

# DARKSPACE

by Robert F Young

Mr. Young is semi-retired, in the sense that he still writes. He is a native of Silver Creek, which is a small, dead town in western New York State. His house, he tells us, is just across the street from Lake Erie, so logically, fishing should be his principal hobby; but unfortunately he doesn't like to fish, so he spends the time he would normally be fishing in writing instead. He's published going-on 200 short stories, 95% of them SF or fantasy, and recently had a novel—Starfinder—published by Pocket Books. He is a veteran of World War II.

art: Jim Odbert

I live in a cave.

I have no name. Most of the time I am asleep.

I am always wearing the same clothes—a red-plaid shirt, tan trousers, black boots.

The rattling of stones on the steep hill that leads up to the cave's mouth has awakened me. This has happened many times before. I am lying on my back on the cave's floor. I roll over onto my stomach, get up on my hands and knees and creep to the cave's mouth. Oddly, for as many times as I have had the experience, I never know who my visitor is until I see her. She is a girl. No, she is not really a girl, she is a woman, but I think of her as a girl. We stare at each other in the gray light, and she is as surprised to see me as I am to see her. Then she screams and runs down the hill.

I run after her.

The hill is the steep slope of a small valley. Woods cover the valley floor. When the girl plunges into them, I plunge into them after her. She is still screaming.

The woods are maple mostly, but some of the trees are locusts, and there are occasional hickories. I did not know the names of the trees in the beginning, but one by one they have crept into my mind.

I run after the girl, but I do not catch her. I never do. At length we come to a narrow stream, and she splashes across it and disappears. I try to cross the stream too, but it is a barrier of some kind, and I cannot get even one foot into it. At this point I feel weak, and I am barely able to make it back to the cave. I collapse onto the floor and fall back to sleep.

Basically, the experience never varies.

This time when the girl awakens me and we come face to face at the cave's mouth, I try to grab her. My hand brushes her shoulder before she draws back. She has an attractive face. Her eyes are light blue,

her cheekbones high. Her cheeks are thin, and her mouth is bow-shaped. She has yellow hair whose ends curl inward along her cheeks and neck. She is wearing a thigh-length light-blue garment. She always wears such garments. Sometimes they are light-green instead of light-blue, sometimes light-yellow. Their material is so thin that I can see her body through them. But I am never interested in her body. I chase her but for one reason: to kill her.

After she draws back from my touch she screams and runs down the hill. Again I run after her. I am very close behind her, and I can smell her. The smell is of perfume and body sweat. But it does not make me want her. Want her how? I ask myself. I do not know. I know only that I want to kill her.

She enters the woods. Her hair streams behind her. I try to grab it, and my fingertips brush its ends. But I cannot get close enough to seize it. Through the woods. The woods are dead. There is no life in them, except for that of the girl and myself. Why should there be life? I ask myself. What kind of life do I mean? Words come. Birds. Insects. Small animals. There are none of these. Yes, the woods are dead.

No matter. I pump my legs harder. Ahead, I see the stream. I must catch her before she reaches it. I pump my legs even harder. But it is no good. She enters the stream, crosses it and is gone. I try to cross it too, even though I know I cannot. But as always I cannot even step into it.

I am weary now, and the woods are whirling. I stagger back through them to the hill and manage to climb to my cave. I crawl inside. I will myself not to fall back to sleep, and for a while I am successful. Then the walls crowd in on me and whirl the way the woods did, and the last of my awareness fades away.

Today, after I chase the girl and again fail to catch her, I manage to remain awake longer than I ever have before.

"Today" is a new word in my vocabulary, but it is not an apt one to apply to the time periods during which I am awake. I associate "day" with a bright sky with a sun rising into it, and fields and trees and houses spread out below. But there is no sun in the sky above the valley, and the sky is always gray. Nor are there any houses or fields in my milieu. The little world I live in, wherever it may be, never changes from one of my awareness periods to the next.

But I cannot think of a better word than "day" to ascribe to my time periods.

As I sit here in the cave trying to remain awake, I realize suddenly that I know the girl I want to kill. But I cannot think of her name, nor can I think of why I want to kill her.

After I again chase the girl to the stream and she disappears beyond it, I stand by the flowing water and stare across it to the unobtainable other shore. Presently I see someone standing on the opposite bank staring at me. It is the figure of a slender man wearing a red-plaid shirt, tan trousers, and black boots. He has no hat, and his hair is the same off-brown color as mine. His face is familiar. I have seen it somewhere—many times. I keep staring at it, and as I stare the other man stares back, and at last I realize that the face is my face, with right and left reversed as in a mirror, and that the man is I.

