, and looked at his watch but couldn't read it in the dark. He pushed through the heavy door, surprised to find a cool wind blowing outside, and twisted his wrist to catch the little light there was. It was only 7:20, though it looked dark enough to be 9 or 10 because of the clouds packed overhead. The scraggly backyard was dry and dust-patched. So it hadn't rained yet. He stretched his neck and scratched it, feeling the sweat drying quickly in the wind.

He supposed Dougie had come and found the bike half-fixed and had gone ahead and put it together and then gone for a ride. That made Max feel good, not only because he'd apparently fixed the bike enough to make it ridable but also because Dougie had been able to put it together by himself. Evidence that Dougie could take care of himself always made Max feel a little less guilty about things.

In the kitchen he checked the icebox for something to eat or drink but found neither. He thought about going after a bottle, but he wasn't sure the car would start, and it looked like it was going to rain like hell anytime. Anyway, he didn't have to have it, no matter what people thought.

He went into the living room, where the TV was on, and threw himself down on the sofa without bothering to turn on any lights. There was a nice breeze coming in the window at the far end of the room, and he really felt, as he did now and then, that he could get along without booze without too much effort. If he didn't go after a bottle the rest of the evening, then pretty soon it would be too late, and he'd have to wait until morning, and then it would be broad daylight, and he might be able to make himself go the whole day without a drink, and what he could do for one day he could do for one more, and so on, and he might never take another drink. He propped his hands behind his head, feeling generally optimistic about himself, although he knew that this was only a game he played with himself from time to time. He still had a few hours before the liquor stores closed, and he might fall asleep and spend the whole night without another drink — and that would be a plus, of sorts — though there was no real chance that he'd be able to make it through the day tomorrow or that he'd even think about doing so, once it was morning. But it was nice to halfway believe in the possibility for a while, when it didn't seem threatening, and he was feeling good anyway about Dougie's bike.

Thinking of that, he twisted his neck slightly and looked toward the front door, where he expected to see Dougie momentarily. He was pretty sure the kid had sense enough to come in out of the rain, unlike his old man.

He frowned, realizing for the first time that Dougie hadn't bothered to wake him up and make him go to bed, as he usually did. He shrugged. The

kid had probably been excited about his bike and in a hurry to take a ride before it got too dark. It wasn't like him to leave the TV on, either, come to think of it.

Max looked at the TV again, thinking for a moment it was a scene from a movie he'd seen somewhere, but then realizing it was one of the new shows, he wondered momentarily whether it might be one of the R-rated ones they were showing now but then remembered they were only showing them after 9 p.m. The window lightened briefly and thunder banged outside, and he frowned again, hoping Dougie would get back soon.

The tire still wobbled enough to make him concentrate on keeping his balance, but after a couple of blocks he had the hang of it, and he began to feel good. There was a little bit of breeze coming up behind him now, drying the sweat he'd worked up in the shed and walking the bike to the gas station, and he was happy to be riding again, going as fast as he dared down the broad street running between bars and used-car lots toward the nice side of town, where streetlamps were just beginning to glow faintly ahead of him, reminding him of why he was taking the ride. As he thought of it, his stomach gave a quick jerk from excitement. He wondered if his bigself might even be waiting for him when he got there, and he rose a little on the pedals, sending the bike shooting on ahead a little faster.

It wasn't until he'd had to turn off the big road into the darker neighborhood streets leading toward the river that he began to feel less confident. What if his bigself didn't show up? Would it mean he wasn't coming? Or would it just mean that he'd have to remember the time and place until he was the bigself, so he could go back? He sat back on the seat, noticing that his legs were growing tired, and let the bike coast a little, just pedaling every now and then when he had to swing out to pass a parked car. There was no traffic here, and the houses blocked the wind that had been blowing down the big boulevard. So there was no sound except his breathing and the crunch of his tires over occasional pebbles, and now and then an unseen dog in some backyard complaining of his passage.

If he did come back and visit himself when he got to be a bigself, then wouldn't he remember being visited when he was a littleself? He remembered now that they'd talked about that in science class one day — it had something to do with what they called a paradox — but he couldn't remember now what the teacher had said about it, and he wished he could. Because if the only bigselves who went back where the ones who remembered being visited, then that's how they'd remember the time and place — it wouldn't take any special remembering, like he was planning on.

But if it was just the bigselves who remembered being visited...why

should they bother to go back? In that case, it wouldn't change anything. But if they didn't go back, how could they remember being visited? So it had to be the ones who didn't remember being visited, who wanted to change things by going back. But did that mean that all the kids who were being visited now wouldn't bother to go back when they got to be bigselves? Because, really, if things were changed, then by the time they got to be bigselves, they'd be different bigselves from the ones who visited them in the first place...

He shook his head, feeling slightly nauseous. It just kept going around and around in his mind, like one of those dreams that kept repeating and waking you up all night long, so that it seemed like you never got any sleep.

The important thing, he thought, forcing himself to grab onto the thought, was that things had to change — that's what it was all about; that's why the bigselves started coming in the first place, to make things change. So, if his bigself showed up tonight, that would be great. But if he didn't, it would just mean that Dougie would have to plan on coming back himself eventually and that he'd have this time and place to do it.

He leaned forward again, pedaling steadily, anxious now to get beyond the neat, dark houses that made him feel small and alone. he had been this way in daylight, and he knew kids who lived in this part of town, but nothing looked familiar in the dark. He saw faces at the bright windows now and then and realized that none of them could see him passing by outside, and it made him feel as if he were somehow beyond their reach, for good or ill, as if he were a ghost.

By the time he reached the gravel stretch leading to the riverbank, he was tired and winded and confused and even a little scared; it was darker out beyond the houses, and there was a strong wind behind him now, seeming to stand between him and the town, as if he couldn't turn back, and the insect sounds made it seem like a long way from anywhere.

The wobbly tire made it too hard to fight the bike through the gravel. So he got off and pushed it, breathing hard, and it took him a while to find the path in the darkness. When he did, it seemed as if the bank were steeper than he remembered, so that it was scary going down toward the narrow level path just above the dark water, and then the place where the big concrete pipe ran out of the earth — their old hideout — looked like a black pit, so that he stood for a moment working up his courage, remembering for the first time tales of snakes and wild animals.

When he did finally enter, leaving his bike on the path, he was surprised to find himself walking in a narrow stream of water. It had never really occurred to him before to wonder what the pipe was for; he had sort of vaguely supposed it was to keep the river from overflowing by taking in water

when it rose that high. Now it occurred to him that there might be some danger in hanging around in it, although he planned to stick close to the end, and he figured he could get out quick enough if he had to.

Once he got a few feet inside, it didn't seem so dark anymore, thanks to the gray light filtering in from the opening. It was hot, though, and none of the wind seemed to get in. He began to itch and jerk after a few minutes, but he couldn't tell if it was from nighttime insects or sweat. After some experimentation he found a way to half sit and half lie with his knees arched over the stream, his back against one slope of the pipe.

Once he had gotten used to the heat and the darkness, the silence began to bother him, so that he kept still and listened hard for outside noises. But then he began to think he heard faint sounds from further inside the pipe, and that worried him a lot until he decided it must just be the echoes of his own small sounds, and he even sang a couple of songs, in a low voice, to prove it to himself but stopped that when the echo began to seem kind of scary.

Finally, he decided to concentrate on listening for the sound of footsteps from outside, but he listened for a long time and nothing happened — although now and then there was a flash of light which might have been distant lightning or passing headlights on the road above — and he grew bored and even began to feel a little silly about the whole thing.

He thought of Pop and felt guilty for having left him on the floor of the shed, and he thought maybe he'd better be starting back soon because, anyway, he was beginning to feel kind of sleepy and the pipe was uncomfortable. But it was going to be an awful long ride back, and he thought he'd better rest awhile before he started. So he laid his head back against the arching concrete and closed his eyes for a moment.

He was cold and wet, and when he woke up he thought at first he might have peed on himself in his sleep, but then he felt the wind from the window and saw the strip of water running clear from the window to the couch, and he shivered and sat up, feeling dizzy. There was a kind of flapping light from somewhere, making it hard to focus on things, and it took him a moment to realize it came from the TV, where a test pattern was rolling over and over.

He got up and turned it off, feeling stiff and sore, then went and closed the window. He was on his way down the hall to his bedroom when he remembered about Dougie, and so he looked in the kid's room just to make sure, but he couldn't tell whether there was anyone in the bed or not, and so he turned on the hall light, which showed him clearly that the bed was empty.

Confused, he went on to his own

bedroom, half expecting to find him there, but it was empty too. He sat down on the edge of his bed and began untying one shoe, as if he might just go ahead and go to sleep, but then he realized that he couldn't do that; the kid might be in some kind of trouble.

That thought woke him up. Where could Dougie be, in the middle of the night? He turned on the bedroom light and checked his watch, then shook his head, perplexed. It was after 1a.m., and it looked like it must have been raining like hell outside. He stood up uncertainly and began to wander through the rest of the little house, thinking Dougie might be there somewhere, after all, but he wasn't in the kitchen or the bathroom, and that was it.

Max stood in the middle of the dark kitchen and licked his lips, wishing to hell he had a bottle. What could have happened? Maybe the spoke busted again, and the kid was out in the middle of nowhere, walking his bike home. Or maybe he'd just had to hole up somewhere for a long time because of the rain. He nodded, trying to decide that that must be it. But the time worried him. It was awful goddamn late; he couldn't quite convince himself that Dougie wouldn't have tried to make it home before now, rain or no rain.

He was beginning to feel a little scared, and he decided he'd better do what he could, which was get in the car and take a swing around the area. He patted his pant's pocket, out of habit, to make sure the keys were there and then went out the back door to where the car was parked beside the shed.

He'd left the window open, as usual, and the whole front seat was soaked. So he went back in the house and hunted up an old ragged army blanket to put over it. But then when he tried to start the car, it didn't even turn over. There was just a kind of clicking sound, and then even that died away.

He sat for a moment in the dark front seat, feeling helpless. As if on cue, it started raining again, big drops coming nearly straight down that struck the window ledge and splattered his face, making him blink. He put his face in his hands and then lifted his eyes slowly to look over his fingertips at the dark windshield, where water ran in wavy lines. He felt certain now that something very bad had happened to Dougie while he had slept on the sofa, oblivious to a storm that splashed water clear across the living room. Maybe there'd been a flood or a tornado; how would he have known?

He fought his way out of the car, filled with the old ache of anger at himself, as if it were a pain that was with him always, but that he only noticed when he was most vulnerable. He went back into the kitchen, not bothering to close the door behind him, and then to the front hall, where he searched in vain for his raincoat, finally settling instead for an old brown leather jacket.

He started out the front door, then turned back to the closet and rummaged again for a moment, coming up at last with a wadded white sailor's cap which he jammed onto his head, letting the brim sag all around. Thus equipped, he plunged out the door and into the rain, heading toward the gas station at the corner and the big boulevard that led downtown.

"Dougie? Hey, Dougie, wake up."

He was lost for a moment, forgetting where he had been, but then it came back to him and he sat up straight, straining to see in the darkness. He looked first at the gray circle of the pipe's end, but then realized the voice had come from the other direction. Looking that way, open-mouthed, he could barely make out the form of someone sitting a few feet further into the pipe's interior.

"Don't be scared, Dougie. I come here on purpose, to tell you something."

He nodded, unable for the moment to say anything. He noticed that it was colder and that his legs were wet, and he thought the water must have risen while he slept.

"You gotta get out of here, Dougie. It ain't safe. Don't you know this is a drainage pipe? All that rainwater's gonna be rushin' down here before you know it."

The voice sounded older than he'd expected. He twisted his head a little to one side, but there was no way he could make out the face.

"Are you my bigself?" he blurted suddenly, surprising himself.

There was a silence, and then the voice said, "Uhh...yeah. Yeah, that's right. I figured you knew that already. That's why you come here, isn't it? Course it is. Since I'm you, I knew that already, you see?"

