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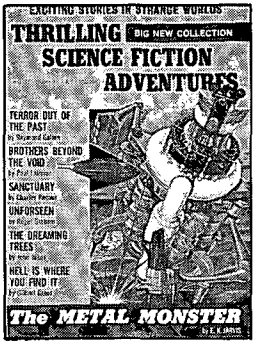

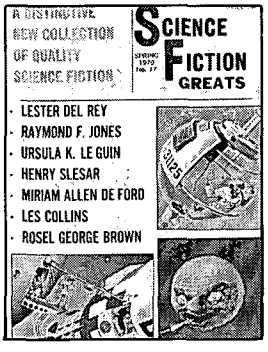

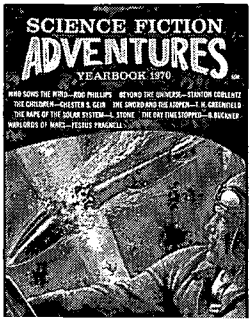

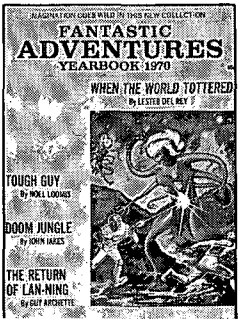

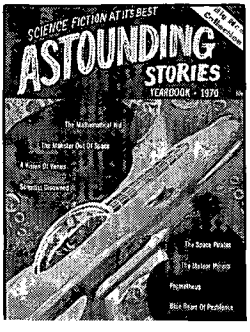

WORLD'S LEADING SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINE

Amazing stories

MAY, 1970 Vol. 44, No. 1

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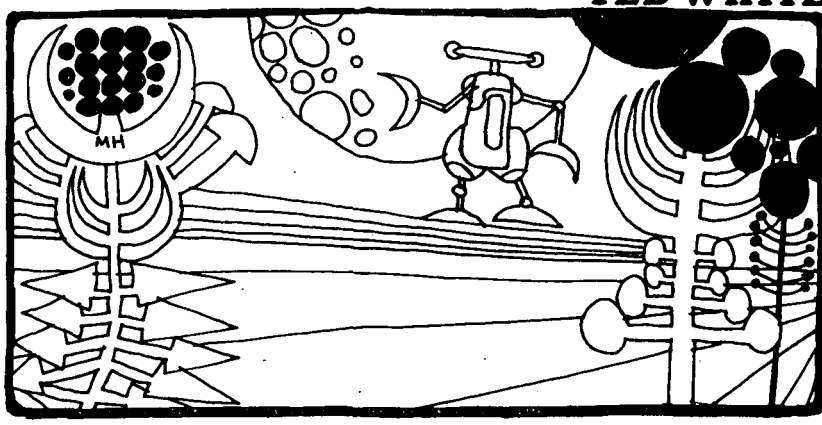


EDITORIAL

Editorial by Ted White

The other day I received a letter from a reader which I'd like to share with you here, rather than in our customary letters section (which is entirely too swollen this time anyway):

Dear Mr. White:

Why is it so hard to publish a first-rate *science fiction* magazine? Other magazines are published with success and abundance. I subscribe to at least ten other magazines, all of which I enjoy. I buy at least two or three paperback sf novels a week. I would buy six or seven sf magazines a month if they existed. But I find quality uneven, format unappetizing, editors unimaginative, presentation childish. Every now and then *IF* or *ANALOG* will publish a great novel (like those of Herbert, Ann McCaffrey, Harrison, etc.), and I will buy the mag for a while until I find that I'm buying it but skipping all the stories because they're so badly (if not badly, then uncreatively) written. I loathe cliches and cliche situations unless there's a parody of style. Any story which begins "Brad was scared. The lean spaceman fingered the controls of his spacecraft nervously. How long had it been since he heard from planetary control?" . . . for instance. (I hate the device of telling the reader facts by having the character wonder about something. Especially when questions ponder the obvious. My hatred is all the more intense since I have an intense imagination and totally surrender my "disbelief". I hate like anything to find myself thinking, "Gee, yes. That's right. I wonder if there's something wrong he hasn't heard from control?" It lowers one's self-respect to catch oneself in idiotic responses of this sort.)

Anyway (if I can recover from this train of thought) I find myself pondering the following argument:

1. SF journals are numerous yet short-lived and uneven in quality with the exception of *F&SF*. (But one fine mag is not enough—one likes a choice of styles, a *varied* diet.)

2. "Good" sf abounds, especially in

paperback form.

3. Therefore, there must be some economic law that makes it unprofitable for good writers to sell to sf mags and good editors to edit them. Occasionally (I am not an economic determinist) a good editor will try and put out a superior mag in his spare time, and the thing will go bankrupt before it really succeeds.

4. I can't believe that a first-rate magazine would have trouble selling to subscribers (it might have trouble selling to advertisers).

5. Therefore, why is there such a high rate of failure in sf mags? The problem must be enduring until some reliable form of support can be found which requires grit, determination, and cash.

6. Perhaps if one makes changes which cost a great deal, the cash will all be used up and the project will fold.

My plea to you, editor White, is "please don't fail!" I fear that the success of your publications is ephemeral and I hope that it is not . . .

Diana Cook
625 Park Avenue
New York, N.Y., 10021

This letter brings us back to the old and much-pondered question, Are the sf magazines still viable? If not, why not? And if so, why do they appear to be in such poor health?

Let's for a beginning run down Miss Cook's numbered arguments.

1. *Are* the magazines "numerous yet short-lived"? Of the six major titles, AMAZING STORIES has been in continuous publication since 1926, *ANALOG* (as, originally, *ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER-SCIENCE*) since 1930, FANTASTIC (as the heir to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES) since 1939, *FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION* since 1949, *GALAXY* since 1950, and *IF* since 1952. In other words, the youngest is eighteen years old, and the oldest forty-four. These are respectable ages; most present-day magazines outside the sf field are younger. To be sure, there have been a great many other sf titles, some of them, like *THRILLING WONDER STORIES* (the descendant of *WONDER STORIES*, itself the offspring of the marriage of *SCIENCE WONDER STORIES* and *AIR WONDER STORIES*, both born in 1929) surviving for more than two decades before perishing; most of them the products of "boom" times and rarely surving them. It is the nature of the publishing industry that when one publisher is seen to have a winner, others will rush in with imitations, sometimes smothering the market.

2. If one should purchase *all* the paperback sf now being published, he would probably find its quality, its "uneven"ness, to approximate that of the magazines. The advantage of a book, however, lies in the fact that, most often, it is a single novel and one can pick and choose among one's favorite authors. If one follows Sturgeon's Law and buys only the top 10% of the books (and their proliferation is so great that one can hardly do elsewise), while continuing to at least thumb through all the few remaining magazines, certainly a gross discrepancy will be apparent. But it remains a false standard for comparison.

3. The economic laws which govern the sf magazine are those dictated by its sales, and from that its profits. Magazines compete against paperback books with severe handicaps. Magazines are placed on sale once, and remain on sale for a maximum of a month or so before being displaced by other titles or a new issue. Once off-sale, they are out of date and cannot be sold again. Paperback books are undated, and can be kept on display as long as possible and returned to display at a later

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 134)

Terry Carr busies himself these days as editor of the prestigious Ace Science Fiction Specials line of books, but is remembered best for his haunting evocations of alien thought and behavior in such stories as "Hop Friend" and "The Dance of the Changer and the Three." Here is yet another such story . . . about the ecology of alien life-styles, long honed to refinement by evolution on the hostile planet Romele, and now slipping precariously out of balance . . .

THE BALANCE

TERRY CARR

Illustrated by MICHAEL WM. KALUTA

FOR A WHILE I thought Algorr was a complete madman—or the alien equivalent. But I've come to feel he's just a typical example of a nonhuman personality. Certainly he has bizarre mannerisms, like that damnable way he inclines his head toward me every time we conclude a business transaction and waves his hair for several seconds; but that too is just local nonhuman custom.

I think it would actually be easier to understand these people if they didn't look so much like us. They have two legs and two arms and they even average about six and a half feet tall, like most people. Their skin is more orange than ours, and their hair continues down the back in a rich pelt, but dammit they have brown eyes. There's not another nonhuman intelligence in the Federation that has brown eyes, and personally I'm glad of it. It's confusing.

I'm beginning to suspect that Hergrave knew more about this than he told me when he talked me into this trip. It sounded simple at the time: the company's regular representative here on Romele had resigned all of a sudden and they needed someone to take over for a few days to conduct this season's trading. Why did he quit? I asked, and Hergrave said something about the man needing a rest.

"Nerves were acting up, that's all. You know how it is when you've been dealing with aliens for a while—they see everything completely different than you do and eventually you get to wondering who's right. Is up really down? Do two and two make seven? And what's your own name, anyway? That's what happened to Leamington, I gather. He was on Romele for seven years, but finally he had to ask for a vacation and a different assignment."

"Any problems with the locals?" I asked.

"No, no, not at all. They're perfectly friendly to us . . . fully assimilated into the Federation, as a matter of fact. Just a bit primitive technologically—all to the good for trading purposes, of course—and also backward culturally, but that's to be expected."

He didn't say in just what *way* they were culturally backward, but I found out as soon as I took my orientation sleep: they were carnivores.