Again, the girl. Again, the chase through the woods. I watch her as she disappears. She does so the instant her foot touches the opposite bank. Alice through the looking glass. I am beginning to remember quite well now.

I stare at myself across the stream.

It is clear to me now that my valley is only a half valley.

How far does it extend to my right and to my left? What lies behind the hill that houses my cave?

When I return to the hill I climb up it past my cave. I climb and climb and climb. At length I realize I am no longer climbing but descending. Suddenly I come to another cave. I stare at it. No, it is not another cave, it is my cave. I have barely time to crawl inside before sleep bludgeons me.

I think of my awareness periods as being diurnal occurrences. But are they? Perhaps between them I sleep for many days. I have no way of knowing. My awakenings are totally dependent on the whim of the girl. Only she is capable of bringing me back to life. I wonder why she keeps doing so. Surely she

knows by now that I live in the cave. Why, then, does she keep climbing the hill to it? She seems startled each time she sees me. Doesn't she remember my existence from one visit to the next? Apparently she does not, or she would stay away.

My awareness periods are much longer now, and they grow longer with each awakening. I am trying to get out of the valley. Today, instead of returning directly to the cave after the girl again escaped me, I turned right and set forth up the valley. I walked and walked. At length I began passing among trees I was certain I had seen before. I moved in closer to the valley's slope. Presently, through the branches of the trees, I made out the dark mouth of a cave. I hurried up the slope toward it. The shape of the mouth was familiar. I crawled inside. Yes, it was my cave. Sleep pounced upon me out of the shadows.

I am not going to try to get out of the valley by walking in the other direction. I know that if I do I will merely come back to where I set out from. An odd term has come into my mind. "Möbius strip." Yes, a curvature of space; That is what the valley is—a curvature of space. A tri-dimensional Möbius strip. A cruel cul-de-sac which it is impossible for me to escape from and to which only the girl has the key.

I have remembered food. People eat food in order to survive. I am a person. Why do I not need food?

Why do I not need water? One also needs water to survive. Why am I never cold or hot?

I have remembered my name. It came to me while I was chasing the girl through the woods. Wishman. Charles Wishman.

The name brings other names to mind. John Ranch. Carl Jung.

Immanuel Kant. Paul Cuiran. Janice Rowlin. Cheryl Wishman... Is Cheryl the name of the girl?

She has my last name. Can she be . . . my wife?

I concentrate on the word "wife." It is a while before I can grasp—remember—its meaning. When I do I am bewildered. If Cheryl Wishman is my wife, why do I want to kill her?

Today, in my eagerness to catch the girl, I tackle her. I cling tightly to her legs as she falls, but somehow she manages to kick free. Her feet are bare, and one of them strikes me in the throat. But I do not even feel the blow.

After she gains her feet she glances at me over her shoulder. Her face is masked with fear, but I can see beyond the mask to the familiar features, and now I know definitely that she was my wife. Was? Why do I say "was?" She must still be my wife. But if she is my wife, why do I want to kill her? At length the answer comes: *Because she killed you.*

But it is the wrong answer. I know now that she killed me, although I do not remember how or why; but that is not why I want to kill her. I want to kill her because she expects me to want to.

I am up on my feet now, and running after her through the woods. But as always she reaches the stream before I can catch her, crosses it and disappears.

I sit on the floor of my cave, thinking. My awareness periods are growing longer and longer.

Why did my wife kill me?

Why am I not dead?

A new word comes into my mind. Endo-analyst.

It is a key word, and it unlocks much of what I am trying to remember.

I was an endo-analyst. I studied Cuiranism at the John Ranch School of Endo-psychology. I opened a practice on Beech Street in the suburb of Forestview, N.A. I bought a hillhouse on the outskirts and settled down there with my wife, Cheryl. We had many friends. We threw parties and went to parties our friends threw. My practice thrived. During deer season Cheryl and I often went hunting.

But I cannot grasp/remember what Cuiranism means.

Today the girl—no, I will call her Cheryl, for Cheryl is who she is—today Cheryl falls while running

down the hill. But she twists aside when I try to leap upon her, and I can find no purchase, and roll halfway down the slope. She beats me to the valley floor, and as I plunge into the woods after her I hear myself screaming the word "murderess" over and over. It is as though she put the word into my mouth.

I have it! Cuiranism is Paul Cuiran's theory of the nature of dreams.

Of the nature of reality.

But it is more than just a theory. Long ago, he turned it into fact. But Freudian analysts have refused to accept it as such. They keep trying to laugh Cuiran away.