Dougie caught a faint, familiar smell and frowned.

"Are you drinking whisky?" he asked.

There was another brief silence.

"Uhh...well, I did have a drink before I come down here, Dougie. Lots of folks have a drink now and then and it don't mean nothin'. I mean, don't let it worry you none, that you're gonna have a drink every now and then, like anyone else, when you get to be big."

Dougie nodded, feeling some of his initial elation fade.

"You're not rich, are you?" he asked.

His bigself chuckled.

"No, not exactly. No, I don't think you could say I was rich." his voice changed suddenly, the way Pop's did sometimes when he tried to make himself be serious. "But, now, that don't mean I ain't happy, does it? You don't have to be rich to be happy with your life, Dougie. I mean...." But then he seemed to run down, as if he couldn't think of anything more to say about it.

"You're just like Pop," Dougie said, and it was an accusation.

This time the silence went on a little

longer. When the bigself spoke again, his voice had softened, become matter-of-fact.

"Yeah, you're right, Dougie. I guess that's what I really come to tell you, besides gettin' out of this pipe. I'm an alky, just like you old man...just like our old man...and that means you're an alky, too, up ahead. But, see, things can change. That's why us bigselves come back, ain't it? Here's the thing, Dougie: You got this sickness in you, just like your old man, that makes you an alcoholic if you let it. It's genetic...inherited...they found that out for sure up ahead. And the only way you can ever lick it is just never to start, never to take that first drink. 'Cause once you do, it's got you. You see what I mean? That's what I come to tell, and it's up to you to take it or leave it. I don't know what you can make out of your life — I don't say you're gonna get rich if you don't drink — but I do know you can keep from ending up like me, for sure. That's entirely up to you."

Dougie nodded, feeling a little ashamed, and beginning to feel intensely grateful to his bigself, who had somehow managed to come back and tell him this.

"How...?" he started to ask, but the bigself cut him off.

"Listen, Dougie, I wasn't kiddin' about that rainwater. You gotta clear out of here, for sure, the sooner the better."

Dougie half stood, getting control of his stiff legs on the slanting pipe and trying to keep his feet out of the water. He started to turn away, toward the outside, but then looked back.

"What about you?" he asked.

It looked as though the bigself shrugged.

"Don't sweat it. They're gonna jerk me back anytime now. I'm gonna be just fine." There was a sharp clinking sound, and Dougie realized that the bigself had picked up a bottle. He turned again toward the opening.

"Say, Dougie," the bigself said. "One more thing, I just happened to remember. You don't know it, but your old man's out lookin' for you tonight. He got worried when he woke up and you weren't around anywhere. And the thing is, if you don't go find him and get him home, he's gonna get sick and be in the hospital a long time. Let's see...if you head straight back out to the highway and then toward home, you oughta run into him."

"I will," Dougie said. "I'll find him. Thanks a lot."

The figure of the bigself gave him a little wave, and Dougie turned and headed out, nearly stumbling over his bike on the path outside. He wrestled it up the slope and then along the gravel stretch to where the pavement began, then jumped on and pedaled hard into the cold wind, feeling an occasional heavy raindrop against his face and arms.

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Max Kufus took another big swallow, which made his eyes water, and then giggled, lying back against the curve of the pipe. When he put his ear against the concrete, he thought he could hear the roar of a lot of water coming up fast.

That had been a good one, all right, that business about the drinking, and he'd just thought it up on the spur of the moment. If he'd scared the kid enough to keep him off the sauce for good, that would be a big bonus. Things were working out even better than he'd planned.

He took another swallow and then coughed for a time. It had been a long time since he'd had anything to drink, and he hated to guzzle his body back, it had to look like he'd just fallen off the wagon and gotten himself drowned by accident.

That way, with luck, they wouldn't bother to go back and check on him, and they'd never find out he hadn't visited his own younger self, and they'd never know that Dougie was alive this time around, and so no government agent would be sent back to "rectify" things.

Shit, he'd even saved himself a round of pneumonia, it looked like, and a hell of a lot of hospital bills. It looked like a bargain all the way around, from where he sat. He held the bottle out toward the darkness, toasting it, and then took as big a swallow as he could stand.

*From one of sf's best humorists, here is a funny story about what happened after Judge Budlong C. Liveright picked up the extraterrestrial on the road. Bretnor fans will be glad to know that a new collection, THE SCHIMMELHORN FILE, has just been published by Ace Books.*

# Thirst Contact

BY

## R. BRETNOR

Judge Budlong C. Liveright and his wife picked the extraterrestrial up eight miles due east of Fahrenheit, Arizona, at eleven o'clock on the night of October 31st, right where the road forks off to snake up over Big Concho Mountain.

The Judge had taken off the pinching cowboy boots he always wore when he was running for assemblyman, and he had just asked Mrs. Liveright whether she thought his speech had really impressed the Fahrenheit Chamber of Commerce.

"If they hadn't liked it, Budlong," she replied, "they'd never have given us those two cases of Concho County Prime Jumbo Grapefruit, now would they?"

"No, sirree, I just reckon they wouldn't. My grapefruit plank for overseas relief was what got 'em. Ain't our rich, ripe, luscious grapefruit got all the vitamins them poor starving fur'ners'll ever need?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake! Can't you forget you're a man of the people and just talk like you usually do? 'Yes sirree, no sirree!' No wonder you never get elected. No —"

It was then that Concho County's rich, ripe, luscious moon revealed the extraterrestrial standing on the gravel shoulder a hundred yards away.

"*Whatever —?*" Mrs. Liveright braked abruptly to twenty miles an hour. "Is that a child up there?"

"Up where?" The judge pushed back his big white Stetson hat. "Well, I'll be durned! Must be one of Pronto Pogue's brats. They're always running off when their pa gets drunk. Keep going — he'll be all right."

"Budlong, you ought to be ashamed! We're going to drive him right back home, and you can give that father of

his a good talking-to. Look at the poor little thing! He has his little Halloween mask on, the funny long-nosed kind."

As the car drew up beside the alien, she whispered, "Why, it's quite a clever costume, isn't it? I suppose one of the town children gave it to him."

They looked out at a broad pink face, at two enormous rubbery pink ears, at a seven-inch blue nose. The ears supported something like a crinkled saucepan with a bedspring soldered to it. The round body was covered by a fuzzy, polkadotted union suit tied at wrists and ankles. One pudgy hand held a lurid comic book; the other, a horned toad on a string.

"Hello, sonny," said Mrs. Liveright maternally. "Did daddy drive away and leave you 'way out here?"

The judge reached back and opened a rear door. "Hop in, boy!" he ordered.

The alien giggled, crossing and uncrossing his big feet. He pointed at the horned toad. Then he pointed at the judge. "Same?" he said in a high, fluting voice.

*"What's that?"*

"Not?" The alien seemed bewildered. "Not same?"

"Shh! Shh!" warned Mrs. Liveright sharply. "Remember his *background.*"

"I'll background him!"

"Delinquent parents make delinquent children, Budlong."

"Hmm —" The judge remembered suddenly that there was the PTA vote to consider. "Exactly!" he cried out. "It would be criminal to drag this tot back to his drunken father! We'll take him into town and turn him over to the detention home, and I'll charge Pronto with cruelty and neglect."

"But —"

"But nothing! Come along, sonny boy. Get in the pretty car and we'll give you a swell ride."

"Yes, yes, yes!" The alien freed the horned toad. Excitedly, he scrambled in. "Go, go!" he giggled. "Find same, like me!"

"It'll make a swell picture for the papers," remarked the judge happily, as they picked up speed. "Me handing him over to the matron in his funny-face and all."

"It'll be too late for the morning *Bugle,*" Mrs. Liveright replied.

"Just as well, too. Damn Old Man Norton's hide! If he did print it, chances are he'd say I was a kidnapper or something. But they'll have it in the city paper — maybe on the front page. The late voters'll see it." Over his shoulder, he asked, "What's your name, son?"

The alien bounced up and down. "Name?" he giggled. "Me? *Yeelil Huh! Yeelil Huh! Yeelil Huh!*"

"He's certainly deficient!" exclaimed Mrs. Liveright. "That doesn't sound like talking at all."

As a matter of fact, it sounded as though the extraterrestrial had whistled it through his long, blue nose....

"Where'd you get a name like

that?" laughed the judge.

"Up home!" Excitedly, the extraterrestrial pointed at a glittering star. "Me *Yeelil Huh*. Down, down, bzoom!"

The judge roared. "Lilybird, don't you *get* it? He's playing he's a Martian. Little Orson H.G. Wells! It's the comic book, I bet you."

"Book, book!" twittered the alien. "Learn read, learn write, like you. Am — ambass'dor!"

"Oh-ho-ho-ho — so that's who you are! Lily, meet His Highness, the Martian Ambassador. He's brought his credentials!"

The judge took the comic book and held it to the dashlight. "Haw-haw-haw! Oh, get a load of this! *Captain Comet and Robot Joe!* This one here, with the striped drawers, that's Captain Comet; the tin can with the legs is Joe —"

"Budlong," protested Mrs. Liveright. "I'm trying to drive."

"Okay, but it's a real riot! All about space monsters. They look like octopuses with feathers on, and —"

"*Bud*long!"

"Okay, okay," grumbled the judge. Turning to the alien, "Welcome to salubrious Concho County, Your Highness," he said cringingly. "I reckon that your army will be here right on your tail, all set to take us over. *Please* don't hurt us. *Pretty* please."

"*Not, not!*" jabbered the alien wildly. "Not take!"

"Ooooh! He isn't just taking over. *They're going to wipe us out!*"

"Not-not-not-not-NOT! Not take! Not wipe! Want *kweetch, kweetch, kweetch!*"

"Well, *that's* a relief!" gasped the judge. "All he wants is *kweetch.*"

"It's probably something he doesn't get at home," suggested Mrs. Liveright. "It's —"

She was slowing down for a horseshoe curve — and her headlights shone on an enormous billboard which showed a plump pink child gorging on one of Concho County's Prime Jumbo Grapefruit.

"*KWEETCH!*" the alien screamed. He danced and giggled and yammered at the billboard. "*Kweetch-kweetch-kweetch!*"

Mrs. Liveright swerved sharply, pulled off the road, and stopped. "Budlong C. Liveright," she stated, "either restrain that child or drive the car yourself."

"*Kweetch!*" echoed the judge uproariously. "Yahoo! *Kweetch* for breakfast! *Kweetch* juice! Rich, ripe, luscious *Prime Jumbo Kweetch!*"

"Are you trying to tell me that *kweetch* is — *grapefruit?*"

"You — you g-guessed it! It doesn't grow on Mars, see? Too dry up there. His Highness wants a — a *Martian* Plan. Free *kweetch!*"

"*I* think it's pathetic," said Mrs. Liveright severely. "His mother probably doesn't feed him anything but hominy grits and beans. No wonder he's hungry for grapefruit. Why don't

you give him one of those we got in Fahrenheit? Then maybe he'll be quiet."

Wedging himself around, the judge pulled a slat from one of the two crates. "Don't go blaming me," he grunted, "if he messes up the car."

The alien was making little pecking bows and giggling and reaching for the grapefruit with both hands.

The judge withheld it. "Wait a minute, kid. You can't eat with your mask on."

"Take off your funny-face like a good little man," urged Mrs. Liveright.

The alien drew back on the seat uneasily, holding up a hand. "Not! Not!"

The judge guffawed. "If you won't take it off, I will!" And with his free hand, quickly, he grabbed the long blue nose and pulled.

*"Oh!"*

The judge pulled harder.

*"Yeee-ow!"*

The judge let go abruptly. He dropped the grapefruit. "It won't come off!" he announced, too loudly. "It — it's glued on!"

"G-glued on?"

"Are you deaf? Glued on, I said! With glue! G-L-U-E!"

There was an uncomfortable silence, broken only by a squeezing-sucking sound and little satisfied giggling noises.

"He — he's *eating* it!" whispered Mrs. Liveright.