There are two intelligent species on Romele: the pandar and the arquerrilan. They're both carnivorous, but most of the lower animals seem to be poisonous to them. (For the most part, Romele is an inhospitable planet; most of it is arid and lifeless and only about 500 square miles around the city are inhabited at all.) Since prehistoric times the two species have fed

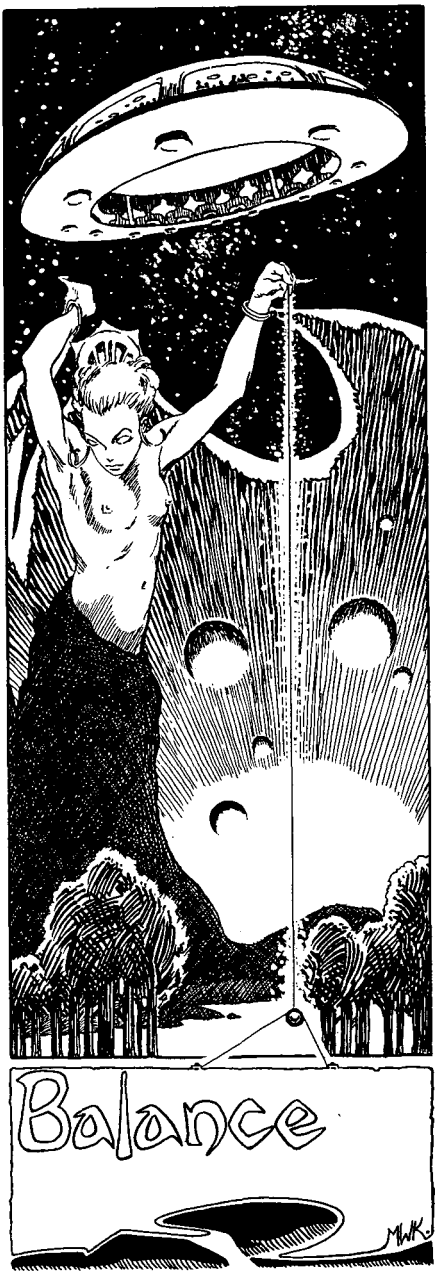
primarily on each other, and that situation has bred an almost preposterous interrelationship of dependence and exploitation. They eat each other, but it's only because they have to.

The pandar and arquerrilan have evolved some sort of agreement under which the Romele year is divided into two seasons roughly corresponding to the breeding-periods of each species. The pandar hunt the arquerrilan during the first season; the arquerrilan have just dropped their newborn at this time, and they leave them protected in cocoon-like coverings and take to the hills. Shortly afterward their teeth and claws fall out (the arquerrilan are humanoid too, but they're more short and squat and they're covered with a reddish-brown fur) and the pandar come after them.

In the second season, when the pandar young have been sealed in the rocks for their growth-hibernation, the arquerrilan come back and the pandar become the quarry.

This is all done with a rather indecent civility; during the day or two when the seasons overlap the two species sheath their claws and conduct mutual business. The dwellings occupied by the pandar are passed on to the arquerrilan, and agreements are made for the tending of the few crops which these locals are able to grow. There is a particularly vile cactuslike plant which only the arquerrilan eat, but the pandar irrigate the fields during the same time that they hunt their owners.

The system upset me quite a bit when the dormiteach fed me the data—in fact, after the machine finished and shut itself off, I had a couple of vivid nightmares. But then the machine's electrodes picked up what was happening and fed in some overriding dreams which were much more pleasant, so by the time I woke up I was able to consider the whole thing more calmly. I decided that the business of planetary natives was their own, so long as they kept it among themselves. And all the data emphasized



that the Romelians, pandar and arquerrilan alike, never bothered humans. So . . . what the hell. I took the assignment.

Algorr met me at the transmatter station with the usual pandar formalities. He touched fingertips to his shoulders and bent slightly at the knees, waved his hair and said, "Our welcomes, Mister Jefferson Healey." Then he observed four and a half minutes of silence, which seems to be a unit of time by local measurement. I spent the time lacing on some shoes and wondering when they'd get a full-powered transmatter unit installed here that could receive more than a few pounds of dead-weight, nonliving matter at a time. It's disconcerting to arrive on a new planet in your stocking feet.

After a period of silence, Algorr took me on a tour of his warehouse. It started with a feverish ride through the center of the city, Algorr at the stick of the car, the retractable claws of his hands slipping out and in as he dodged through traffic. There's been little Federation industry set up here yet, and of course the prices on shipping vehicles by spacer would be preposterous, so the car was quite primitive: three wheels on a cracked rafftree body, driven by a basic 20-hp electric motor. Nevertheless, Algorr got the thing up to about forty miles an hour as we tore through pockets of pedestrians with a recklessness that made me wonder just how assimilated these people were after all.

I almost yelled out loud when he came within inches of an old local with black hair and stooped shoulders. Algorr must have noticed, because he shrugged and said, "No difference. The season is soon finished."

It struck me as a rather callous form of fatalism, but I held my tongue. Their society was their own business, I told myself again, and if Algorr considered the life of an aging pandar worth little when the arquerrilan's season was approaching, what was it to me?

We broke out of the congestion around the marketplaces and made good time through the human residential areas. Algorr's warehouse was out on the edge of town, where the shadows of the dark hills reach down across the fields in the afternoon and lay a dull brown peace over the ground. It was the kind of quiet that a primitive, undeveloped planet should have, I thought—but instead I had seen the crowded frenzy of the city, and I know the savage, bloody hunts that were taking place out in those hills. This seemed like a pocket of sanity surrounded by clanging, clashing opposites.

We pulled up before a large building (two stories, built of rafftree wood elaborately carved with pandar and arquerrilan motifs juxtaposed over the doorway) and Algorr led me inside.

He spread his arms and indicated the racks on which the hides of thousands of arquerrilan were stretched. A musty smell pervaded the large room. "All are ready for transfer," he said. "The season draws close."

I nodded politely, visualizing what the arquerrilan must look like alive. The hides were covered with a rich fur; they had not yet been cut for human clothing patterns and I saw with distaste where faces had once been. The hides had been stretched, of course, but the dried caricatures were grotesquely lifelike, wide mouths and flat noses, furred arms reaching out helplessly. Some of the features even had a trace of expression left, eyes wide open (and empty, now), mouths gaping.

"My instructions," I said, "are to conclude this season's purchase as quickly as possible. I understand my predecessor, Mr. Leamington, had some difficulty arranging terms."

Algorr turned his brown eyes to me and regarded me quietly for several seconds. "The form of barter was unacceptable," he said.

"I believe he offered double-honed

knives, at a trade balance of six to one?" I asked. "I can raise that by half."

"Knives will not do," Algorr said. He threw his head back and inspected me again. Then abruptly he strode off, leading me into another room, half the size of the first. This was a storeroom of some sort; a light coat of dust lay over everything in it. There were cartons stacked all along one wall, and several more scattered about the floor, only a few of them opened.

Algorr stooped and lifted back the flap on one of them. "Guns, they are called," he said. "That is your word, correct?"

They were pellet-guns, of the type used against the sharnayal in the Deneb system over a century before. Now obsolete. "What do you call them?" I asked.

He made his shrugging motion, his huge shoulders raising and falling heavily. "We call them guns," he said. "We have no word."

He opened another carton, and took from it a light plastic breastplate. It had been fashioned for human use (Rigel VI, the Balmor Revolt), but it would fit the pandar and probably the arquerrilan too.

"These were part of a trade three seasons ago," Algorr said. "We were mentioned they could be traded back at another time if we could not make use of them."

I saw what he was leading up to. It had been a practice among the companies trading with Romele to place their surplus and antiquated weapons with the pandar and arquerrilan, knowing their usefulness in the seasonal wars of the planet. Apparently the locals had now built up a surplus of their own.

"I'm afraid," I said, "that I have no authorization to purchase any of these articles."

Algorr nodded in rather clumsy imitation of our human gesture. "For this trouble I can not accept knives in trade."

There was a long silence then, as apparently he was waiting for me to make another suggestion. But my hands were tied: the shipment of knives was due to touch down in three days and before I could order and receive any other trade articles the season would be over and Algorr would be in the hills, unreachable.

It would really have been much easier had the locals been willing to accept Federation currency in trade, but this was one step of assimilation at which they balked. They had joined the human community even to the extent of accepting and exercising the right to vote, but trade in any form less material than the actual goods themselves was unacceptable to them.

Well, it would have violated every human code of decency to force the locals into any of our cultural patterns which they didn't like. The Federation had enough trouble establishing civilized contact with local races, without asking for more by using force on them.

"I'll have to contact my section office and see about some other arrangement," I said at last. Algorr dipped his head and waved his hair at me (I grimaced slightly, but he didn't see it) and then drove me back into the city. If anything, our speed this time was even greater than on the trip out; Algorr's knuckles were white on the driving-stick and his claws were extended all the way.

I checked in at the public hotel where Leamington had stayed before me, an enormous structure built of the very best of the local stones. (A bond-issue had been voted for it, over fairly strong opposition by the locals—but the humans living on Romele outnumbered either the pandar or the arquerrilan, whichever was in season during a given election.) I was a bit surprised to find that the staff was entirely composed of humans, but the manager assured me there was no discrimination in personnel: the locals were usually too busy with their own affiars to hire on with any of our enterprises.