They have been unable to do so.

Near the *fin de siècle* Cuiran combined properties of Kant's transcendental aesthetic and Jung's collective unconscious and came up with Lightspace and Darkspace. Lightspace, he asserted, is reality as we perceive it, Darkspace the land of dreams. Both, he said, constitute the Kantian thing-in-itself, and neither possesses time nor, despite the names he applied to them, space. Time and space, he maintained, are imposed by the beholder.

He focused his endeavors on the investigation of Darkspace. After developing a drug, which he called *cuiranum* and which established an emotional rapport between himself and his patients, he found he could enter their dreams. He concentrated on their recurrent items, and began curing them by destroying or changing the dreams. He called himself an endo-analyst. In the Catskills, John Ranch, his foremost disciple, built the John Ranch School of Endo-psychology.

I have entered thousands of dreams.

Recurrent dreams.

A competent endo-analyst does not bother with ordinary dreams. Even so-called nightmares are harmless. It is the obsessive dream we set our sights upon.

Patients with recurrent dreams came to me, and I entered those dreams and cured them. I know what Darkspace is. It is many things if you explore its Jungian archetypal ramifications, but to the practicing endo-analyst it is nothing more than what the dreamer makes it, and its clock is the dreamer's mind. Invariably the two "levels" of reality, of the thing-in-itself, are divided by a symbolic barrier. When the dreamer awakes, he/she passes through that barrier. The dreamed-of never can.

I am in Darkspace now. But not as an endo-analyst. I am the dreamed-of.

Cheryl's dreaming mind has fashioned out of Darkspace a woods that reverts back into itself, and a topless ridge. She uses a woodland stream for her barrier.

She killed me, and now she keeps dreaming that I am hiding in a cave, waiting to kill her. But her sleeping mind keeps forgetting I am here, and, unaware of my presence, her dream-self keeps climbing the slope to my cave.

Why did she kill me?

How?

I cannot remember. The walls of the cave creep closer to me as I try to think. The cave's mouth darkens. Just before the last of my awareness drifts away, a jagged bolt of terror tears through my mind. If she does not dream the dream again I shall be truly be dead!

We went hunting that day. Yes, I remember now.

Cheryl, a short time ago, disappeared beyond the stream/barrier. I am sitting on the floor of my cave.

Yes, we went hunting that day.

She and I.

The day is obscure. My thoughts take me back beyond it. I become again what I was before my murder. A practicing endo-analyst. I sit in my Beech Street office, listening to my patients recount their dreams. I am becoming richer with each passing moment. It is said in professional circles that my fees are exorbitant. Perhaps they are. But if a doctor does not rob his patients he will not be held high in their esteem. In any event, I am justified in charging what I do. I spent five long years acquiring my expertise. Even with *cuiranum* you do not walk blithely into dreams. And each dream is different, and you must

learn from the patient before you enter it what you will encounter, and you must know beforehand exactly what you must do to destroy the dream or to alter it in such a way that he or she will not dream it again and will be cured of the malaise that occasioned it.

Such dreams I entered!

A woman is walking down a street. She sees a parade of children approaching and pauses to watch it go by. She sees that each child carries a spear. When the center of the parade is abreast of her, the Leader cries, "Halt!" and the marchers stop. "Left face!" cries the Leader, and the children turn simultaneously in the woman's direction. Half of them are girls, half boys. The girls are dressed in pink uniforms, the boys in blue. Each has a large golden cross hanging from a golden chain around his or her neck. There is no sunlight, but the crosses glitter as though the sun were high and bright. "Phalanx!" cries the Leader, and the second, fourth, and six lines take one-half-step to the right. "Close lines, lower spears and advance!"

The phalanx now approaches the woman, its spearheads glittering in the nonexistent sunlight. Terrified, she tries to back away from the solid line of spears, but comes immediately into contact with the façade of a building. Then she tries to run up the street, but the phalanx curves inward, blocking her. I am standing in a nearby doorway. I knew what the children are before I entered the dream. They are those she would have given birth to if she had not defied the Church and taken birth-control pills. I know she will awake before they reach her, but I must stop her from dreaming of them again. I remove my belt, walk over to her, kneel on one knee and pull her down across the other. I raise her dress, pull down her panties and begin beating her with my belt across her bare buttocks. She screams in pain. The phalanx halts, and the children lower their spears and begin laughing. A moment later the dream ends. It will never recur.