"What did you think he'd do with it? But it sounds to me more like he's just sucking out the juice."

The sounds stopped. There was a rustling in the crate, and they began again. Presently they ended, and there was another rustling. Then they recommenced.

"That's his third one. He'll be ill!" Mrs. Liveright shivered. "There's something unnatural about that child, Budlong. Are you sure his funny-face is — *glued* on?"

*"KWEESH!"* screamed the alien. "More, more, more!" He sprawled across the back of the seat between the Liverights. "Want all! All *kweesh!"*

"Oh, dear! I think he *is* ill."

The alien pointed waveringly at Concho County. "N'good. Not take. *Kweesh* good. Take million *kweesh.* Take up home!"

"There! Budlong, he can't even speak properly!"

The alien offered something to the judge. "Buy!" he gibbered. "Buy *kweesh!"*

The something crackled in the judge's hand. He squinted at it. "For Pete's sake! It's — it's a couple of *hundred dollar bills!"*

"Don't touch them!" ordered Mrs. Liveright. "They're certainly stolen!"

The alien twittered angrily. "Not, not! Make up home! Make many. You like? Here, here, here —" He pushed several more of them at the judge.

The judge pushed them back.

"Not buy?" complained the alien incredulously. "Not buy *kweesh?"*

With a sad, giggling sigh, he drew back from between them, and, a moment later, they heard him rustling around in the crates again.

"He's sucking *another* one," said Mrs. Liveright.

"*Hic,*" the alien said distinctly. "*Uc-hic!*" Then he began singing a happy little song in a foreign language, the only understandable word of which was *kweesh.*

"Spanish," said the judge. "Pronto was born down near Nogales."

"It doesn't *sound* like Spanish," said his wife nervously.

The song went on for a few moments; then it dwindled, hesitated, died. The Liverights looked back —

Knees drawn up, hands folded on his round stomach, the extraterrestrial was out like a light.

"B-Budlong, it's asleep!"

"Why shouldn't he be?"

"Well, he just shouldn't snore like that. He — he's *fizzing.* I don't think he's a normal child at all!"

The judge remembered suddenly that the long blue nose had felt quite warm and flexible.... "You — you're crazy!" he exploded. "You've been reading those damfool comic books yourself! That nose is plastic — that's all it is. Warm plastic. They make it that way nowadays."

"*Warm!* I thought so."

"You're nuts, Lil. No Martian would come here just to go 'round yapping for grapefruit!"

"We don't know what they'd do. Perhaps they just think differently from us, like Japanese. Anyhow, I didn't say he *was* one, and I'm sure he's completely harmless, even if he is so — well, so *abnormal.*"

"He's a shrimp, all right — and I didn't catch sight of any sort of ray gun or anything." The judge regained some of his self-confidence. "Say, wouldn't it be something if he really was a Martian trying to buy up Concho County grapefruit? Boy, oh boy! What headlines — *Time, Newsweek,* TV, everything! Can you picture Old Man Norton's face —?"

Abruptly, in gorgeous technicolor, he saw himself riding through cheering throngs on Pennsylvania Avenue. He saw his campaign sticker in gigantic size, a national emblem: *Live Right With Liveright.* He sighed; that would come later. First — ah, those headlines! — MARS GRAPEFRUIT PACT MEANS PEACE, PROSPERITY SAYS LIVERIGHT — SENATE OKAYS LIVERIGHT MARTIAN PLAN —

"*Gosh,*" murmured the judge.

"Don't be silly," said Mrs. Liveright. "Those machines they've been sending up have proved there isn't any life on Mars. He may turn out to be one of the Pogue children after all —" She paused, listening.

The judge cocked an ear. "Car coming. Sounds like they're in a hurry."

She stepped on the starter; she began to turn the wheel.

"Hey, hold it, Lil! Let 'em by!"

With screeching tires, the other car had swept around the turn, and now its headlights were bearing down on them. "Say!" the judge exclaimed. "They're really tear —" He didn't finish. Brakes screamed; there was the sharp hoot of a siren, a shower of gravel as the car cut in — and, an instant later, the Liverights saw four armed men leap out and come towards them.

"Bandits!" gasped Mrs. Liveright.

"Godalmighty!" groaned the judge. "I wish they *were.*"

"Why, it's — it's Mr. Norton and Sheriff Wickens and his deputy, and — What —?"

"Everything but their National Committee! And us with *that* in back —" The judge squinted as three flashlights converged upon him.

"Don't shoot!" called Mrs. Liveright. "It's only us."

There was laughter. "Well, well," boomed the Sheriff, "if it isn't Lawyer Liveright! Didn't see any ambulances comin' out this way, did you, Norton?"

"Heh-heh," croaked Old Man Norton. "Now, Wick, might be he's just been rustling up a couple of sheepherder votes for tomorrow."

"*Ignore* them, Budlong," hissed Mrs. Liveright.

"Ha-ha, fellers." The judge laughed weakly. "Every vote counts, now don't it? Looks like something mighty serious, them guns and all. Have an escape from the county jail?"

"Ought we tell him?" asked the deputy dubiously.

Old Man Norton's Adam's apple bobbed up and down. "I guess we can. He'd be as likely to see one as anybody."

"We're out after flyin' discuses," chuckled the sheriff. "Joe Ramirez phoned he'd seen one of 'em come down somewheres near Big Concho. He was all het up about it. Figgered it'd be full of Martians or some — Hey! You sick?"

The judge had twitched violently; now he coughed and said, "G-gas pains," in a strangled voice.

"Comes from speech-makin'," explained the sheriff.

"Anything for a client," cackled Norton. "I guess the hickus must've crashed, and he's beat us to the scene of the accident."

The fourth man, a fish-faced character with a camera and a dead cigar, said, "You want I should get a shot of 'em, boss?"

"For *free?* You've got better sense than that, Jake. Now, if he had Martians with him —"

And, *"Kweesh!"* cried the alien, stirring in his sleep. *"H-hic!* Want *kweesh!"*

Mrs. Liveright killed the engine with a jerk.

"What th' hell?" yelled the sheriff, bringing his rifle to the ready.

*"God!"* and *"Look at it!"* and *"Jumpin' Jupiter! It's not human!"* ex-

claimed Jake and the deputy and Old Man Norton.

Their flashlights focused brightly on the alien. Their guns scraped menacingly against the car.

"It's a M-Martian!" Norton quavered. "L-Liveright's sold out to 'em!"

"*You!*" snarled the sheriff. "Talk — and talk fast!"

"Give it a poke with your rifle barrel!" suggested the deputy hysterically.

Mrs. Liveright knew a critical moment when she saw one. Her sharp elbow caught the judge under the ribs just in time to silence his reply. "You'll poke that child over my dead body, Sheriff Wickens! Lay a finger on him, and I'll have the law on you!"

"Lady, *that* ain't no child!"

Her voice rose half an octave. "It's one of those miserable Pogue children. Haven't you seen a Halloween trick-or-treat costume before! He's lost, and we're going to take him home."

"Now, *listen* —"

"Pss-st! Hey, Wick! Take a look here." Old Man Norton had been peering closely through the windows. Now, plucking the sheriff by the arm, he pointed at the comic book and winked. "D-don't let on," he whispered, his voice still shaking. "M-make out you still think maybe he's Darth Vader."

The sheriff choked. He shook himself. He gave Norton a heavy nudge and turned back to the Liverights. "Looks plenty suspicious to me!" he proclaimed. "Everybody knows them Martians want to take us over, and this here's a Martian if ever I saw one. That right, Nort?"

"Right as rain. Full-grown male — fine specimen. Y' know, Wick, it wouldn't surprise me if Liveright here was their Trojan horse — or part of it, anyhow. He's ambitious, else he'd not be running for assembly every time. They've probably promised to make him king or something —"

"I'll stand no more of this!" Mrs. Liveright stamped on the starter.

"Un-Earthly Activities," continued Old Man Norton hoarsely. "We'll give it a big editorial spread tomorrow. We'll ask why Congress hasn't appointed a committee —"

The judge's dream of Pennsylvania Avenue had long since popped and vanished. He was imagining headlines of a different sort. LIVERIGHT GRILLED! they screamed. LIVERIGHT DENIES MARS SPY LINK—

Just as Jake's strobe flashed to the accompaniment of much crude merriment, Mrs. Liveright raced the engine, made an abrupt U-turn across the highway, and rammed the throttle to the floorboard.

"Those — those *stupid* men!" she muttered, as they careened back down Big Concho Mountain toward Pronto Pogue's. "They don't even know the machines have proved there aren't any Martians. Oh, Budlong — *let's get rid of this — this horrible child!*"

* * *

The Pogue residence rambled in three directions from the one-room adobe structure at its center. It included such diverse materials as weathered boards, old railroad ties, more or less corrugated iron, and the yellow, peeling body of a long-dead school bus.

The Liverights, however, were in no mood to appreciate its quaintness. The rutted side-road jarred them unmercifully; the smell of goats and chickens came to them strongly on the still night air; the alien, shaken into wakefulness, bounced up and down again demanding *kweesh.*

Pronto Pogue was seated at his door when they swayed into the dusty yard. He wore a pair of trousers and a straw sombrero, and the frayed ends of his mustache twitched mournfully as, accompanying himself on the accordion, he sang nasally of love. When he saw the Liverights, he stopped, refreshed himself from a huge bottle by his elbow, and called out, "Hey Dilly babe! There's comp'ny!"

"Hold yer water!" replied a vast contralto from somewhere in the corrugated iron. "I'm on m'way."

"How *sordid,*" sniffed Mrs. Liveright. "How *degrading.*" Beside her, the judge was puffing and blowing; and, after a moment, she asked him if he was aware of their arrival. "This is where the child lives, Budlong," she said. "Hadn't you better —?"

"Wait till I ... get my boots ... on," grunted the judge, lurching against her.

"*Kweesh!*" hiccupped the alien, trying to scramble into the front seat over her shoulder. "*Kweesh!*"

It was too much. She opened the door, stepped out, and found Pronto Pogue confronting her.

"Hi-ya!" He swept off his sombrero, bowed profoundly, lost his balance, and regained it by putting an arm around her. As this brought the neck of his bottle right under her chin, he tilted it, leered invitingly, and said, "Have a snootful, kid?"

Mrs. Liveright squealed. "How *dare* you? *B-Budlong! Help!*"

Instantly, the judge came roaring from the car. "Keep your dirty hands off my wife, you!" he bellowed, towering over Pronto. "By God, I'll break every bone in your —"

Pronto snickered rudely — and violence might easily have resulted if Dilly, arriving at that moment, hadn't placed herself between them.

Dilly Pogue stood six foot three and weighed in at two hundred plus, including breasts, biceps, and strong white teeth. She loomed there, eyes narrowed, arms akimbo, and snarled, "What th' goddamn hell do *you* want?" at the judge.

Hastily, Mrs. Liveright intervened. "I'm sure the man meant no real harm, Budlong," she said, with a superior sweetness. "It isn't like we were dealing with people of our own class, now is it?" She smiled thinly. "I'm Mrs. Budlong C. Liveright, and this is my husband, the judge. We brought back one

of your poor little children. We could have taken him to the detention home, but instead we went out of our way to bring him here."

"My kids is all asleep," answered Dilly, her voice heavy with suspicion.

"And we ain't sellin' no votes tomorrow," added Pronto pointedly. "Not for no kid who ain't even our own."

Mrs. Liveright waggled a finger. "Now, now," she chided, "I think you just missed one of your itsy-bitsy ones in — in your celebrating."

"Chrissake!" Dilly was indignant. "You think I can't count to fourteen?"

"I'm sure you can, ordinarily, but —" Mrs. Liveright stopped. Out of the corner of her eye, she had seen the alien weaving unsteadily around the car. "S-see?" she said, as brightly as she could. "That's his funny-face. He — he's playing he's a Martian."