"And you know what their affairs are," he said meaningfully. "Killing and eating each other."

I smiled, rather ill at ease. "Well, you've got to expect aliens to seem strange," I said, and went to my room. I sent a message to Hergrave back at the office asking for alternate instructions on the trade, and then flopped down on the bed for a few hours' sleep. Transmatter relays are quick and painless, but they always upset my nervous system—and riding with Algorr hadn't helped.

I slept fitfully for two hours, dreaming of the arquerrilan pelts coming to life and waving knives at me, grinning vacantly and nodding their heads. When I awoke there was a memo on the screen next to the bed: there was to be a hotel party that night down in the lobby, and I was cordially invited.

I had dinner in the hotel (noting thankfully that the menu didn't list arquerrilan steak) and after a shower I went down to the lobby. The manager, Simsbroke, met me at the foot of the stairway and introduced me around. There was Altgeld, who was opening a building-materials business on Romele ("We're cutting the rafftree cactus near the edge of the desert, and fortunately that keeps us out of the way of the locals' grounds—it would be embarrassing to have them come screaming through the camp while we're working.") and Villamo, who ran an art store which shipped *objets* to the inner worlds ("We try to get pieces depicting the hunt—the primitive aspects of this culture seem to lend more *power* to their art."), and a Miss Therasa, who was vacationing on Romele. She had hair that was pure silver—that Denebian scalp-treatment, I supposed—and the most sensual hands I'd ever seen, not to mention the way she moved her body. I didn't catch anyone else's name.

The party was rather dull, as these things so often are, until most of the guests left, and then those of us who remained became rather boisterously loud.

"Damnedest wines in the Federation!" Altgeld shouted, waving his glass aloft. "Blood-red grapes, straight from the soil!"

Miss Therasa wrinkled her nose and turned to me. "And what do you do, Mr. Healey?"

I'd had a few too many myself by then. "I buy empty corpses," I said. "Pelts, that is. They take the insides out for themselves."

"Yes?" she said. "How fascinating."

"We cut away the faces and shape the furs for the market," I went on. "Very much in demand these days. Of course, some of them are a bit torn by teeth and claws, but we work around that."

"And how long will you be on Romele?" she asked, touching the tips of her fingers together. I noticed the gesture, a common one on some of the inner worlds.

"Long enough to get to know you better," I said roguishly, and we laughed together. Everyone else at the table laughed too, though they hadn't been listening; it was that kind of party.

"What kind of trade goods are you offering the locals?" asked Villamo, the art dealer.

I turned to him reluctantly. "Knives. But they won't accept them."

"The hell you say! Who are you dealing with?"

"Algorr. We've traded with him for several seasons now. He seems to have a surplus of weapons."

"Algorr!" Villamo's heavy cheeks puffed out in an explosive laugh. "Fellow's only thirty years old—and the years here are short, at that! Why should he want knives, eh?"

"I supposed they used them in the hunt," I said shortly. Villamo's tone was good-humored enough, but patronizing.

"Not the young ones," he said. "Against their ethics. Only teeth and claws in the hunt. But the old ones, when they get slow and weak—*they'll* take your knives." He paused long enough to take a large swallow of the wine. "When it's a matter of their lives . . ."

I hesitated. "I hadn't realized it was a

matter of local—"

"Damned right you hadn't!" he said. "Never would have got mixed up in it, would you?" He lowered his voice. "But if you want to trade those knives—it's up to them if they want to accept, you know. Go see Helrathe, fellow out near my place." He fumbled a piece of paper out of his pocket. "I'll give you the location."

He scribbled something and handed the paper to me. I put it in my tunic pocket and forgot about it. I turned back to Miss Lynn Therasa for the rest of the party, and drank more wine. I'm afraid she had to help me to my room that night.

I awoke the next morning feeling surprisingly good. My mouth tasted wooley, but I had none of the other hangover symptoms I was expecting. It seems to have something to do with the oxygen content of Romele's air and the trace-elements in the water; at any rate that's the claim of the local Tourist Bureau. They even advertise it, though the more staid members of the human community (those who have been here for more than ten years) disapprove of the idea of attracting tourists strictly on a promise of hangover-free vacations.

There was a message from Hergrave on the screen; I read it while I got dressed. It was filled with friendly but firm apologies about company policy and economic necessities, but the instructions were clear enough: I was to trade the knives, even if I had to take a slight loss. *The trade-ratio heretofore established has been greatly to our advantage; in view of the current situation, a concession in favor of the locals seems appropriate and will build good will.*

As I sealed my tunic the paper which Villamo had given me fell from the pocket. I picked it up and glanced at it, remembering our conversation. There was something about his suggestion that seemed unethical to me. Still . . . Well, I'd see Algorr once more before opening negotiations with anyone else.

But when I hired a car to take me to his warehouse, I found the building closed and locked. I looked around and found a young pandar in the fields out in back.

"My father is gone on the hunt," he said. His speech was short and clipped, somehow cold. Probably human speech came to these people only with long practice, I guessed.

I told him I was seeing the fellow Helrathe, and that if his father wanted to speak further with me I could be reached at the hotel.

Then I gave Helrathe's address to the driver and went there.

I had expected an older building, considering Helrathe's greater age, but his warehouse was as new as Algorr's. Apparently the locals had little use for the pelts they acquired during the hunt until we made trade contact with the planet, so the warehouses had all been built the same year. I knocked on the door with my fingernails (an unfortunate compromise of customs which has developed on Romele—human nails aren't well adapted to it) and after several minutes Helrathe himself answered.

His hair was deep black, long and full beneath his dark shoulder-cape; there were heavy lines in his jaws and his powerful shoulders were stooped and rounded with age. He looked remarkably like that tired old pandar that Algorr had almost run down the day before.

His eyes narrowed when he saw me, but he invited me inside politely enough. As I stood looking around at his comparatively meager supply of pelts he touched his shoulders, welcomed me, and observed the ritual silence. I felt somewhat intimidated by his age; even in nonhumans it is imposing.

"You are a trader," he said at last. It wasn't a question.

"Yes. I'm here in hopes of making a trade for your pelts."

He continued to watch me closely, and I found myself avoiding his eyes. They were a

clear, deep brown, and though most of his face was wrinkled the skin around his eyes was smooth and firm.

"You trade goods?" he asked.

"There's a shipment of double-honed knives due to land here in two days," I said. "I'm authorized to make a generous balance on the trade."

"Then that is clear," he said. "Algorr will not accept them."

I hesitated. "He does seem reluctant, but we haven't decided anything definitely."

"He is on the hunt," Helrathe said. "Correct, correct." His head leaned from side to side with an aging limpness; his thick black hair fell back and forth like waves. "Algorr has no need of knives, so he holds close the law."

A brief awkward silence followed; then I said, "we don't want to infringe on any of your laws. I hope you understand that."

"You are quite natural," he said. "But we have no laws as you mean. Only what you would call custom, because you have no better word."

I frowned, and he must have recognized the expression, because he went on: "Custom. Order. Balance. You have no better word in your language."

It still wasn't clear, but I decided not to pursue the question. "Is a trade possible?" I asked. "We hadn't realized that this touched upon your morality—"

"No, no." Helrathe turned away and strode slowly to his shelves. "It is not your concern. If I trade for the knives . . . if I give them to my family and others . . . Already many of us have used weapons."

"I see," I said. "Customs can change."

He regarded me with his clear brown eyes. They seemed to shine in the dimness. "As I mentioned, your word is not precise."

The rest of the meeting went smoothly. We made a tentative trade agreement and I told him I'd have to speak with Algorr before final disposition was made. He bowed and waved his dark hair, and I left.

I felt troubled. The thick, smooth black of his hair—would it be a pelt to be traded next season? He *was* old, and not likely to survive another hunt . . . unless he bought weapons.

Algorr was gone for eight days, and while I waited for his return I was free to spend my time as I pleased. Lynn Therasa occupied a great deal of that time. She was quick-witted and fun; she'd been on Romele for a couple of weeks now, and she showed me several of the local places of interest. I was pleased just to be seen with her: she was quite beautiful. Her cheekbones and her small chin had a firm, almost sculptured quality which contrasted strikingly with the softness of her mouth. Even the locals often turned to look at her as we passed, and she smiled back at them. (Uselessly, of course, since the locals don't really understand smiling.)

The marketplaces were as colorful as she predicted—there were very few locals there, since most of them engaged humans to do their business, but the crafts of the planet had a startling beauty. The clothing made from a local plant which produced soft fibers in bluish shades was remarkably becoming to humans; some of the locals had learned how to fashion shoes for our untaloned feet, and their stalls displayed a large variety of styles. I bought a pair, paying in currency since the stall was one of those run by humans; and once we spent an afternoon arranging a direct trade with one of the locals—I bought a watch in our section of town and exchanged it for several small amulets made from arquerrilan teeth. We had them strung as a necklace for Lynn.

Lynn had a strange attitude toward the locals. She said things to them that I'd never dream of risking; you never know when even an innocuous remark will offend an alien, but several times she deliberately joked about their customs to their faces. They didn't laugh—they never do—but they didn't get angry either. Maybe she'd

been here long enough to get an intuited understanding of them—or maybe she was just lucky. Anyway, her sense of humor made me uncomfortable on a number of occasions.