A young man is climbing a cliff. He is not a mountain climber and he is terrified. He has reached a part of the cliff above which he cannot find a handhold. His present position is precarious, and shortly he will fall. He will then awake. I have deduced from his description of the recurrent dream that the cliff is the university at which he is taking a pre-med course, and I have concluded that he does not have the right qualifications to become a doctor. He cannot climb higher because he does not want to climb higher, and it is this that he must admit to himself.

I have positioned myself a considerable distance above him, and now I drop him a rope. "You must swing 'way to the right," I shout down. "There is a ledge there." Desperately he seizes the rope, kicks out and makes a pendulum pitch to the ledge. It is a good-sized ledge, and there is a wide fissure leading up from it to the top of the cliff. So now, instead of awakening, he climbs up the fissure. It is such an easy climb that he realizes it is the logical way for him to climb the cliff and that he should abandon the previous route altogether, even though the new route will take him to a different eminence. When he reaches the eminence, he is enchanted by the view and freed from his impasse.

Such dreams!

I used to enter many of my wife's dreams.

I have chased her again, and have returned to my cave. It seems that this time when I awoke I had slept for ages.

I entered her dreams out of curiosity at first. I merely wanted to know what she dreamed of. I would take a cuiranum before going to bed, and then, lying beside her in the darkness, I would slip my dream-self into her mind.

Her dreams were simple affairs, and they bored me. But I was already bored. With her. And it irked me to find that she was as innocent as she seemed.

Her simplicity had always been an affront to my intelligence. She embarrassed me at parties, saying the wrong thing, laughing the wrong time at a joke, or not laughing when she should. And then there was this thing I had going with Janice Rowlin. All of my patients were rich—they had to be to afford me—but Janice was filthy rich. Her parents had built a castle on the Hudson. Like many of my female patients, she had fallen in love with me. She was an only child, and would someday inherit her parents' fortune. But money did not comprise her sole fascination. She was sophisticated, cultured, intelligent—everything

Cheryl was not. I wanted to marry her, but Cheryl was old-fashioned, and I knew I would have to fight for a divorce and feared that the publicity would hurt my practice.

There are two diametrically different ways an endo-analyst can set about killing someone. He can do so from without—or from within.

Cheryl often dreamt of water. She would dream she was standing on a seashore and she would see a huge wave approaching the beach. A tsunami. She would turn and begin to run. I began tripping her, adding to the agony of the experience. She would go sprawling, roll over and see the great wave almost upon her, and scream. She would see me, too, but I always assumed she merely believed she dreamed me. She would scramble to her feet and begin running again, still screaming. She would always awaken, of course, before the wave reached her. Then she would lie huddled in bed beside me, whimpering for a long while before she fell back to sleep.

Another dream she dreamed over and over was what I thought of as a childhood dream. It cannot be referred to as a recurrent dream in the usual sense of the term, because it did her no psychological harm. Actually, before I began entering it, it helped her.

The dream was about her teddy bear. She would be 9, little girl and she would walk into a nursery wallpapered with pictures of toys and sandboxes and swings and teeter-totters, and look for her teddy bear. When she failed to find it she would become frightened. She would search for it everywhere. Under the bed, behind the bureau, in the closet, behind the window curtains. Then at last she would find it under the pillow of her little bed, and she would pick it up and hug it and then lie down on the bed holding it to her, and when she fell asleep she would go right on sleeping in her real bed beside me. In the morning she would awake bright and happy, and hum one of her favorite songs while she dressed.

The first few times I entered the dream I stayed out of her center of observation and she did not know I was there. Then one night I followed her into the little room, and after she found the bear I tore it out of her arms and plucked its eyes out. Then I handed it back, and she lay down on the bed with it, sobbing. When the dream ended I could hear her crying beside me in the darkness.

I plucked the little bear's eyes out in several successive dreams, then I changed my tactics. Now, when I took the bear from her, I held it by the hind legs and began swinging it so its head kept banging against the wall. Each time I did this, Cheryl would wake up, screaming. I did it again and again and again. In all of the teddy-bear dreams I transformed myself into an old man with a crooked nose and mean little eyes, and I was certain she thought the old man was merely an added dream-element. But I had betrayed myself in the water dreams by entering them as myself. Mornings after the teddy-bear dreams she would wake up with a haggard face and swollen eyes. She would have nothing for breakfast except coffee. I do not believe she ate all day. She grew thinner and thinner. She caved deeper and deeper into herself. I was certain she would kill herself. But she did not. She killed me.

It seems I have slept for an eternity before she dreams the cave dream again. But there is no way for me to know. She climbs the bank to the cave and we look at each other, and then she runs screaming down the slope and into the woods. And even though I am aware by now that I will never catch her before she reaches the stream and disappears, I still pursue her. She has incorporated the instinct to do so in my dream-self, and I am helpless against it.