The alien veered aside to pick up a scrawny kitten frisking in the dust. He looked at Pronto, and Pronto looked at him. Then Pronto took another drink, squinted at Mrs. Liveright, and said something about a family resemblance. "But that ain't no excuse fer dumpin' him," he stated disapprovingly.

Mrs. Liveright sputtered. The judge frowned ferociously. And the extraterrestrial, halting four feet from Pronto Pogue, said, *"Hic!"* and started giggling.

*"Hic* yerself!" chuckled Pronto.

"He's p-playing he's drunk," offered Mrs. Liveright with a sickly smile.

"He *is* drunk," asserted Pronto. "You been feedin' him likker." And Dilly made an unpleasant comment about unnatural mothers.

*"Hic!"* The alien pointed at his star. "Me — up home. Down, down, *bzoom*. Ambassh'dor!"

"Haw-haw!" laughed Pronto. "Me, *I'm* President of the United States."

The alien went wild with excitement. He giggled and bounced and ran around in circles. *"Kweesh!"* he screamed. "Buy all *kweesh!* Presh'dent! Buy, buy, buy!"

"That's what he calls grapefruit," said Mrs. Liveright, starting to edge back towards the car.

"Hey, where you goin'?" yelled Pronto. "You can't leave yer kid here!"

*"NOT! NOT!"* screeched the alien, pointing at the Liverights. *"NOT GO WITH!"*

Immediately, Dilly Pogue was all pity. "Pore little bastard," she soothed. "They been treatin' you mean, huh? Okay, you don't gotta go."

The alien stopped screaming. He giggled. In quick succession, he indicated himself, Pronto, Dilly, and the kitten. "Same?" he asked anxiously. "All same?"

Pronto was delighted. "Same? You betcha! Me, I'm a great big cat." He meowed raucously.

The alien pointed at the kitten, at Pronto, at Dilly and at himself. *"Same,"* he repeated. "Live — think — feel. All same." He paused. He giggled.

He pointed at the Liverights, who were trying to climb unnoticed back into their car. *"Not same!"* he stated, with great certainty.

Pronto waved the bottle; he embraced Dilly; he gave a frightful rebel yell. "Not same!" he shouted. "N-not same! Say, I like that young 'un. He sure hits the nail on the head!"

"Budlong —" Mrs. Liveright shivered. "— let's get *away* from here!"

"Move over!" said the judge. "I'll drive." Sliding in, he started the engine. Then he stuck his head out of the window, and, just as the alien handed Pronto a fistful of hundred dollar bills, he blared, "Next time this happens, Pogue, I'll haul you into court! You understand?"

Dilly made an obscene gesture. "Go on! Beat it before I throw a rock!"

The Liverights drove away with as much judicial dignity as they could muster, and they said nothing to each other until they reached the highway. Then, "B-Budlong," ventured Mrs. Liveright, "do you — do you suppose he really *was* their child? I — I mean — there was something so *uncanny* — wasn't there? Could he — could he have been a —?"

The judge turned on her savagely. "Goddamnit, Lilybird, SHUT UP! Haven't you made us enough trouble? How many times do I have to tell you? HE WASN'T A MARTIAN! THERE AREN'T ANY. NOW FORGET ABOUT IT!"

* * *

Even though next morning's *Bugle* carried no editorial on Judge Liveright and his un-Earthly activities, early election returns made it apparent that his constituency preferred his opponent. This was a disappointment to the judge, but by no means a novel one, and within a week he was busy making plans for his next campaign. Soon afterwards, hearing that Jake's photograph had been a failure, he started telling how Old Man Norton and Sheriff Wickens had taken a brat of Pronto Pogue's for a — you'd never guess, haha! — a *Martian!* Yes, sirree, it'd just scared their pants plumb off of them! Then, after a while, he quit mentioning whose brat it was, preferring simply to "that poor kid Lily and I picked up on Halloween." Finally, he stopped telling it altogether.

If he hadn't, he wouldn't have been able to look forward to the next election with the feeling that, for the first time in his career, he had a lead-pipe cinch.

It all came out at a strategy meeting of the Live Right With Liveright Committee. It was an important meeting, in honor of the state chairman of the judge's party, and the judge had staged it carefully, hiring a private dining room at the Concho Vista Inn at his own expense.

"Yes, sirree," he admitted modestly, when dinner and liquor and cigars had done their work. "I saw we needed really big support, so I went out and got it. He's the coming man in these

parts. Hard work, up from poverty, rags to riches — that's the story."

"What did you say his name was?" asked the state chairman.

"Pogue," replied the judge. "Pron — er, that is Threadley — Threadley W. Pogue."

"He's a character," began Mrs. Henry Myers of the PTA. "They used to live in the queerest, dirtiest old shack. With fourteen children too, and —"

Mrs. Liveright quelled her with a glance. "Maybe he used to be *eccentric*," she amended. "But have you met his wife? A remarkable woman — so statuesque and, well, forceful. Anyhow, it's a free country. If he wants a special-built Cadillac to carry all his children in, well, let him, I say, if he can afford it."

"That's right," echoed the judge. "He pays his taxes. He's helping build up the community. The way he lives is his business."

"Say, what is his line?" the state chairman asked.

"Wholesale grapefruit," the judge told him — and the momentary flicker of uneasiness of his wife's countenance was not mirrored on his own. "Yes, sir-ree, wholesale grapefruit."

"He'll be here any minute now," said Mrs. Liveright. "I just know you'll enjoy meeting him. He's so —" She heard the door open and looked around. "Here they are now!"

It was a new Pronto Pogue who entered. A pearl-grey ninety-dollar hat adorned his head. He wore a sports coat, a vivid yellow shirt, a solid gold grapefruit belt-buckle. Over him stood Dilly, robed in scarlet, flashing teeth and diamonds.

"Hi-ya, judge!" he called, as the judge rose. "Howdy, folks!" Reaching around, he took the judge's freshly refilled glass. "Thanks for the drink."

Everybody laughed, and the judge put his arm around Pronto's shoulders. "Mr. Morrison —" He bowed to the state chairman. "— I want you to meet two of our staunchest backers, Mr. and Mrs. Pogue, Threadley and Daffodil."

There was loud applause, and Pronto said, "It's nice meetin' you social, Mr. Morrison. I'm sure sorry me and the old lady can't set a spell and chew the fat. But there's a big brawl over to her Uncle Esau's, and we're late right now." From his hip pocket he took a roll of greenbacks. "Judge," he said, "I bought that goddamn *Bugle* and fired Old Man Norton an hour ago. You're on your way! And here —" He tossed the roll. "— here's for yer piggybank. Fifty of 'em." He chuckled. "Good as gold, too. Leastwise, that's what them Treasury agents said when old Norton sicked 'em onto me."

The judge looked down and saw that they were crisp, new hundred dollar bills. "Threadley," he declared with deep emotion, "I don't know how to thank you!"

"Ferget it!" Pronto slapped him on the back. "Me and Dilly, we just natch-

er'ly like you, judge." He wheeled to face the room. "Y'know why, folks? It's kind of a joke 'tween Liveright and me." Winking, he lifted a wooden salad fork. He pointed at it. He pointed at the Judge's head.

"Same," he said.

*This unusual and beautifully written story is Jack Dann's first for F&SF, however he has sold short sf to many other publications and is also a novelist and anthologist. His most recent book (as editor) is IMMORTAL: SHORT NOVELS OF THE TRANSHUMAN FUTURE, published by Harper. Forthcoming is a collection, JUNCTION, to be published by Dell.*

# *Camps*

**BY**

## JACK DANN

As Stephen lies in bed, he can think only of pain.

He imagines it as sharp and blue. After receiving an injection of Demerol, he enters pain's cold regions as an explorer, an objective visitor. It is a country of ice and glass, monochromatic plains and valleys filled with wash-blue shards of ice, crystal pyramids and pinnacles, squares, oblongs, and all manner of polyhedron — block upon block of painted blue pain.

Although it is midafternoon, Stephen pretends it is dark. His eyes are tightly closed, but the daylight pouring into the room from two large windows intrudes as a dull red field extending infinitely behind his eyelids.

"Josie," he asks through cotton mouth, "aren't I due for another shot?" Josie is crisp and fresh and large in her starched white uniform. Her peaked nurse's cap is pinned to her mouse-brown hair.

"I've just given you an injection, it will take effect soon." Josie strokes his hand, and he dreams of ice.

"Bring me some ice," he whispers.

"If I bring you a bowl of ice, you'll only spill it again."

"Bring me some ice...." By touching the ice cubes, by turning them in his hand like a gambler favoring his dice, he can transport himself into the beautiful blue country. Later, the ice will melt, and he will spill the bowl. The shock of cold and pain will awaken him.

Stephen believes that he is dying, and he has resolved to die properly. Each visit to the cold country brings him closer to death; and death, he has learned, is only a slow walk through icefields. He has come to appreciate the complete lack of warmth and the beau-

tifully etched face of his magical country.

But he is connected to the bright flat world of the hospital by plastic tubes — one breathes cold oxygen into his left nostril; another passes into his right nostril and down his throat to his stomach; one feeds him intravenously, another draws his urine.

"Here's your ice," Josie says. "But mind you, don't spill it." She places the small bowl on his tray table and wheels the table close to him. She has a musky odor of perspiration and perfume; Stephen is reminded of old women and college girls.

"Sleep now, sweet boy."

Without opening his eyes, Stephen reaches out and places his hand on the ice.

"Come now, Stephen, wake up. Dr. Volk is here to see you."

Stephen feels the cool touch of Josie's hand, and he opens his eyes to see the doctor standing beside him. The doctor has a gaunt long face and thinning brown hair; he is dressed in a wrinkled green suit.

"Now we'll check the dressing, Stephen," he says as he tears away a gauze bandage on Stephen's abdomen.

Stephen feels the pain, but he is removed from it. His only wish is to return to the blue dreamlands. He watches the doctor peel off the neat crosshatchings of gauze. A terrible stink fills the room.

Josie stands well away

"Now we'll check your drains." The doctor pulls a long drainage tube out of Stephen's abdomen, irrigates and disinfects the wound, inserts a new drain, and repeats the process by pulling out another tube just below the rib cage.

Stephen imagines that he is swimming out of the room. He tries to cross the hazy border into cooler regions, but it is difficult to concentrate. He has only a half-hour at most before the Demerol will wear off. Already, the pain is coming closer, and he will not be due for another injection until the night nurse comes on duty. But the night nurse will not give him an injection without an argument. She will tell him to fight the pain.

But he cannot fight without a shot.

"Tomorrow we'll take that oxygen tube out of your nose," the doctor says, but his voice seems far away, and Stephen wonders what he is talking about.

He reaches for the bowl of ice, but cannot find it.

"Josie, you've taken my ice."

"I took the ice away when the doctor came. Why don't you try to watch a bit of television with me; Soupy Sales is on."

"Just bring me some ice," Stephen says. "I want to rest a bit." He can feel the sharp edges of pain breaking through the gauzy wraps of Demerol.

"I love you, Josie," he says sleepily as she places a fresh bowl of ice on his tray.

***

As Stephen wanders through his ice-blue dreamworld, he sees a rectangle of blinding white light. It looks like a doorway into an adjoining world of brightness. He has glimpsed it before on previous Demerol highs. A coal-dark doorway stands beside the bright one.

He walks toward the portals, passes through white-blue conefields.

Time is growing short. The drug cannot stretch it much longer. Stephen knows that he has to choose either the bright doorway or the dark, one or the other. He does not even consider turning around, for he has dreamed that the ice and glass and cold blue gemstones have melted behind him.

It makes no difference to Stephen which doorway he chooses. On impulse he steps into blazing, searing whiteness.

Suddenly he is in a cramped world of people and sound.

The boxcar's doors were flung open. Stephen was being pushed out of the cramped boxcar that stank of sweat, feces, and urine. Several people had died in the car, and added their stink of death to the already fetid air.

"Carla, stay close to me," shouted a man beside Stephen. He had been separated from his wife by a young woman who pushed between them, as she tried to return to the dark safety of the boxcar.