I think she was amused even when Algorr interrupted us in my room two nights ago. His claws on the light wooden door set my teeth on edge and I sat bolt upright; the sharp knocking seemed to vibrate the whole door. Lynn stepped into the other room and in a moment I let him in.

I touched my shoulders and bowed awkwardly, feeling decidedly foolish. I couldn't wave my hair, but I dropped my head sharply and my hair fell forward. Then I straightened up and greeted him. During the ritual silence there were sounds from the other room; Algorr raised his eyes to the door for a moment.

When the silence was past I offered him a chair. He paid no attention.

"You trade with Helrathe," he said.

I wanted to take the seat myself, but I would have had to look up at him. "Yes. But the final decision is still yours; I'd rather trade with you."

"His pelts are not satisfactory?"

I shrugged. "They'll do. But there's a matter of your laws."

Lynn came back into the room. She had borrowed my comb and was running it through her long silvery hair. She paused, and flipped her hair forward with her hand, smiling. Algorr watched her silently.

"This is Miss Lynn Therasa," I said quickly.

"She is known," Algorr said.

Lynn sat on the edge of the bed and patted a spot next to her. I sat down, and immediately regretted it.

"Do you have a law which forbids the use of anything but . . . teeth and claws, in the hunt?"

"There is no law," he said.

"But no one uses weapons, is that right?"

He was silent for a moment. "Some use them," he said at last.

"I think Helrathe would," I said.

"Correct."

I waited for him to say more, but he didn't. In the silence, Lynn went back to combing her hair. I was becoming even more nervous.

"Well, don't you care if knives are used in the hunt?" I burst out. "Helrathe said something about balance. The use of knives or any other artificial weapon could completely upset the balance between you and the arquerrilan! You're equally matched in your natural weapons—teeth, claws, strength. But don't you realize that if ever a sizable proportion of either race should suddenly use artificial weapons . . . well, they could kill off most of the other race in a single season!" I paused, but Algorr still didn't say anything, so I plunged on. "Maybe you think it would be good if, say, you pandar became dominant over the arquerrilan, outnumbered them. But you . . . you need the arquerrilan for food . . . so if there aren't enough of them, your race dies too. Don't you people realize that?"

"We realize," Algorr said. "That is the reason and I trade for all artificial weapons. Always someone else will accept them if I do not."

I remembered the dusty, unopened cartons of weapons he had shown me on that first day, and finally I began to understand him.

"When your whole way of life here is threatened like this, why don't you protest? We could pass a law against any trade in weapons, and it would be respected. We don't want to interfere with your culture."

Algorr turned away. "The weapons are yet not so important," he said. "Many have abandoned the hunt to do work here, fashioning goods which they trade to you, and trade your goods to others. At the end they trade for the meat."

He turned back to me, and I saw him staring at my shoes. I crossed my legs.

"I suppose that upsets the balance too," I

said. "But we could pass a law against such trade. Or . . . surely there are *some* off-planet foods you can eat. You could trade for them, and stop killing each other!"

"We would not vote any of these laws. Laws are artificial, Mister Healey, means of correcting artificial troubles. Food from your worlds would also be artificial for us. It is not the answer. The answer is continuing balance, with nonething allowed to interfere. Both pandar and arquerrilan are now realizing that. *Nonething allowed to interfere.*" He paused, his half-human face still expressionless. Then he said: "Correct. I will trade with you for the knives."

Lynn had finished combing her hair. She looked up at Algorr, meeting his eyes directly. Brown eyes, yet so different from hers. He returned her gaze calmly.

"You understand now," he said to her.

Lynn started; I felt her body tense for a moment next to me. She said, "I think so. My vacation is nearly over anyway."

"Correct," Algorr said. "And Mister Healey, you must know I am not the controller of what can happen. It is the balance which controls. I will trade with you for the weapons, and your business here will be over very soon. And you too can be able to leave."

I stood up. "But buying my knives is only a stopgap measure. There'll be other traders, more and more of them the more you buy. And someday you'll have to face the situation here in town—your people and the arquerrilan abandoning the hunt to work here. This isn't something you can put off forever. What you're doing is only temporary!"

"Yes, only temporary," Algorr said.

Then he stood looking at me, at Lynn, back to me. Abruptly he dipped his head and waved his pelt-hair; without a word, he turned and went out the door.

As I shut it behind him I turned to Lynn, shaking my head. "How do you make primitives understand a situation like this? It isn't just a cultural crisis—it's their whole ecology. But they don't have the science to see it."

She was frowning, oddly subdued. "Yes, they have. Only they see it in much more basic terms than we do."

I sat next to her again on the bed. Now that Algorr was gone I remembered our earlier mood, and began to feel a bit resentful that it had been broken by his visit. "Oh, the hell with them," I said, leaning in close to her. "We have some basic matters of our own to finish."

But she pushed away. "No, not now; I have to go to my room and pack. I'm leaving tomorrow. And, Jeff . . . I advise you to do the same."

I slipped my arm around her again. "Well, tomorrow is tomorrow. As for tonight—" I tried to pull her down with me.

"*Don't you realize what's happening?*" Again she broke away from me, and now I saw with surprise that there was fear in her eyes—fear that was close to panic. She stood up and ran to the door.

"Lynn! You're being foolish!"

She hesitated as she opened the door. She said, "I'm not being foolish, Jeff. *Leave tomorrow!*" Then she ran out.

I sat on the edge of the bed and cursed Algorr, Helrathe and everybody else on the planet.

Yesterday was a busy day. I made arrangements for the transfer of the knives to Algorr, and supervised the loading of the pelts onto the spacer. It all took longer than it should have, because the arquerrilan have been arriving in the city for two days now; the streets are crowded and there is a general uneasiness about everything. When the hunt is over it must be difficult for the two species to readapt to civilized interchange. Tension permeates the entire city.

It was a shock to see the arquerrilan on the streets. I'd never seen any of them before, but their pelts were unmistakable. Yet they seem so different when they're

alive—they walk with a supple strength and an almost arrogant dignity. Their teeth and claws are almost completely regrown already, now that it's their season coming.

I made a short visit to Helrathe, to tell him of the trade with Algorr. He didn't seem surprised.

All of the pandar and arquerrilan, of course, are busy conducting business between themselves. There have been several mass meetings of the locals—which is unusual, Villamo tells me. They seem to be in a hurry to conclude their business together and get ready for the new season. I'll be glad when they do, and the tension is lifted. With both species in the city it seems that all I see are locals.

Lynn left yesterday via transmatter. When I heard about it I realized I didn't even know her home planet. It probably doesn't matter anyway: she didn't bother to say goodbye, so I suppose our vacation romance was just a passing thing to her, something that could be ended completely by a quarrel.

I decided to see Algorr just once more, to wish him luck. It wasn't just any salesman's courtesy; I really was concerned about the problem here, and Algorr seemed to have more of a grasp on the situation than anyone else. So today I went out to his warehouse.

There were several of the arquerrilan there, and half a dozen of the pandar. Algorr, if I read his manner correctly, seemed preoccupied; he kept baring and retracting his claws nervously. I had interrupted some business he had with the arquerrilan; I noticed that the door was open to the storeroom where he kept the useless weaponry.

I wished him luck in getting through the hunt (feeling foolish, because the arquerrilan were there), and decided to make one last effort to persuade him to bring up the problem of the balance with the local Federation officials.

"You have to go through legal channels for anything this important."

"When we face an importance, we deal with it directly," he said.

Several of the other locals moved forward and stood around me, in a sort of semicircle. They were so close that I could smell the pungent, savage odor of their breaths.

"Directly," said one of the arquerrilan.

Algorr drew me away from them, grasping my arm tightly in a claws-sheathed hand. "You must go. Your work is finished here," he said.

"Well, I just came to wish you luck in whatever you plan," I said nervously, looking around at the pandar, the arquerrilan, the open door to the storeroom. I remembered Lynn's near-panic two nights ago, and Villamo's surprise at the locals' mass meetings, and the tension in the city. "I hope I'm right in wishing you luck."

Algorr answered with a bow, waving his pelt-hair only briefly. But he smiled as he escorted me to the door; his mouth opened and his huge, strong teeth showed white in the dim light.

One of the arquerrilan smiled too. If anything, the arquerrilan's teeth are even larger and more frightening than the pandar's. But neither of them should ever smile; it reminds you rather forcefully that both races are carnivores.

I went straight back to the hotel and packed—fast. I called the local Federation office and tried to warn them, but I wasn't sure just what to warn them against. The comsec who came on the screen said they'd already had one warning, but since it had come from a young lady who was obviously upset they'd discounted it. (Must have been Lynn.) However, two warnings in the same week obviously called for an investigation and evaluation, and if I'd care to come down to the office and fill in some forms . . .

I wouldn't care to, no. I'm transmattering out of here in half an hour, and if I can get out the other end leaving behind only my shoes, I'll be very satisfied.

—Terry Carr

Scenerio for Destruction: *With the best will in the world, arm your enemy with the tools of knowledge . . . and forget that he remains your enemy . . .*

BLOOD OF TYRANTS

BEN BONA

Illustrated by MICHAEL HINGE

STILL PHOTO . . .