If a long time truly passed between this dream and its predecessor, perhaps she is undergoing a cure. But I do not think so—not only because I have seen no sign of an endo-analyst but because I do not believe she would seek help, since this would necessitate her having to tell the analyst—ecto or endo—that she killed me. But recurrent dreams sometimes fade out of their own accord if the malaise that causes them loosens its hold. If such is the case with this dream, I shall soon be dead.

I am already dead, of course, but only in proper time. In the timelessness of the thing-in-itself I am both alive and dead. Cuiran theorized that the dreamed-of in recurrent dreams, if dreamed of often enough, could acquire awareness independent of that of the dreamer's, whether the dreamed-of were alive or dead in proper time. I have borne his theory out.

How did Cheryl kill me?

I find that I cannot think clearly any longer. I have again remained awake for a long time, but I cannot

even begin to remain awake for the entire periods that separate her dreams. I am about to fall asleep again. I try to fight back the dimness that crowds in around me. It is no use. My awareness fades away.

We went hunting that day. Yes. Cheryl and I. Hunting deer We used old-fashioned 16-gauge shotguns with slugs. Rifles are still taboo in hunting deer. It was in November. Late November. I am-remembering very well as I sit here in my cave after returning from my futile chase. It was in late November, and there had been a light snow. An ideal snow for deer hunting.

We followed deer tracks through the woods. We came to a clearing. We knew the deer was close, and we paused at the clearing's edge. Then, to our right, we saw the deer step out of the woods. It was a big buck, upwind from us. Both of us raised our guns. I dropped the buck with a shot to the throat, but I could see it was still alive. Cheryl did not fire. My second slug entered the side of the buck's head, killing it instantly. I could see the evanescent clouds of Cheryl's breath. I could see the evanescent clouds of my own. She still had her gun fitted against her shoulder. "Aren't you going to make sure he's dead?" she asked. "I know he's dead," I said, but I walked toward the animal anyway. Her first shot struck my left shoulder, twisting me around. As I sagged to the ground I could see her face. The bleakness of her eyes shocked me. "No," I said. Her body jerked slightly, and there was a great whiteness. I remember nothing after that.

Thank God she dreamed me again!

It has been a long time since my last awareness period. A very long time. I can sense the passage of proper days and proper weeks. I must get out of the dream. Must!

Is it possible for the dreamed-of to dream? Can I, by dreaming of my real self, *become* my real self?

I have not dreamed yet, but perhaps I can.

There is no other way out of this cul-de-sac.

If I can dream of myself as I was in real life and become my real self, I will be able to avert my Lightspace death. With my precognition I will know when the time comes *not* to turn my back on my wife and walk into the clearing.

Perhaps the best moment to dream of will be the moment before I shot the buck. I will shoot it and then shoot it again, and then *not* go into the clearing. And Cheryl will be standing there beside me with her gun raised and I will look at her and say, "You go see if it's dead." And when she does, I will shoot her.

A hunting accident. If it worked for her, there is no reason it should not work for me.

I concentrate on the moment as sleep closes in. I picture the clearing in my mind. I picture the buck about to walk into it. I see Cheryl standing beside me. Two people. A clearing. A buck.

I saw trees!

Yes, trees!

I did not see Cheryl, nor did I see the clearing. But it is a beginning.

I know this time that it has been ages since she dreamed me last. I can feel a stiffness in my mind. But I dreamed of trees again. And the leaves of a forest floor. Oh, I am close, so close! I concentrate with all my might on the moment as sleep closes in again. Cheryl and myself standing at the edge of the clearing. The buck about to step into it from the woods. This time I *must* escape!

The forest floor is covered with this year's leaves. Beneath them lie layer upon layer of leaves from years before. I sink deeply into the layers of leaves as I walk. There are trees on either hand. I glance to my left, but see no sign of Cheryl. All I see are trees.

There is a clearing just ahead. This is wrong. I should be standing at the edge of it with my wife. I look to left and right. Oddly, I do not need to turn my head to do so. I still see no sign of her. I sniff the air, then step into the clearing. Then I see my wife. And myself. I am pointing a gun in my direction. *No!* I try to scream, but I cannot say the word. I start to run. Then the gun blasts and there is a horrid tearing in

my throat. I crumple to the ground. The gun in my hands is still pointing in my direction. *No!* I try to scream again, but I have no voice. In the final second of my life I know that I have not only escaped Darkspace, but Light as well.