SS men in black, dirty uniforms were everywhere. They kicked and pummeled everyone within reach. Alsatian guard dogs snapped and barked. Stephen was bitten by one of the snarling dogs. A woman beside him was being kicked by soldiers. And they were all being methodically herded past a high barbed-wire fence. Beside the fence was a wall.

Stephen looked around for an escape route, but he was surrounded by other prisoners, who were pressing against him. Soldiers were shooting indiscriminately into the crowd, shooting women and children alike.

The man who had shouted to his wife was shot.

"Sholom, help me, help me," screamed a scrawny young woman whose skin was as yellow and pimpled as chicken flesh.

And Stephen understood that *he* was Sholom. He was a Jew in this burning, stinking world, and this woman, somehow, meant something to him. He felt the yellow star sewn on the breast of his filthy jacket. He grimaced uncontrollably. The strangest thoughts were passing through his mind, remembrances of another childhood: morning prayers with his father and rich uncle, large breakfasts on Saturdays, the sounds of his mother and father quietly making love in the next room, *yortzeit* candles burning in the living room, his brother reciting the 'four questions' at the Passover table.

He touched the star again and remembered the Nazi's facetious

euphemism for it: *Pour le Semite.*

He wanted to strike out, to kill the Nazis, to fight and die. But he found himself marching with the others, as if he had no will of his own. He felt that he was cut in half. He had two selves now; one watched the other. One self wanted to fight. The other was numbed; it cared only for itself. It was determined to survive.

Stephen looked around for the woman who had called out to him. She was nowhere to be seen.

Behind him were railroad tracks, electrified wire, and the conical tower and main gate of the camp. Ahead was a pitted road littered with corpses and their belongings. Rifles were being fired and a heavy, sickly sweet odor was everywhere. Stephen gagged, others vomited. It was the overwhelming stench of death, of rotting and burning flesh. Black clouds hung above the camp, and flames spurted from the tall chimneys of ugly buildings, as if from infernal machines.

Stephen walked onward; he was numb, unable to fight or even talk. Everything that happened around him was impossible, the stuff of dreams.

The prisoners were ordered to halt, and the soldiers began to separate those who would be burned from those who would be worked to death. Old men and women and young children were pulled out of the crowd. Some were beaten and killed immediately while the others looked on in disbelief. Stephen looked on, as if it was of no concern to him. Everything was unreal, dreamlike. He did not belong here.

The new prisoners looked like *Musselmänner*, the walking dead. Those who became ill, or were beaten or starved before they could "wake up" to the reality of the camps, became *Musselmänner*. *Musselmänner* could not think or feel. They shuffled around, already dead in spirit, until a guard or disease or cold or starvation killed them.

"Keep marching," shouted a guard, as Stephen stopped before an emaciated old man crawling on the ground. "You'll look like him soon enough."

Suddenly, as if waking from one dream and finding himself in another, Stephen remembered that the chicken-skinned girl was his wife. He remembered their life together, their children and crowded flat. He remembered the birthmark on her leg, her scent, her hungry love-making. He had once fought another boy over her.

His glands opened up with fear and shame; he had ignored her screams for help.

He stopped and turned, faced the other group. "Fruma," he shouted, then started to run.

A guard struck him in the chest with the butt of his rifle, and Stephen fell into darkness.

He spills the icewater again and awakens with a scream.

"It's my fault," Josie says, as she

peels back the sheets. "I should have taken the bowl away from you. But you fight me."

Stephen lives with the pain again. He imagines that a tiny fire is burning in his abdomen, slowly consuming him. He stares at the television high on the wall and watches Soupy Sales.

As Josie changes the plastic sac containing his intravenous saline solution, an orderly pushes a cart into the room and asks Stephen if he wants a print for his wall.

"Would you like me to choose something for you?" Josie asks.

Stephen shakes his head and asks the orderly to show him all the prints. Most of them are familiar still-lifes and pastorals, but one catches his attention. It is a painting of a wheat field. Although the sky looks ominously dark, the wheat is brightly rendered in great broad strokes. A path cuts through the field and crows fly overhead.

"That one, Stephen says. "Put that one up."

After the orderly hangs the print and leaves, Josie asks Stephen why he chose that particular painting.

"I like Van Gogh," he says dreamily, as he tries to detect a rhythm in the surges of abdominal pain. But he is not nauseated, just gaseous.

"Any particular reason why you like Van Gogh?" asks Josie. "He's my favorite artist, too."

"I didn't say he was my favorite," Stephen says, and Josie pouts, an expression which does not fit her prematurely lined face. Stephen closes his eyes, glimpses the cold country, and says, "I like the painting because it's so bright that it's almost frightening. And the road going through the field" — he opens his eyes — "doesn't go anywhere. It just ends in the field. And the crows are flying around like vultures."

"Most people see it as just a pretty picture," Josie says.

"What's it called?"

*"Wheatfield with Blackbirds."*

"Sensible. My stomach hurts, Josie. Help me turn over on my side." Josie helps him onto his left side, plumps up his pillows, and inserts a short tube into his rectum to relieve the gas. "I also like the painting with the large stars that all look out of focus," Stephen says. "What's it called?"

*"Starry Night."*

"That's scary, too," Stephen says. Josie takes his blood pressure, makes a notation on his chart, then sits down beside him and holds his hand. "I remember something," he says. "Something just —" He jumps as he remembers, and pain shoots through his distended stomach. Josie shushes him. checks the intravenous needle, and asks him what he remembers.

But the memory of the dream recedes as the pain grows sharper. "I hurt all the fucking time, Josie," he says, changing position. Josie removes the rectal tube before he is on his back.

"Don't use such language, I don't like to hear it. I know you have a lot of

pain," she says, her voice softening.

"Time for a shot."

"No, honey, not for some time. You'll just have to bear with it."

Stephen remembers his dream again. He is afraid of it. His breath is short and his heart feels as if it is beating in his throat, but he recounts the entire dream to Josie.

He does not notice that her face has lost its color.

"It's only a dream, Stephen. Probably something you studied in history."

"But it was so real, not like a dream at all."

"That's enough!" Josie says.

"I'm sorry I upset you. Don't be angry."

"I'm *not* angry."

"I'm sorry," he says, fighting the pain, squeezing Josie's hand tightly. "Didn't you tell me that you were in the Second World War?"

Josie is composed once again. "Yes, I did, but I'm surprised you remembered. You were very sick. I was a nurse overseas, spent most of the war in England. But I was one of the first service women to go into any of the concentration camps."

Stephen drifts with the pain; he appears to be asleep.

"You must have studied very hard," Josie whispers to him. Her hand is shaking just a bit.

It is twelve o'clock and his room is death-quiet. The sharp shadows seem to be the hardest objects in the room. The fluorescents burn steadily in the hall outside.

Stephen looks out into the hallway, but he can see only the far white wall. He waits for his nightnurse to appear: it is time for his injection. A young nurse passes by his doorway. Stephen imagines that she is a cardboard ship sailing through the corridors.

He presses the buzzer, which is attached by a clip to his pillow. The nightnurse will take her time, he tells himself. He remembers arguing with her. Angrily, he presses the buzzer again.

Across the hall, a man begins to scream, and there is a shuffle of nurses into his room. The screaming turns into begging and whining. Although Stephen has never seen the man in the opposite room, he has come to hate him. Like Stephen, he has something wrong with his stomach, but he cannot suffer well. He can only beg and cry, try to make deals with the nurses, doctors, God, and angels. Stephen cannot muster any pity for this man.

The night nurse finally comes into the room, says, "You have to try to get along without this," and gives him an injection of Demerol.

"Why does the man across the hall scream so?" Stephen asks, but the nurse is already edging out of the room.

"Because he's in pain."

"So am I," Stephen says in a loud voice. "But I can keep it to myself."

"Then stop buzzing me constantly for an injection. That man across the hall has had half of his stomach removed. He's got something to scream about."

So have I, Stephen thinks; but the nurse disappears before he can tell her. He tries to imagine what the man across the hall looks like. He thinks of him as being bald and small, an ancient baby. Stephen tries to feel sorry for the man, but his incessant whining disgusts him.

The drug takes effect; the screams recede as he hurtles through the dark corridors of a dream. The cold country is dark, for Stephen cannot persuade his nightnurse to bring him some ice. Once again, he sees two entrances. As the world melts behind him, he steps into the coal-black doorway.

In the darkness he hears an alarm, a bone-jarring clangor.

He could smell the combined stink of men pressed closely together. They were all lying upon two badly constructed wooden shelves. The floor was dirt; the smell of urine never left the barrack.

"Wake up," said a man Stephen knew as Viktor. "If the guard finds you in bed, you'll be beaten again."

Stephen moaned, still wrapped in dreams. "Wake up, wake up," he mumbled to himself. He would have a few more minutes before the guard arrived with the dogs. At the very thought of dogs, Stephen felt revulsion. He had once been bitten in the face by a large dog.

He opened his eyes, yet he was still half-asleep, exhausted. You are in a death camp, he said to himself. You must wake up. You must fight by waking up. Or you will die in your sleep. Shaking uncontrollably, he said, "Do you want to end up in the oven; perhaps you will be lucky today and live."

As he lowered his legs to the floor; he felt the sores open on the soles of his feet. He wondered who would die today and shrugged. It was his third week in the camp. Impossibly, against all odds, he had survived. Most of those he had known in the train had either died or become *Musselmänner*. If it was not for Viktor, he, too, would have become a *Musselmänner*. He had a breakdown and wanted to die. He babbled in English. But Viktor talked him out of death, shared his portion of food with him, and taught him the new rules of life.

"Like everyone else who survives, I count myself first, second, and third — then I try to do what I can for someone else," Viktor had said.

"I will survive," Stephen repeated to himself, as the guards opened the door, stepped into the room, and began to shout. Their dogs growled and snapped but heeled beside them. The guards looked sleepy; one did not wear a cap, and his red hair was tousled.

Perhaps he spent the night with one of the whores, Stephen thought. Perhaps today would not be so bad....

And so begins the morning ritual: Josie enters Stephen's room at quarter to eight, fusses with the chart attached to the footboard of his bed, pads about aimlessly, and finally goes to the bathroom. She returns, her stiff uniform making swishing sounds. Stephen can feel her standing over the bed and staring at him. But he does not open his eyes. He waits a beat.

She turns away, then drops the bedpan. Yesterday it was the metal ashtray; day before that, she bumped into the bedstand.

"Good morning, darling, it's a beautiful day," she says, then walks across the room to the windows. She parts the faded orange drapes and opens the blinds.

"How do you feel today?"

"Okay, I guess."

Josie takes his pulse and asks, "Did Mr. Gregory stop in to say hello last night?"

"Yes," Stephen says. "He's teaching me how to play gin rummy. What's wrong with him?"

"He's very sick."

"I can see that; has he got cancer?"

"I don't know," says Josie, as she tidies up his night table.

"You're lying again," Stephen says, but she ignores him. After a time, he says, "His girlfriend was in to see me last night. I bet his wife will be in today."

"Shut your mouth about that," Josie says. "Let's get you out of that bed so I can change the sheets."

Stephen sits in the chair all morning. He is getting well but is still very weak. Just before lunchtime, the orderly wheels his cart into the room and asks Stephen if he would like to replace the print hanging on the wall.

"I've seen them all," Stephen says. "I'll keep the one I have." Stephen does not grow tired of the Van Gogh painting; sometimes, the crows seem to have changed position.

"Maybe you'll like this one," the orderly says as he pulls out a cardboard print of Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. It is a study of a village nestled in the hills, dressed in shadows. But everything seems to be boiling and writhing as in a fever dream. A cypress tree in the foreground looks like a black flame, and the vertiginous sky is filled with great blurry stars. It is a drunkard's dream. The orderly smiles.

"So you did have it," Stephen says.

"No, I traded some other pictures for it. They had a copy in the West Wing."