Danny Romano, switchblade in hand, doubling over as the bullet hits slightly above his groin. His face going from rage to shock. In the background other gang members battling: tire chains, pipes, knives. Behind them a grimy wall bearing a tattered political poster of some WASP promising "EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL."

Fast montage of scenes, quick cutting from one to the next. Background music: Gene Kelly singing, "You Are My Lucky Star" . . .

Long shot of the street. Kids still fighting. Danny crawling painfully on all fours. CUT TO tight shot of Danny, switchblade still in hand, eyes fixed on the skinny kid who shot him. The kid, goggle-eyed, tries to shoot again, gun jams, he runs. CUT TO long shot again, police cruisers wailing into view, lights flashing. CUT TO Danny being picked up off the street by a pair of angry-faced cops. He struggles feebly. Nightstick fractures skull, ends his struggling. CUT TO Danny being slid out of an ambulance at hospital emergency entrance. CUT TO green-gowned surgeons (backs visibly only) working with cool indifference under the glaring overhead lights. CUT TO Danny lying unconscious in hospital bed. Head bandaged. IV stuck in arm. Private room. Uniformed cop opens door from hallway, admits two men. One is obviously a plainclothes policeman: stocky, hard-faced, tired-eyed. The other looks softer, unembittered, even smiles. He peers at Danny through rimless glasses, turns to the plainclothesman and nods.

Establishing shots . . .

Washington, D.C.: Washington monument, Capitol building (seen from foreground of Northeast district slums), pickets milling around White House fence.

An office interior . . .

> Two men are present. Brockhurst, sitting behind the desk, is paunchy, bald, hooked on cigarets, frowning with professional skepticism. The other man, Hansen, is the rimless-glasses man from the hospital scene.

"I still don't like it; it's risky," says Brockhurst from behind his desk.

"What's the risk?" Hansen has a high, thin voice. "If we can rehabilitate these gang leaders, and then use them to rehabilitate their fellow delinquents, what's the risk?"

"It might not work."

"Then all we've lost is time and money."

Brockhurst glowers, but says nothing.

Another montage of fast-cut scenes. Background music: Mahalia Jackson stomping, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" . . .

Danny, between two cops, walks out of the hospital side door and into a police van. Bandages gone now. CUT TO Danny being unloaded from van, still escorted, at airport. He is walked to a twin-engine plane. CUT TO interior of plane. Five youths are already aboard: two Negroes, two Puerto Rican, one white. Each is sitting flanked by a white guard. A sixth guard takes Danny's arm at the entry hatch and sits him in the only remaining pair of seats. Danny tries to look cool, but he's really delighted to be next to the window.

Interior of a "classroom" . . .

A large room. No windows, cream-colored walls perfectly blank. About fifty boys are fidgeting in metal folding chairs. Danny is sitting toward the rear. All the boys are now dressed in identical gray coveralls. Two uniformed guards stand by the room's only exit, a pair of large double doors. The boys are mostly quiet; they don't know each other, they're trying to size up the situation. Hansen comes through the double doors (which a guard quickly closes behind him) and strides to the two-steps-up platform in the front of the room. He has a small microphone in his hand. He smiles and tries to look confident as he speaks.

"I'm not going to say much. I'd like to introduce myself. I'm Dr. Hansen. I'm not a medical doctor, I'm a specialist in education . . ."

A loud collective groan.

"No, no . . ." Hansen chuckles slightly. "No, it's not what you think. I work with teaching machines. You know, computers? Have you heard of them? Well, never mind . . ."

One of the kids stands up and starts for the door. A guard points a cattle prod toward the kid's chair. He gets the idea, goes back sullenly and sits down.

"You're here whether you like it or not," Hansen continues, minus the smile. "I'm confident that you'll soon like it. We're going to change you. We're going to make your lives worth living. And it doesn't matter in the slightest whether you like it or not. You'll learn to like it soon enough. No one's going to hurt you, unless you try to get rough. But we *are* going to change you."

Interior of the "reading room"

A much smaller room. Danny and Hansen are alone in it. Same featureless plastic walls. No furniture except an odd-looking chair in the middle of the floor. It somewhat resembles an electric chair. Danny is trying to look contemptuous to cover up his fear.

"You ain't gettin' me in that!"

"It's perfectly all right; there's nothing here to hurt you. I'm merely going to determine how well you can read."

"I can read."

"Yes, of course." Doubtfully. "But how well? That's what I need to know."

"I don't see no books around."

"When you sit in the chair and the electrodes are attached to your scalp . . ."

"You gonna put those things on my head?"

"It's completely painless."

"No you ain't!"

Hansen speaks with great patience. "There's no use arguing about it. If I have to, I'll get the guards to strap you in. But it will be better if you cooperate. Mr. Carter—the one you call, uh, 'Spade,' I believe—he took the test without hesitating a moment. You wouldn't want him to know that we had to hold you down, would you?"

Danny glowers, but edges toward the chair. "Motherhumpin' sonofabitch . . ."

Series of fade-ins and fade-outs . . .

Danny in the "reading room," sitting in the chair, cranium covered by electrode network. The wall before him has become a projection screen, and he is reading the words on it. MUSIC UNDER is Marine Corps Band playing Cornell University *Alma Mater* ("Far Above Cayuga's Waters . . .")

DANNY (hesitantly): The car . . . hummed . . . cut . . . quiet-ly to it-self . . .

FADE OUT

FADE IN

DANNY (tense with concentration): So my fellow Americans . . . ask not what your country can do for you . . .

FADE OUT

FADE IN

DANNY: "Surrender?" he shouted. "I have not yet begun to fight!"

FADE OUT

FADE IN

DANNY (enjoying himself): Robin pulled his bowstring back carefully, knowing that the Sheriff and all the townspeople were watching him . . .

FADE OUT

Interior of Brockhurst's office . . .

Hansen is pacing impatiently before the desk, an intense smile on his face.

"I tell you, it's succeeding beyond my

fondest hopes! Those boys are soaking it up like sponges. That Romano boy alone has absorbed more knowledge . . ."

Brockhurst is less than optimistic. "They're really learning?"

"Not only learning. They're beginning to change. The process is working. We're changing their attitudes, their value systems, everything. We're going to make useful citizens out of them!"

"All of them?"

"No, of course not. Only the best of them: half a dozen, I'd say, out of the fifty here—Romano, 'Spade' Carter, three or four others. At least six out of fifty, better than one out of ten. And this is just the first batch! When we start processing large numbers of them . . ."

Brockhurst cuts Hansen short with a gesture. "Do you actually think these—students—of yours will go back to their old neighborhoods and start to rehabilitate their fellow gang members?"

"Yes, of course they will. They'll have to! They're being programmed for it!"

Interior of library . . .

Danny is sitting at a reading table, absorbed in a book. Bookshelves line the walls. A lumpy-faced redhead sits one table away, also reading. Hansen enters quietly, walks to Danny.

"Hello Danny. How's it going today?"

Danny looks up and smiles pleasantly. "Fine, Mr. Hansen."

"I just got the computer's scoring of your economics exam. You got the highest mark in the class."

"Did I? Great. I was worried about it. Economics is kind of hard to grasp. Those booster pills you gave me must have helped."

"You did extremely well . . . . What are you reading?"

"Biography, by Harold Lamb. It's about Genghis Khan."

Hansen nods. "I see. Look, it's about time we started thinking about what you're going to do when you go back home. Why don't you drop over to my office tonight, after supper?"

"Okay."

"See you then."

"Right."

Hansen moves away, toward the other boy. Danny closes his book, stands up. He turns to the bookshelf directly behind him and reaches unhesitatingly for another volume. He puts the two books under his arm and starts for the door. The title of the second book is *Mein Kampf.*

Brockhurst's office . . .

Six boys are standing in front of Brockhurst's desk, the six Hansen spoke of. They are now dressed in casual slacks, shirts, sportcoats. Hansen is sitting beside the desk, beaming at them. Brockhurst, despite himself, looks impressed.

"You boys understand how important your mission is." Brockhurst is lapsing into a military tone. "You can save your friends a lot of grief . . . perhaps save their lives."

Danny nods gravely. "It's not just our friends that we'll be saving. It'll be our cities, all the people in them, our whole country."

"Exactly."

Hansen turns to Brockhurst. "They've been well trained. They're ready to begin their work."

"Very well. Good luck boys. We're counting on you."

Exterior shot, a city street . . .

Mid-afternoon, a hot summer day. A

taxi pulls to the curb of the dingy, sun-baked street. Danny steps out, ducks down to pay the cabbie. He drives away quickly. Danny stands alone, in front of a magazine/tobacco store. He is dressed as he was in Brockhurst's office. Taking off the jacket, he looks slowly up and down the street. Deserted, except for a few youngsters sitting listlessly in the shade. With a shrug, he steps to the store.

Interior, the store . . .

Magazine racks on one side of the narrow entrance; store counter featuring cigarets and candy on the other. No one at the counter. Overhead, a battered fan drones ineffectually. Farther back, a grimy table surrounded by rickety chairs. Three boys, two girls, all Danny's age, sit there. The boys in jeans and tee shirts, girls in shorts and sleeveless tops. They turn as he shuts the door, gape at him.

"Nobody going to say hello?" He grins at them.

"Danny!"

They bounce out of the chairs, knocking one over.

"We thought you was dead!"

"Or in jail . . . nobody knew what happened to you . . ."

"It's been almost a year!"

They cluster around him as he walks slowly back toward the table. But no one touches him.

"What happened to ya?"

"You look . . . different, sort of." The girl gestures vaguely.

"What'd they do to you? Where were you?"

Danny sits down. "It's a long story. Somebody get me a coke, huh? Who's been running things, Marco? Find him for me, I want to see him. And, Speed . . . get word to the Bloodhounds. I want to see their Prez . . . is it still Waslewski? And the one who shot me . . ."

"A war council?"

Danny smiles. "Sort of. Tell them that, if that's what it'll take to bring them here."

Interior, the back of the store . . .

It is night. Danny sits at the table, his shirt-sleeves rolled up, watching the front door. Two boys blank him: Marco, slim and dark, his thin face very serious; and Speed, bigger, lighter, obviously excited but managing to keep it contained. Both boys are trying to hide their nervousness with cigarets. The door opens, and a trio of youths enter. Their leader, Waslewski, is stocky, blond, intense. His eyes cover the whole store with a flick. Behind him is the skinny kid who shot Danny, and a burlier boy who's trying to look cool and menacing.

"Come on in," Danny calls from his chair. "Nobody's going to hurt you."

Waslewski fixes his eyes on Danny and marches to the table. He takes a chair. His cohorts remain standing behind him. "So you ain't dead after all."

"Not yet."

"Guess you're pretty lucky."

Danny grins. "Luckier than you'll ever know." Nodding toward the boy who shot him, "What's his name?"

"O'Banion."

"All right, O'Banion. You put a bullet in me; I lived through it. You were doing your job for the Bloodhounds; I'm doing my job for the Champions. Nothing personal and no hard feelings on my part."

Waslewski's eyes narrow. "What're you

pullin'? I thought this was gonna be a war council . . ."

"It is, but not the regular kind." Danny leans forward, spreads his hands on the table. "Know where I've been the past ten months? In Washington, in a special school the Government set up, just to handle jaydees. They pump knowledge into you with a computer . . . just like opening your head and sticking a hose in it."

The other boys, Bloodhounds and Champions alike, squirm a bit.

"You know what they taught me? They taught me we're nuts to fight each other. That's right . . . gangs fighting each other is strictly crazy. What's it get us? Lumps, is all. And dead."

Waslewski is obviously disgusted. "You gonna preach a sermon?"

"Damned right I am. You know why the gangs fight each other? Because *they* keep us up tight. They've got the money, they've got the power that runs this city, and they make sure we gangs stay down in the garbage. By fighting each other, we keep them sitting high and running the big show."

"They? Who the hell's they?"

"The people who run this city. The fat cats. The rich cats. The ones who've got limosines and broads with diamonds hanging from each tit. They *own* this city. They own the buildings and the people in the buildings. They own the cops. They own us."

"Nobody owns me!" says the burly kid behind Waslewski.

"Shuddup." Waslewski is frowning with thought now, trying to digest Danny's words.

"Look," Danny says. "This city is filled with money. It's filled with broads and good food and everything a guy could want for the rest of his life. What do we get out of it? Shit, that's what! And why? Because we let them run us, that's why. We fight each other over a crummy piece of turf, a couple of blocks of lousy street, while *they* sit back in plush restaurants and penthouses with 42-inch broads bending over them."

"So . . . what d'you expect us to do?"

"Stop fighting each other. Make the gangs work together to take over this city. We can do it! We can crack this city wide open, like a peanut. Instead of fighting each other, we can conquer this whole fucking city and run it for ourselves!"

Waslewski sags back in his seat. The other boys look at each other, amazed, unbelieving, yet obviously attracted by the idea.

"Great . . . real cool." Waslewski's voice and face exude sarcasm. "And what do the cops do? Sit back and let us take over? And what about the rest of the people? There's millions of 'em."

"Listen! We know how to fight. What we've got to do is get all the gangs together and fight together, like an army. It's just a matter of using the right strategy, the right tactics. We can do it. But we've got to work together. Not just the Bloodhounds and the Champions, but *all* the gangs! All of us, together, striking all at once. We can rack up the fuzz and take this town in a single night. They'll never know what hit them."

Marco objects. "But Danny, we can't . . ."

"Look, I know it'll take a lot of work. I figure we'll need two years, at least. We've got to get our goys spotted at key places all over the city: the power plants, all the radio and TV stations. We'll need guys inside the National Guard armories, inside the precinct stations, if we can do it. It'll mean a lot of guys will have to take jobs, learn to work hard for a couple years. But in the end, we'll have this city for ourselves!"

"You got it all figured out?"

"To the last inch."

Waslewski unconsciously pushes his chair slightly back from the table. He glances at his two lieutenants; they are wide-eyed.

"I gotta think about this . . . . I can't say yes or no just like that."

"Okay, you think about it. But don't spill it to anybody except your top boys. And remember, I'm going to be talking to all the gangs around here . . . and then to the gangs in the rest of the city. They'll go for it, I know. Don't get yourself left out."

Waslewski gets up slowly. "Okay, I'll get back to you right away. I think you can count us in." His aides nod agreement.

"Good. Now we're rolling." Danny gets up and sticks out his hand. Waslewski hesitates a beat, and then—acting rather stunned—shakes hands with Danny.

Montage of scenes. Background music: "The Army Caisson Song" . . .

Danny escorting Waslewski and two other boys into a Job Corps training center office. CUT TO half a dozen boys sitting in a personnel office waiting room. CUT TO a boy signing up in a National Gard armory.

Interior, Brockhurst's office . . .

Hansen is sitting on the front inch of the chair beside the desk, tense with excitement.

"It's a brilliant idea. Romano is working out better than any of his classmates, and this idea simply proves it!"

Brockhurst looks wary, probing for the weak point. "Why's he doing it? What's the sense of having gang members formed into a police auxiliary?"

"Sense? It's perfect sense. The boys can work hand-in-hand with the police, clue them in on trouble before it erupts into violence. The police can get to know the boys, and the boys will get to know the police. Mutual exposure will breed mutual trust and confidence. Instead of working against each other, they'll be working together. With violence between the gangs and the police dwindling, a major source of trouble will be eliminated . . ."

"It just doesn't sound right to me. I can't picture those young punks turning into volunteer cops."

But it's worth a try, isn't it? What do we have to lose?"

Brockhurst makes a sour face. "I suppose you're right. It's worth a try."

Interior, a one-room apartment . . .

The room is small but neat. The bed in the corner is made up in military style. The walls are covered with street maps of the city, over which are colored markings showing the territory of each gang. Danny sits at the only table, together with five other boys. One is a Negro, two others are Puerto Rican. The table is heaped high with papers.

"Okay," Danny says, "the Hellcats will handle the power station in their turf and the precinct house. And they've offered to put eight of their guys on our task force for the downtown area. What else?" He looks around at his aides.

The Negro boy says, "The Hawks have a beef. They claim the Jaguars have been cuttin' into their turf pretty regular for the past month. They've tried talkin' it out with 'em, but no dice. I tried talkin' to both sides, but they're pretty up tight about it."

Danny frowns. "Those damned Hawks have been screwing up for months."

"They're gonna rumble 'less you can stop 'em."

Thoughtfully, "There hasn't been a rumble all winter. Even the newspapers are starting to notice it. Maybe it'd be a good idea to let them fight it out . . . so long as

nobody winds up spilling his guts about us to the squares."

"Somebody's gonna get hurt bad if they rumble. Lotta bad blood between them two gangs."

"I know." Danny thinks it over for a moment. "Look, tell them if they've got to rumble, do it without artillery. No guns, nothing that'll tip the squares to what we've got stashed away."

"Okay."

Interior, a Congressman's office . . .

The room is high-ceilinged, ornately decorated. The Congressman's broad desk is covered with momentos, framed photographs, neat piles of papers. The Congressman himself is in his mid-forties, just starting to turn fleshy. Sitting before him are Brockhurst, Hansen and—in a neat business suit—Danny.

"And so, with the annual appropriation coming up," Brockhurst is saying, "I thought you should have a personal report on the program."

The Congressman nods. "From all I've heard, it seems to be highly successful."

"It is." Brockhurst allows himself to smile. "Of course, this is only the beginning; only a half-dozen cities have been touched so far, although we have a hundred more boys in training at the moment. But I think you can judge the results for yourself."

Hansen interrupts. "And I hope you can realize the necessity for keeping the program secret, for the time being. Premature publicity . . ."

"Could ruin everything. I understand." Turning his gaze to Danny, "And this is your star pupil, eh?"

Danny smiles. "I . . . uh, Sir, I'd merely like to add my thanks for what this program has done for me and my friends. It's just like Dr. Hansen has been saying: all we boys need is some training and opportunity."

Interior, a fire house . . .

A boy sits at a tiny desk in the deserted garage. Behind him are the powerful fire trucks. No one else is in sight. Through the window alongside the desk, snow is falling on a city street. The window has a holiday wreath on it.

The boy is thumbing through the big calendar on the desk. He flips past December and into the coming year. He stops on July, notes that the Fourth falls on a Sunday. Smiling, he puts a red circle around the date.