Stephen watches him hang it, thanks him, and waits for him to leave. Then he gets up and examines the painting carefully. He touches the raised facsimile brushstrokes and turns toward Josie, feeling an odd sensation in his groin. He looks at her, as if seeing her for the first time. She has an overly full mouth which curves downward at the corners when she smiles. She is not a pretty woman — too fat, he thinks.

"Dance with me," he says, as he waves his arms and takes a step for-

ward, conscious of the pain in his stomach.

"You're too sick to be dancing just yet," but she laughs at him and bends her knees in a mock plié.

She has small breasts for such a large woman, Stephen thinks. Feeling suddenly dizzy, he takes a step toward the bed. He feels himself slip to the floor, feels Josie's hair brushing against his face, dreams that he's all wet from her tongue, feels her arms around him, squeezing, then feels the weight of her body pressing down on him, crushing him....

He wakes up in bed, catheterized. He has an intravenous needle in his left wrist, and it is difficult to swallow, for he has a tube down his throat.

He groans, tries to move.

"Quiet, Stephen," Josie says, stroking his hand.

"What happened?" he mumbles. He can only remember being dizzy.

"You've had a slight setback, so just rest. The doctor had to collapse your lung; you must lie very still.

"Josie, I love you," he whispers, but he is too far away to be heard. He wonders how many hours or days have passed. He looks toward the window. It is dark, and there is no one in the room.

He presses the buzzer attached to his pillow and remembers a dream....

"You must fight," Viktor said.

It was dark, all the other men were asleep, and the barrack was filled with snoring and snorting. Stephen wished they could all die, choke on their own breath. It would be an act of mercy.

"Why fight?" Stephen asked, and he pointed toward the greasy window, beyond which were the ovens that smoked day and night. He made a fluttering gesture with his hand — smoke rising.

"You must fight, you must live, living is everything. It is the only thing that makes sense here."

"We're all going to die, anyway," Stephen whispered. "Just like your sister...and my wife."

"No, Sholom, we're going to live. The others may die, but we're going to live. You must believe that."

Stephen understood that Viktor was desperately trying to convince himself to live. He felt sorry for Viktor; there could be no sensible rationale for living in a place like this.

Stephen grinned, tasted blood from the corner of his mouth, and said, "So we'll live through the night, maybe."

And maybe tomorrow, he thought. He would play the game of survival a little longer.

He wondered if Viktor would be alive tomorrow. He smiled and thought: If Viktor dies, then I will have to take his place and convince others to live. For an instant, he hoped Viktor would die so that he could take his place.

The alarm sounded. It was three o'clock in the morning, time to begin the day.

This morning Stephen was on his feet before the guards could unlock the door.

"Wake up," Josie says, gently tapping his arm. "Come on, wake up."

Stephen hears her voice as an echo. He imagines that he has been flung into a long tunnel; he hears air whistling in his ears but cannot see anything.

"Whassimatter?" he asks. His mouth feels as if it is stuffed with cotton; his lips are dry and cracked. He is suddenly angry at Josie and the plastic tubes that hold him in his bed as if he was a latter-day Gulliver. He wants to pull out the tubes, smash the bags filled with saline, tear away his bandages.

"You were speaking German," Josie says. "Did you know that?"

"Can I have some ice?"

"No," Josie says impatiently. "You spilled again, you're all wet."

"...for my mouth, dry..."

"Do you remember speaking German, honey. I have to know."

"Don't remember, bring ice, I'll try to think about it."

As Josie leaves to get him some ice, he tries to remember his dream.

"Here, now, just suck on the ice." She gives him a little hill of crushed ice on the end of a spoon.

"Why did you wake me up, Josie?" The layers of dream are beginning to slough off. As the Demerol works out of his system, he has to concentrate on fighting the burning ache in his stomach.

"You were speaking German. Where did you learn to speak like that?"

Stephen tries to remember what he said. He cannot speak any German, only a bit of classroom French. He looks down at his legs (he has thrown off the sheet) and notices, for the first time, that his legs are as thin as his arms. "My God, Josie, how could I have lost so much weight?"

"You lost about forty pounds, but don't worry, you'll gain it all back. You're on the road to recovery now. Please, try to remember your dream."

"I can't, Josie! I just can't seem to get ahold of it."

"Try."

"Why is it so important to you?"

"You weren't speaking college German, darling. You were speaking slang. You spoke in a patois that I haven't heard since the forties."

Stephen feels a chill slowly creep up his spine. "What did I say?"

Josie waits a beat, then says, "You talked about dying."

"Josie?"

"Yes," she says, pulling at her fingernail.

"When is the pain going to stop?"

"It will be over soon." She gives him another spoonful of ice. "You kept repeating the name Viktor in your sleep. Can you remember anything about him?"

*Viktor, Viktor, deep-set blue eyes, balding head and broken nose, called himself a Galitzianer. Saved my life.* "I

remember," Stephen says. "His name is Viktor Shmone. He is in all my dreams now."

Josie exhales sharply.

"Does that mean anything to you?" Stephen asks anxiously.

"I once knew a man from one of the camps." She speaks very slowly and precisely. "His name was Viktor Shmone. I took care of him. He was one of the few people left alive in the camp after the Germans fled." She reaches for her purse, which she keeps on Stephen's night table, and fumbles an old, torn photograph out of a plastic slipcase.

As Stephen examines the photograph, he begins to sob. A thinner and much younger Josie is standing beside Viktor and two other emaciated-looking men. "Then I'm not dreaming," he says, "and I'm going to die. That's what it means." He begins to shake, just as he did in his dream, and, without thinking, he makes the gesture of rising smoke to Josie. He begins to laugh.

"Stop that," Josie says, raising her hand to slap him. Then she embraces him and says, "Don't cry, darling, it's only a dream. Somehow, you're dreaming the past."

"Why?" Stephen asks, still shaking.

"Maybe you're dreaming because of me, because we're so close. In some ways, I think you know me better than anyone else, better than any man, no doubt. You might be dreaming for a reason; maybe I can help you."

"I'm afraid, Josie."

She comforts him and says, "Now tell me everything you can remember about the dreams."

He is exhausted. As he recounts his dreams to her, he sees the bright doorway again. He feels himself being sucked into it. "Josie," he says, "I must stay awake, don't want to sleep, dream...."

Josie's face is pulled tight as a mask; she is crying.

Stephen reaches out to her, slips into the bright doorway, into another dream.

It was a cold cloudless morning. Hundreds of prisoners were working in the quarries; each work gang came from a different barrack. Most of the gangs were made up of *Musselmänner*, the faceless majority of the camp. They moved like automatons, lifting and carrying the great stones to the numbered carts, which would have to be pushed down the tracks.

Stephen was drenched with sweat. He had a fever and was afraid that he had contracted typhus. An epidemic had broken out in the camp last week. Every morning several doctors arrived with the guards. Those who were too sick to stand up were taken away to be gassed or experimented upon in the hospital.

Although Stephen could barely stand, he forced himself to keep moving. He tried to focus all his attention on what he was doing. He made a

ritual of bending over, choosing a stone of certain size, lifting it, carrying it to the nearest cart, and then taking the same number of steps back to his dig.

A *Musselmänn* fell to the ground, but Stephen made no effort to help him. When he could help someone in a little way, he would, but he would not stick his neck out for a *Musselmänn*. Yet something niggled at Stephen. He remembered a photograph in which Viktor and this *Musselmänn* were standing with a man and a woman he did not recognize. But Stephen could not remember where he had ever seen such a photograph.

"Hey, you," shouted a guard. "Take the one on the ground to the cart."

Stephen nodded to the guard and began to drag the *Musselmänn* away.

"Who's the new patient down the hall?" Stephen asks as he eats a bit of cereal from the breakfast tray Josie has placed before him. he is feeling much better now; his fever is down, and the tubes, catheter, and intravenous needle have been removed. He can even walk around a bit.

"How did you find out about that?" Josie asks.

"You were talking to Mr. Gregory's nurse. Do you think I'm dead already? I can still hear."

Josie laughs and takes a sip of Stephen's tea. "You're far from dead! In fact, today is a red-letter day; you're going to take your first shower. What do you think about that?"

"I'm not well enough yet," he says, worried that he will have to leave the hospital before he is ready.

"Well, Dr. Volk thinks differently, and his word is law."

"Tell me about the new patient."

"They brought in a man last night who drank two quarts of motor oil; he's on the dialysis machine."

"Will he make it?"

"No, I don't think so; there's too much poison in his system."

We should all die, Stephen thinks. It would be an act of mercy. He glimpses the camp.

"Stephen!"

He jumps, then awakens.

"You've had a good night's sleep; you don't need to nap. Let's get you into that shower and have it done with." Josie pushes the tray table away from the bed. "Come on, I have your bathrobe right here."

Stephen puts on his bathrobe, and they walk down the hall to the showers. There are three empty shower stalls, a bench, and a whirlpool bath. As Stephen takes off his bathrobe, Josie adjusts the water pressure and temperature in the corner stall.

"What's the matter?" Stephen asks, after stepping into the shower. Josie stands in front of the shower stall and holds his towel, but she will not look at him. "Come on," he says, "you've seen me naked before."

"That was different."

"How?" He touches a hard, ugly scab that has formed over one of the wounds on his abdomen.

"When you were very sick, I washed you in bed, as if you were a baby. Now it's different." She looks down at the wet tile floor, as if she is lost in thought.

"Well, I think it's silly," he says. "Come on, it's hard to talk to someone who's looking the other way. I could break my neck in here and you'd be staring down at the fucking floor."

"I've asked you not to use that word," she says in a very low voice.

"Do my eyes still look yellowish?"

She looks directly at his face and says, "No, they look fine."

Stephen suddenly feels faint, then nauseated; he has been standing too long. As he leans against the cold shower wall, he remembers his last dream. He is back in the quarry. He can smell the perspiration of the men around him, feel the sun baking him, draining his strength. It is so bright....

He finds himself sitting on the bench and staring at the light on the opposite wall. I've got typhus, he thinks, then realizes that he is in the hospital. Josie is beside him.

"I'm sorry," he says.

"I shouldn't have let you stand so long; it was my fault."

"I remembered another dream." He begins to shake, and Josie puts her arms around him.

"It's all right now, tell Josie about your dream."

She's an old, fat woman, Stephen thinks. As he describes the dream, his shaking subsides.

"Do you know the man's name?" Josie asks. "The one the guard ordered you to drag away."

"No," Stephen says. "He was a *Musselmänn*, yet I thought there was something familiar about him. In my dream I remembered the photograph you showed me. He was in it."

"What will happen to him?"

"The guards will give him to the doctors for experimentation. If they don't want him, he'll be gassed."

"You must not let that happen," Josie says, holding him tightly.

"Why?" asks Stephen, afraid that he will fall into the dreams again.

"If he was one of the men you saw in the photograph, you must not let him die. Your dreams must fit the past."

"I'm afraid."

"It will be all right, baby," Josie says, clinging to him. She is shaking and breathing heavily.

Stephen feels himself getting an erection. He calms her, presses his face against hers, and touches her breasts. She tells him to stop, but does not push him away.

"I love you," he says as he slips his hand under her starched skirt. He feels awkward and foolish and warm.

"This is wrong," she whispers.

As Stephen kisses her and feels her thick tongue in his mouth, he begins to dream....

Stephen stopped to rest for a few seconds. The *Musselmänn* was dead weight. I cannot go on, Stephen thought; but he bent down, grabbed the *Musselmänn* by his coat, and dragged him toward the cart. He glimpsed the cart, which was filled with the sick and dead and exhausted; it looked no different than a carload of corpses marked for a mass grave.

A long, grey cloud covered the sun, then passed, drawing shadows across gutted hills.

On impulse, Stephen dragged the *Musselmänn* into a gully behind several chalky rocks. Why am I doing this? he asked himself. If I'm caught, I'll be ash in the ovens, too. He remembered what Viktor had told him: "You must think of yourself all the time, or you'll be no help to anyone else."