Interior, a Congressional hearing room . . .

The Committee members, half of them chatting with each other, sit at a long table in the front of the room. Brockhurst is sitting at the witness' desk, reading from a prepared text. Hansen sits beside him. The visitors' pews are completely empty, and a uniformed guard stands impassively at the door.

"Mr. Chairman, since the inception of this program, juvenile gang violence has decreased dramatically in five of the six cities where we have placed rehabilitated subjects. In one city, gang violence has dwindled to truly miniscule proportions. The boys are being rehabilitated, using Job Corps and other OEO facilities to train themselves for useful work, and then taking on—and keeping—full-time jobs." Brockhurst looks up from his text. "Mr. Chairman, if I may be allowed a new twist on an old saying, we're beating their switchblades into plowshares."

Interior, Danny's apartment . . .

Danny is pacing angrily across the room, back and forth. Three abject youths sit on the bed in the corner. At the table sit Marco and Speed.

"He nearly blew it!" Danny's voice is not loud, but clearly close to violence. "You stupid assholes can't keep your own people happy. He gets sore over a bitch and goes to the cops! If we didn't have a man in the precinct station last night, the whole plan would've been blown sky-high!"

One of the boys on the bed says miserably, "But we didn't know . . ."

"That's even worse! You're supposed to know. You're the Prez of the Belters, you're supposed to know every breath your people take."

"Well . . . whadda we do now?"

"You do nothing! You go back to your hole and sit tight. Don't even go to the can unless you get the word from me. Understand? If the cops tumble to us because you've got one half-wit who can't keep his mouth shut, every gang in the city is going to be after your blood. And they'll get it!"

Danny motions them to the door. They leave quickly.

He turns to his lieutenants.

"Speed, you know anybody in the Belters who can do a good job as Prez?"

Speed hesitates only a beat before answering, "Yeah . . . kid named Molie. Sharp. He'd keep 'em in line okay."

"All right. Good. Get him here. Tonight. If I like him, we get that asshole who just left and his half-wit fink to kill each other. Then Molie becomes their President."

"Kill each other?"

"Right. Can't let the fink hang around. And we can't make the cops worry that he was killed because he knew something. And that asshole is no good for us. So we make it look like they had a fight over the bitch. And fast, before something else happens. We've only got a month to go."

Speed nods. "Okay, Danny. I'm movin' . . ." He is already halfway to the door.

Exterior, night . . .

A park in the city. Holiday crowd is milling around. City skyline is visible over the trees. A band finishes the final few bars of "Stars and Stripes Forever." A hush. Then the small thud of a skyrocket being launched, and overhead, a red-white-and-blue firework blossoms against the night sky. The crowd gives its customary gasp of delight.

Danny stands at the edge of the crowd. In the flickering light of the fireworks, he looks at his wristwatch, then turns to Speed and Marco and nods solemnly. They hurry off into the darkness.

Exterior, toll booth across a major bridge . . .

A car full of youths pulls up at one of the three open toll gates. The boys spill out, guns in hands, club down the nearest tollbooth collector. The next closest one quickly raises his hands. The third collector starts to run, but he's shot down.

Interior, National Guard armory . . .

One hugely-grinning boy in Army fatigues is handing out automatic weapons to a line-up of other boys, from a rack that has an unlocked padlock hanging from its open door.

Interior, subway train . . .

Four adults—two old ladies, a

middle-aged man and a younger man—ride along sleepily. The train stops, the doors open. A combat team of twenty boys steps in through the three open doors. Their dress is ragged, but each boy carries a newly-oiled automatic weapon. The adults gasp. One boy yanks open the motorman's cubicle door and drags out the portly motorman. Another boy steps into the cubicle and shuts the doors. The train starts up again with the boys wordlessly standing, guns ready, while the adults huddle in a corner of the car.

Interior, police precinct station . . .

The desk sargent is yawning. The radio operator, in the back of the room, is thumbing through a magazine. A boy—one of the police auxiliary—sits quietly on a bench by the door. He gets up, stretches, opens the front door. In pour a dozen armed boys. The desk sargent freezes in mid-yawn. Two boys sprint toward the radio operator. He starts to grab for his microphone, but a blast of fire cuts him down.

Interior, a city power station . . .

Over the rumbling, whining noise of the generators, a boy walks calmly up to his supervisor, who's sitting in front of a board full of dials and switches, and pokes a pistol i. nis face. The man, startled, gets slowly out of his chair. Two other boys appear and take the man away. The first boy sits in the chair and reaches for the phone hanging on the instrument board.

Interior, newspaper office . . .

There is no sign of the usual news staff. All the desks are manned by boys, with Danny sitting at one of the desks in the center of the complex. Boys are answering phones, general hubbub of many simultaneous conversations. The mood is excited, almost jubilant. A few boys stand at the windows behind Danny, with carbines and automatic rifles in their hands. But they look relaxed.

Speed comes over to Danny from another desk, carrying a bundle of papers. "Here's the latest reports: every damned precinct station in town. We got 'em all! And the armories, the power stations, the TV studios. All the bridges and tunnels are closed down. Everything!"

Danny doesn't smile. "What about City Hall?"

"Took some fighting, but Shockie says we've got it nailed down. A few diehards in the cellblock, that's all. Our guys are usin' their own tear gas on 'em."

"The Major and the Councilmen?"

"The Mayor's outta town for the holidays, but we got most of the Councilmen, and the Police Chief, and the local FBI guys, too!"

Danny glances at his watch. "Okay, time for Phase Two. Round up every cop in town. On duty or off. Knock their doors down if you have to, pull them out of bed. But get them all into cells before dawn."

"Right!" Speed's grin is enormous.

Exterior, sun rising over city skyline . . .

From the air, the city appears normal. Nothing out of the ordinary. No fires, no milling crowds, not even much motor traffic on the streets. ZOOM TO the toll plaza at one of

the city's main bridges. A lone sedan is stopped at an impromptu roadlock, made up of old cars and trucks strung lengthwise across the traffic lanes. A boy with an automatic rifle in the crook of one arm is standing atop a truck cab, waving the amazed automobile driver back into the city. On the other side of the tollbooth, an oil truck and moving van are similarly stopped before another roadlock.

Interior, a TV studio . . .

Danny is sitting at a desk, the hot lights on him. He is now wearing an Army shirt, open at the collar. A Colt automatic rests on the desk before him. Adults are manning the cameras, mike boom, lights, control booth; but armed boys stand behind each one.

"Good morning," Danny allows himself to smile pleasantly. "Don't bother trying to change channels. I'm on every station in town. Your city has been taken over. It's now our city. My name is Danny Romano; I'm your new Mayor. Also your Police Chief, Fire Chief, District Attorney, Judge, and whatever other jobs I want to take on. The kids you've been calling punks, jay-dees . . . the kids from the street gangs . . . we've taken over your city You'll do what we tell you from now on. If you cooperate, nobody's going to hurt you. If you don't, you'll be shot. Life is going to be a lot simpler for all of us from now on. Do as you're told and you'll be okay."

Interior, Brockhurst's office . . .

General uproar. Brockhurst is screaming into a telephone. A couple dozen people are shouting at each other, waving their arms. Hansen is prostrate on the couch.

"No, I don't know anything more about it than you do!" Brockhurst's voice is near frenzy. His shirt is open at the neck, tie ripped off, jacket rumpled, face sweaty. "How the hell do I know? The FBI . . . the Army . . . somebody's got to do *something!*"

His secretary fights her way through the crowd. "Mr. Brockhurst . . . on line three . . . it's the *President!*"

Every voice hushes. Brockhurst slams the phone down, takes his hand off it, looks at it for a long moment. Then, shakily, he punches a button at the phone's base and lifts the receiver.

"Yessir. Yes, this is Brockhurst . . . . No sir, I have no idea of how this came about . . . it . . . it seems to be genuine, sir. Yes, we've tried to communicate with them . . . Yessir, Romano is one of our, eh, graduates. No sir. No, I don't . . . but . . . I agree, we can't let them get away with it. The Army? Isn't there any other way? I'm afraid he's got several million people bottled up in that city, and he'll use them as hostages. If the Army attacks, he might start executing them wholesale."

Hansen props himself up on one elbow and speaks weakly, "Let me go to them. Let me talk to Danny. Something's gone wrong . . . something . . ."

Brockhurst waves him silent with a furious gesture. "Yes, Mr. President, I agree. If they won't surrender peacefully, then there's apparently no alternative. But if they fight the Army, a lot of innocent people are going to be hurt . . . . Yes, I know you can't just . . . but . . . no other way, yes, I see. Very well sir, you are the Commander-in-Chief. Yessir. Of course, sir. Before the day is out. Yessir . . ."

Exterior, city streets . . .

Tanks rumbling down the streets. Kids firing from windows, throwing Molotov cocktails. One tank bursts into flames. The one behind it fires its cannon point-blank into a building: the entire structure explodes and collapses. Soldiers couching in doorways, behind burned-out automobiles, firing at kids running crouched-down a half block away. Two boys go sprawling. A soldier kicks a door in and tosses in a grenade. A few feet up the street, a teenage girl lies dead. A tank rolls past a children's playground, while a dazed old man sits bloody-faced on the curbstone, watching. Flames and smoke and the constant pock-pock-pock sound of automatic rifles, punctuated by explosions.