The *Musselmänn* groaned, then raised his arm. His face was gray with dust and his eyes were glazed.

"You must lie still," Stephen whispered. "Do not make a sound. I've hidden you from the guards, but if they hear you, we'll all be punished. One sound from you and you're dead. You must fight to live, you're in a death camp, you must fight so you can tell of this later."

"I have no family, they're all —"

Stephen clapped his hand over the man's mouth and whispered, "Fight, don't talk. Wake up, you cannot survive the death by sleeping."

The man nodded, and Stephen climbed out of the gully. He helped two men carry a large stone to a nearby cart.

"What are you doing?" shouted a guard.

"I left my place to help these men with this stone; now I'll go back where I was."

"What the hell are you trying to do?" Viktor asked.

Stephen felt as if he was burning up with fever. He wiped the sweat from his eyes, but everything was still blurry.

"You're sick, too. You'll be lucky if you last the day."

"I'll last," Stephen said, "but I want you to help me get him back to the camp."

"I won't risk it, not for a *Musselmänn*. He's already dead, leave him."

"Like you left me?"

Before the guards could take notice, they began to work. Although Viktor was older than Stephen, he was stronger. He worked hard every day and never caught the diseases that daily reduced the barrack's numbers. Stephen had a touch of death, as Viktor called it, and was often sick.

They worked until dusk, when the sun's oblique rays caught the dust from the quarries and turned it into veils and scrims. Even the guards sensed that this was a quiet time, for they would congregate together and talk in hushed voices.

"Come, now, help me," Stephen

whispered to Viktor. "I've been doing that all day," Viktor said. "I'll have enough trouble getting you back to the camp, much less carry this *Musselmänn*."

"We can't leave him."

"Why are you so preoccupied with this *Musselmänn*? Even if we can get him back to the camp, his chances are nothing. I know, I've seen enough, I know who has a chance to survive."

"You're wrong this time," Stephen said. He was dizzy and it was difficult to stand. The odds are I won't last the night, and Viktor knows it, he told himself. "I had a dream that if this man dies, I'll die, too. I just feel it."

"Here we learn to trust our dreams," Viktor said. "They make as much sense as this...." He made the gesture of rising smoke and gazed toward the ovens, which were spewing fire and black ash.

The western portion of the sky was yellow, but over the ovens it was red and purple and dark blue. Although it horrified Stephen to consider it, there was a macabre beauty here. If he survived, he would never forget these sense impressions, which were stronger than anything he had ever experienced before. Being so close to death, he was, perhaps for the first time, really living. In the camp, one did not even consider suicide. One grasped for every moment, sucked at life like an infant, lived as if there was no future.

The guards shouted at the prisoners to form a column; it was time to march back to the barracks.

While the others milled about, Stephen and Viktor lifted the *Musselmänn* out of the gully. Everyone nearby tried to distract the guards. When the march began, Stephen and Viktor held the *Musselmänn* between them, for he could barely stand.

"Come on, dead one, carry your weight," Viktor said. "Are you so dead that you cannot hear me? Are you as dead as the rest of your family?" The *Musselmänn* groaned and dragged his legs. Viktor kicked him. "You'll walk or we'll leave you here for the guards to find."

"Let him be," Stephen said.

"Are you dead or do you have a name?" Viktor continued.

"Berek," croaked the *Musselmänn*. "I am not dead."

"Then we have a fine bunk for you," Viktor said. "You can smell the stink of the sick for another night before the guards make a selection." Viktor made the gesture of smoke rising.

Stephen stared at the barracks ahead. They seemed to waver as the heat rose from the ground. He counted every step. He would drop soon, he could not go on, could not carry the *Musselmänn*.

He began to mumble in English.

"So you're speaking American again," Viktor said.

Stephen shook himself awake, placed one foot before the other.

"Dreaming of an American lover?"

"I don't know English and I have no American lover."

"Then who is this Josie you keep talking about in your sleep...?"

"Why were you screaming?" Josie asks, as she washes his face with a cold washcloth.

"I don't remember screaming," Stephen says. He discovers a fever blister on his lip. Expecting to find an intravenous needle in his wrist, he raises his arm.

"You don't need an I.V.," Josie says. "You just have a bit of a fever. Dr. Volk has prescribed some new medication for it."

"What time is it?" Stephen stares at the whorls in the ceiling.

"Almost three p.m. I'll be going off soon."

"Then I've slept most of the day away," Stephen says, feeling something crawling inside him. He worries that his dreams still have a hold on him. "Am I having another relapse?"

"You'll do fine," Josie says.

"I should be fine now. I don't want to dream anymore."

"Did you dream again, do you remember anything?"

"I dreamed that I saved the *Musselmänn*," Stephen says.

"What was his name?" asks Josie.

"Berek, I think. Is that the man you knew?"

Josie nods and Stephen smiles at her. "Maybe that's the end of the dreams," he says, but she does not respond. He asks to see the photograph again.

"Not just now," Josie says.

"But I have to see it. I want to see if I can recognize myself....

Stephen dreamed he was dead, but it was only the fever. Viktor sat beside him on the floor and watched the others. The sick were moaning and crying; they slept on the cramped platform, as if proximity to one another could insure a few more hours of life. Wan moonlight seemed to fill the barrack.

Stephen awakened, feverish. "I'm burning up," he whispered to Viktor.

"Well," Viktor said, "you've got your *Musselmänn*. If he lives, you live. That's what you said, isn't it?"

"I don't remember, I just knew that I couldn't let him die."

"You'd better go back to sleep, you'll need your strength. Or we may have to carry *you*, tomorrow."

Stephen tried to sleep, but the fever was making lights and spots before his eyes. When he finally fell asleep, he dreamed of a dark country filled with gemstones and great quarries of ice and glass.

"What?" Stephen asked, as he sat up suddenly, awakened from dampblack dreams. He looked around and saw that everyone was watching Berek, who was sitting under the window at the far end of the room.

Berek was singing the *Kol Nidre* very softly. It was the Yom Kippur

prayer, which was sung on the most holy of days. He repeated the prayer three times, and then once again in a louder voice. The others responded, intoned the prayer as a recitative. Viktor was crying quietly, and Stephen imagined that the holy spirit animated Berek. Surely, he told himself, that face and those pale unseeing eyes were those of a dead man. He remembered the story of the golem, shuddered, found himself singing and pulsing with fever.

When the prayer was over, Berek fell back into his fever trance. The others became silent, then slept. But there was something new in the barrack with them tonight, a palpable exultation. Stephen looked around at the sleepers and thought: We're surviving, more dead than alive, but surviving....

"You were right about that *Musselmänn*," Viktor whispered. "It's good that we saved him."

"Perhaps we should sit with him," Stephen said. "He's alone." But Viktor was already asleep; and Stephen was suddenly afraid that if he sat beside Berek, he would be consumed by his holy fire.

As Stephen fell through sleep and dreams, his face burned with fever.

* * *

Again he wakes up screaming.

"Josie," he says, "I can remember the dream, but there's something else, something I can't see, something terrible...."

"Not to worry," Josie says, "it's the fever." But she looks worried, and Stephen is sure that she knows something he does not.

"Tell me what happened to Viktor and Berek," Stephen says. He presses his hands together to stop them from shaking.

"They lived, just as you are going to live and have a good life."

Stephen calms down and tells her his dream.

"So you see," she says, "you're even dreaming about surviving."

"I'm burning up."

"Dr. Volk says you're doing very well." Josie sits beside him, and he watches the fever patterns shift behind his closed eyelids.

"Tell me what happens next, Josie."

"You're going to get well."

"There's something else...."

"Shush, now, there's nothing else." She pauses, then says, "Mr. Gregory is supposed to visit you tonight. He's getting around a bit; he's been back and forth all day in his wheelchair. He tells me that you two have made some sort of a deal about dividing up all the nurses."

Stephen smiles, opens his eyes, and says, "It was Gregory's idea. Tell me what's wrong with him."

"All right, he has cancer, but he doesn't know it, and you must keep it a secret. They cut the nerve in his leg because the pain was so bad. He's quite comfortable now, but, remember, you can't repeat what I've told you."

"Is he going to live?" Stephen asks. "He's told me about all the new projects he's planning. So I guess he's expecting to get out of here."

"He's not going to live very long, and the doctor didn't want to break his spirit."

"I think he should be told."

"That's not your decision to make, nor mine."

"Am I going to die, Josie?"

"No!" she says, touching his arm to reassure him.

"How do I know that's the truth?"

"Because I say so, and I couldn't look you straight in the eye and tell you if it wasn't true. I should have known it would be a mistake to tell you about Mr. Gregory."

"You did right," Stephen says. "I won't mention it again. Now that I know, I feel better." He feels drowsy again.

"Do you think you're up to seeing him tonight?"

Stephen nods, although he is bone tired. As he falls asleep, the fever patterns begin to dissolve, leaving a bright field. With a start, he opens his eyes: he has touched the edge of another dream.

"What happened to the man across the hall, the one who was always screaming?"

"He's left the ward," Josie says. "Mr. Gregory had better hurry, if he wants to play cards with you before dinner. They're going to bring the trays up soon."

"You mean he died, don't you."

"Yes, if you must know, he died. But *you're* going to live."

There is a crashing noise in the hallway. Someone shouts, and Josie runs to the door.

Stephen tries to stay awake, but he is being pulled back into the cold country.

"Mr. Gregory fell trying to get into his wheelchair by himself," Josie says. "He should have waited for his nurse, but she was out of the room and he wanted to visit you."

But Stephen does not hear a word she says.

There were rumours that the camp was going to be liberated. It was late, but no one was asleep. The shadows in the barrack seemed larger tonight.

"It's better for us if the Allies don't come," Viktor said to Stephen.

"Why do you say that?"

"Haven't you noticed that the ovens are going day and night? The Nazis are in a hurry."

"I'm going to try to sleep," Stephen said.

"Look around you, even the *Musselmänner* are agitated," Viktor said. "Animals become nervous before the slaughter. I've worked with animals. People are not so different."

"Shut up and let me sleep," Stephen said, and he dreamed that he could hear the crackling of distant gunfire.

"Attention," shouted the guards as

they stepped into the barrack. There were more guards than usual, and each one had two Alsatian dogs. "Come on, form a line. Hurry."

"They're going to kill us," Viktor said, "then they'll evacuate the camp and save themselves."

The guards marched the prisoners toward the north section of the camp. Although it was still dark, it was hot and humid, without a trace of the usual morning chill. The ovens belched fire and turned the sky aglow. Everyone was quiet, for there was nothing to be done. The guards were nervous and would cut down anyone who uttered a sound, as an example for the rest.

The booming of big guns could be heard in the distance. If I'm going to die, Stephen thought, I might as well go now and take a Nazi with me. Suddenly, all of his buried fear, aggression, and revulsion surfaced; his face became hot and his heart felt as if it was pumping in his throat. But Stephen argued with himself. There was always a chance. He had once heard of some women who were waiting in line for the ovens; for no apparent reason the guards sent them back to their barracks. Anything could happen. There was always a chance. But to attack a guard would mean certain death.

The guns became louder. Stephen could not be sure, but he thought the noise was coming from the west. The thought passed through his mind that everyone would be better off dead. That would stop all the guns and screaming voices, the clenched fists and wildly beating hearts. The Nazis should kill everyone, and then themselves, as a favor to humanity.

The guards stopped the prisoners in an open field surrounded on three sides by forestland. Sunrise was moments away; purple-black clouds drifted across the sky, touched by grey in the east. It promised to be a hot, gritty day.

Half-step Walter, a Judenrat sympathizer who worked for the guards, handed out shovel heads to everyone.

"He's worse than the Nazis," Viktor said to Stephen.

"The Judenrat thinks he will live," said Berek, "but he will die like a Jew with the rest of us."

"Now, when it's too late, the *Musselmänn* regains consciousness," Viktor said.

"Hurry," shouted the guards, "or you'll die now. As long as you dig, you'll live."

Stephen hunkered down on his knees and began to dig with the shovel head.

"Do you think we might escape?" Berek whined.

"Shut up and dig," Stephen said. "There is no escape, just stay alive as long as you can. Stop whining, are you becoming a *Musselmänn* again?" Stephen noticed that other prisoners were gathering up twigs and branches. So the Nazis plan to cover us up, he thought.

"That's enough," shouted a guard. "Put your shovels down in front of you and stand in a line."

The prisoners stood shoulder to shoulder along the edge of the mass grave. Stephen stood between Viktor and Berek. Someone screamed and ran and was shot immediately.

I don't want to see trees or guards or my friends, Stephen thought as he stared into the sun. I only want to see the sun, let it burn out my eyes, fill up my head with light. He was shaking uncontrollably, quaking with fear.

Guns were booming in the background.

Maybe the guards won't kill us, Stephen thought, even as he heard the crackcrack of their rifles. Men were screaming and begging for life. Stephen turned his head, only to see someone's face blown away.

Screaming, tasting vomit in his mouth, Stephen fell backward, pulling Viktor and Berek into the grave with him.

*Darkness,* Stephen thought. His eyes were open, yet it was dark, I must be dead, this must be death....

He could barely move. Corpses can't move, he thought. Something brushed against his face; he stuck out his tongue, felt something spongy. It tasted bitter. Lifting first one arm and then the other, Stephen moved some branches away. Above, he could see a few dim stars; the clouds were lit like lanterns by a quarter moon.

He touched the body beside him; it moved. That must be Viktor, he thought. "Viktor, are you alive, say something if you're alive." Stephen whispered, as if in fear of disturbing the dead.

Viktor groaned and said, "Yes, I'm alive, and so is Berek."

"And the others?"

"All dead. Can't you smell the stink? You, at least, were unconscious all day."

"They can't *all* be dead." Stephen said, then he began to cry.

"Shut up," Viktor said, touching Stephen's face to comfort him. "We're alive, that's something. They could have fired a volley into the pit."

"I thought I was dead," Berek said. He was a shadow among shadows.

"Why are we still here?" Stephen asked.

"We stayed in here because it is safe," Viktor said.

"But they're all dead," Stephen whispered, amazed that there could be speech and reason inside a grave.

"Do you think it's safe to leave now?" Berek asked Viktor.

"Perhaps. I think the killing has stopped. By now the Americans or English or whoever they are have taken over the camp. I heard gunfire and screaming. I think it's best to wait a while longer."

"Here?" asked Stephen. "Among the dead?"

"It's best to be safe."

It was late afternoon when they climbed out of the grave. The air was thick with flies. Stephen could see bodies sprawled in awkward positions beneath the covering of twigs and branches. "How can I live when all the others are dead?" he asked himself aloud.

"You live, that's all," answered Viktor.

They kept close to the forest and worked their way back toward the camp.

"Look there," Viktor said, motioning Stephen and Berek to take cover. Stephen could see trucks moving toward the camp compound.

"Americans," whispered Berek.

"No need to whisper now," Stephen said. "We're safe."

"Guards could be hiding anywhere," Viktor said. "I haven't slept in the grave to be shot now."

They walked into the camp through a large break in the barbed-wire fence, which had been hit by an artillery shell. When they reached the compound, they found nurses, doctors, and army personnel bustling about.

"You speak English," Viktor said to Stephen, as they walked past several quonsets. "Maybe you can speak for us."

"I told you, I can't speak English."

"But I've heard you!"

"Wait," shouted an American army nurse. "You fellows are going the wrong way." She was stocky and spoke perfect German. "You must check in at the hospital; it's back that way."

"No," said Berek, shaking his head. "I won't go in there."

"There's no need to be afraid now," she said. "You're free. Come along, I'll take you to the hospital."

Something familiar about her, Stephen thought. He felt dizzy and everything turned grey.

"Josie," he murmured, as he fell to the ground.

"What is it?" Josie asks. "Everything is all right, Josie is here."

"Josie," Stephen mumbles.

"You're all right."

"How can I live when they're all dead?" he asks.

"It was a dream," she says as she wipes the sweat from his forehead. "You see, your fever has broken, you're getting well."

"Did you know about the grave?"

"It's all over now, forget the dream."

"Did you know?"

"Yes," Josie says. "Viktor told me how he survived the grave, but that was so long ago, before you were even born. Dr. Volk tells me you'll be going home soon."

"I don't want to leave, I want to stay with you."

"Stop that talk, you've got a whole life ahead of you. Soon, you'll forget all about this, and you'll forget me, too." *(to page 56)*

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## REPORT ON COMPETITION 21

In the January issue we asked competitors to interpose sf titles in cliches, common sayings or familiar quotations. The response was pretty good, though we wish more entries had avoided such *common* common sayings and such *familiar* familiar quotes.

We could use some more suggestions for new competitions; rest assured that if we use yours we will send some appropriate reward.

### FIRST PRIZE

Caution: Bridge freezes before *Hell's Pavement*

Frankly my dear, I don't give a *Damnation Alley.*

Go West, *Young Frankenstein*

Last refreshment stand before the *Stand On Zanzibar.*

*Make Room! Make Room!* For Daddy! For Daddy!

*Ringworld* around the collar.

—Peter & Myra David
Wendy Goldstein
Fresh Meadows, NY

### SECOND PRIZE

People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw *Doorways in the Sand.*

Rome was not built in *San Diego, Lightfoot Sue.*

Heaven helps those who help *The Gods Themselves.*

Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man *The Perfect Lover.*

Familiarity breeds *The Marching Morons.*

You can't get blood out of a *Waldo.*

—Carlene Stober Baum
Olney, Md.

### RUNNERS UP

A miss is as good as *The Female Man*

Take two aspirins *And Call Me Conrad*

Too many *Galactic Pot-Healers* spoil the pot.

Time and tide wait for *The Ship That Sailed the Time Stream.*

Is the Pope Catholic? *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

—Linda McAllister
Palo Alto, CA

You can't make a silk purse out of *Donovan's Brain.*

If man was meant to fly he would have been *Born With the Dead.*

Red sky at morning, sailors take warning,/ Red sky at night, *Cities in Flight.*

When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be *New Voices in Science Fiction.*

—Bruce Berges
Lennos, CA

*Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones* is money.

Simon says, *Stand on Zanzibar.*

You can call me Ray, or you can call

me Jay, but you don't have to call me *The Atlantic Abomination.*

—Robert Werner
Albany, NY

*Too Many Magicians* spoil the pot.
A bird in the hand is worth two *On the Beach*
*Space Lords* have more fun.

—John G. Myers
Norwood, Pa.

Now that's a name to *Conjure Wife!*

Snug as a *Bug Jack Barron* in a rug.
There's many a *Martian Time-Slip* twixt cup and lip.

—Robert Stewart
Somerville, Mass.

All together now! *The Nine Billion Names of God* on the wall, *Nine Billion Names of God!* If If one of those names should happen to fall...

—James Donahue
Riverhead, NY

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COMPETITION 22 (suggested by Philip Michael Cohen)

In his book Exercises in Style, Raymond Queneau retold the following pointless anecdote in 100 different styles:

One day at about midday in the Parc Monceau district, on the back platform of a more or less full S bus (now No. 84), I observed a person with a very long neck who was wearing a felt hat which had a plaited cord around it instead of a ribbon. This individual suddenly addressed the man standing next to him, accusing him of purposely treading on his toes every time any passengers got on or off. However, he quickly abandoned his dispute and threw himself on to a seat which had become vacant.

Two hours later I saw him in front of the gare Saint-Lazare engaged in earnest conversation with a friend who was advising him to reduce the space between the lapels of his overcoat by getting a competent tailor to raise the top button.

For competition 22 we ask you to retell this anecdote in the style of any famous science fiction writer. You may condense, change the setting and characters, but keep the basic structure.

As an alternative, you are asked to retell the story of The Three Little Pigs (and the big bad wolf) in the style of any sf writer. Limit: 250 words.

Rules: Send entries to Competition Editor, F&SF, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Entries must be received by May 15. Judges are the editors of F&SF; their decision is final. All entries become the property of F&SF; none can be returned.

Prizes: First prize, six different hard cover science fiction books. Second prize, 20 different sf paperbacks. Runners-up will receive one-year subscriptions to F&SF. Results of Competition 22 will appear in the Sept. issue.


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TIME TRAVEL — For a plan that could make it available to you, send 50¢ to TIME WARP, 1210 Truxillo, Houston, TX 77004.

UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNE, help start one. Bob, Box 1770, 88021.

NONUPLE! Nine words that can psyche you to success, with explanation, $1.00. Family Publishing, Box 2686, Lakewood, Ohio 44107.

MAGNETIC ASTROLOGY CHART — 24"x24". For details write: Astro Visual Aides Inc., RD1, Box 133, Lebanon, NJ 08833.

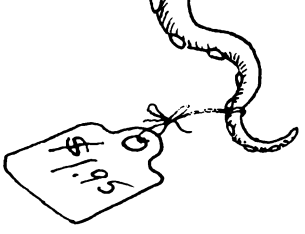
BIBLIOGRAPHIC, photocopying service. Free catalog. Send wants. Marx, 4412 18th, Lubbock, TX 79416.

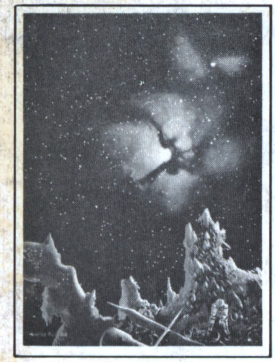
BIORHYTHM $3.95! Computerized, ten-foot, yearlong graph. Daily interpretations. Theory explanation. Additional graphs $3.00. Immediate first-class shipment. Send birthdate. Biograph, 13519P Carter, Painesville, Ohio 44077.

ORIGINAL SCI FI art posters (space battles, etc.). Colorful, unique. Send 25¢ for brochure. Lewis Publications, 4900 Royal Ave., #6, Eugene, Oregon 97402.

"TWO CENTURIES OF SPACECRAFT ENGINEERING" Future advertising calendar, year 2679 (1979). Quality, limited edition. Color, 11x17. $2.00. Box 667-F, Laytonville, CA 95454.

COLOR SLIDES: Free samples for large stamped envelope; Geological Education Aids, 17 Leisure Drive, Kirksville, MO 63501, Dept. F.





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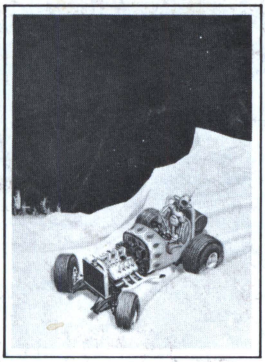

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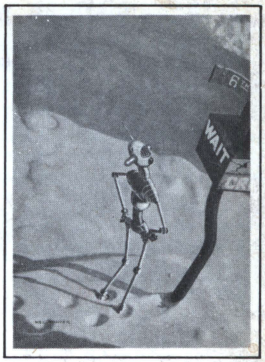


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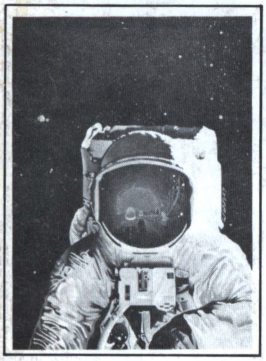

D

## Full-color posters of four exceptional F&SF covers

**These are not press proofs; they are a special small run of prints on quality, heavy stock. The quality of color reproduction exceeds that of the original printed covers. There is no overprinting, and they are suitable for framing (size: 9 x 11½).**

**$2.00 EACH; 3 FOR $5.00; 4 FOR**

A - September 1968, Chesley Bonestell, "The Trifid Nebula."
B - January 1970, Mel Hunter, "Robot and dune buggy."
C - September 1970, Mel Hunter, "Robot at street crossing."
D - May 1971, Ron Walotsky, for "The Bear With the Knot On His Tail."

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 06753

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