No picture, sound only . . .

The sounds of a phone being dialed, the click of circuits, the buzz of a phone ringing, another click as it is picked up.

"Yeah?"

"Hey, Spade, that you?"

"It's me."

"This is Midget."

"I know the voice, Midge."

"You see what Danny did?"

"I see what happened to him. How many dead, how many thousands? Or is it millions?"

"They ain't tellin'. Gotta be million, though. Whole damned city's flattened. Army must've lost fifty thousand men all by itself."

"They killed Danny."

"They claim they killed him, but I ain't seen pictures of his body yet."

"It's a mess, all right."

"Yeah. Listen . . . they got Federal men lookin' for us now, you know?"

"I know. All Danny's 'classmates' are in for it."

"You gonna be okay?"

"They won't find me, don't worry. There's plenty of places to hide and plenty of people to hide me."

"Good. Now listen, this mess of Danny's oughtta teach us a lesson."

"Damned right."

"Yeah. We gotta work together now. When we make our move, it's gotta be in all the cities. Not just one. Every big city in the goddam country."

"Gonna take a long time to do it."

"I know, but we can make it. And when we do, they can't send the Army against every big city all at once."

"Specially if we take Washington and get *their* Prez."

"Right. Okay, gotta run now. Stay loose and keep in touch."

"Check. See you in Washington one of these days."

"You bet your sweet ass."

—Ben Bova

NEXT ISSUE

Piers Anthony's blockbuster of a sequel to "Omnivore," his new 87,000-word novel, "Orn," makes it debut in these pages. Orn is one of the most unusual and engaging non-humans to stride across the pages of science fiction since Weinbaum's famous Tweel!

A SKIP IN TIME

It doesn't pay to mess around with perpetual motion machines—to begin with, everyone knows they don't work. And then again, you might stumble into something else that does *work . . . like time displacement . . .*

ROBERT E. TOOMEY, JR.

Illustrated by MICHAEL WM. KALUTA

IT WAS a quiet day. You know the drill.

I was sitting in Greerson's, drinking. The bartender was leaning on the counter, tending the color television set. Reception was poor here in the heart of town; just off the Main Stem, but he watched it with mournful attention. An asinine quiz show with hysterical women.

I regarded him balefully (I knew my expression was baleful, halfway between quizzical and inebriated, because I could see myself in the bar mirror: a bad sign to be sure) over a glass of Jack Daniels. The afternoon edition of the Telegram would be going to press shortly and the place would be filling up not long after that. Today was my day off, so my drinking had begun early.

The only other customer in the bar was an unshaven old man with a maimed hat who had been nursinga bell-shaped glass of draft since Wednesday last. About every ten seconds he would look up and around, then take a furtive sip from a pint bottle of wine in a brown paper bag.

It was a quiet day. Warm outside, warm inside.

Then I heard a sound like thunder out in the street and turned my head to look. People were running past the widow (plate glass. bisected by ruffled red curtains) at a fast clip and cars were sounding their horns. Through the door I saw a woman run past and fall to her knees and someone help her to her feet and get bowled over on his ass for his trouble.

Then I saw it.

"Hey, George," I said to the bartender.

He wrenched himself away from the television where a smiling announcer with a mike was jumping up and down like a maniac in front of a matronly housewife type. "Yeah?"

"Is that a dinosaur I see coming down the Main Stem?" I said, keeping my voice down to a calm screech.

He stared. "Looks like," he said, and turned back to the idiot box, mesmerized.

The old man had fallen asleep, his head down on the counter, his glass of draft overturned.

I lurched to my feet. The dinosaur,a brontosaur from the looks of it, blundered on down the Main Stem. It moved with a slow, ponderous clumsiness, and I remembered from a childhood interest in such things that brontosauri spent most of their time in deep water because of their great weight. The huge tail swung from side to side like a pendulum.

As it passed the bar, heading south towards the mills and the river, I downed the last of my Jack Daniels. Instinctively I knew there might be a story here. "I'm

going to check this out," I said.

No answer. Not from the old man, not from George who was engrossed.

"Don't go away, George," I shouted.

He shrugged. "Where would I go?" he said.

I moved out. People were running around like the confused residents of an overturned anthill. Traffic was hopelessly snarled, cars abandoned in the street. One small Volkswagen lay with its wheels in the air like a dead turtle. In the near distance the keening wail of sirens turning over cut through the general noise of panic and confusion.

Our crack police force was rising to the emergency, converging on the spot, and would likely gun down the offending reptile in a withering hail of bullets. Or fusilade of bullets, if you prefer. I was already composing my lead. Or they might beat it with night sticks. Or mace it. They'd find a way.

To my right, everything was chaotic. Mike Dowdy, one of our staff photographers, flashed by without greetings, snapping pictures of the scene as fast as he could run the film. The retreating figure of the dinosaur waddling along stood out like a bad dream. Two reporters from city ran by, and one from suburban. In case the beast made it to the city line, I supposed.

A photo would have shown devastation. In addition to the dead Volkswagen, a fire hydrant had been opened somehow and water was spilling into the street in a widening stream. A plate glass window had been shattered from one of the storefronts. Shattered outward with shards of glass all over the sidewalk. I didn't get that at all, but I wasn't getting much except a boozy haze. Everything was cranked up to a breakneck pace like a Mack Sennett comedy. Lots of bent fenders were in evidence and cars were piled against each

other and the curb all the way down the street. A burgler alarm was sounding off, adding to the general din.

Maybe that alarm was what the cops were responding to.

A couple of bodies were lying around, but how badly hurt they were I couldn't tell. No particular blood or gore seemed in evidence. One of the bodies was female, her short skirt up around her hips.

I took a step towards her and stopped. To my left, in the direction the dinosaur had come from, the street was just about deserted. Littered with various wreckage, but deserted. But about twenty feet from where I was standing, was a very short, very stocky man with a shock of uncombed white hair and a chinful of scholarly goatee. He appeared unreasonably calm.

Instinct took over. "What's happening?" I asked him, bounding over to where he stood. I think I bounded. Maybe I staggered.

He didn't look at me, but said, "I caused all this," in a dead voice.

"Right. How?"

"With my time displacer." He looked at me pleadingly. "It was an accident, just an accident. You know how accidents are, don't you?"

"Sure," I said. "Accidental. What's your name?" I didn't take out my notepad. Didn't want to make him nervous.

"Mason Dougherty."

"Glad to meet you," I said heartily. He averted his face from my breath. "Webb Williams."

"Charmed. I was a professor of spatial mechanics at Cloister U., but they discharged me for radial thinking."

"You mean radical, don't you?"

"No. Radial." His hand made a vague gesture in the air, sketching a radius no doubt. "But this'll show them." His voice took on a mad whine, and he rubbed his hands together—really!—while a fierce light flamed in his mild blue eyes.

"Yes indeed," I said, still hearty. Never disagree with an interviewee. Don't eliminate, subliminate. A rolling stone gathers no moss. "It certainly will show them. But in the meantime, how did it all happen?"

He looked directly at me for the first time. "Would *you* like to *see* my time displacer?"

I took a step backwards. "Do you have it on you?"

"Oh, no. I could never lift it." I relaxed slightly, but remained at the ready. I know judo. "It weighs a ton," he said. "Well, not a ton exactly. Fifteen hundred and seventy-three kilograms, to be precise. A kilogram is two-point-two pounds, so..."

"I'd like to see it," I decided.

"Wonderful. You're a very nice young man. May I ask your name?"

"Webb Williams," I said again. I would have given him my card, embossed with the family crest and printed in genuine Gothic script, but I was all out.

"Didn't I have you in one of my classes a few years back?" he asked.

"Everyone thinks that," I said.

Dougherty's lab was a mere block and a half away. Well, not a block exactly. One hundred and three meters to be precise.

It was built into a converted granery loft that had seen time as a coal bin when the grain business fell off. It was filled with the things a lab is generally filled with, all packed in tight, but neatly. Dominating the place, in a corner, was a huge structure of glass and steel, wound round with copper wires and affixed with numberless dials, meters, cogwheels and whatnot. A large wet cell battery stood to one side, and insulated wires ran from it to the device. On the other side was a small dynamo. The whole affair

was humming a bass note that I could feel in my back fillings, and pretty colored lights played across the front.

Dougherty pointed at the device and said triumphantly, "There she is."

"It is indeed," I agreed. "But *what* is it?"

"My time displacer," he said.

"It—displaces time?" I guessed.

"Of course. You grasp things very quickly."

"You should see me Monday mornings. How does it work?"

He stroked his beard. "That's a very good question. As a matter of strict fact, I haven't quite pinned that detail down yet. It functions perfectly, of course, as witness the dinosaur. It's capable—the displacer, not the dinosaur—of transferring objects of almost any given size into the past or—" he paused, presumably for effect—"into the *present*. It proves conclusively that time is—"

At this point he became unintelligible. I was about to do the prescribed things for an epiliptic when I realized he was rattling off a string of equations.

When he stopped to take a breath I leapt into the breach.

"Naturally," I said, "that much is obvious to anyone."

"It is?"

"But how does it work?"

He patted the machine with obvious affection. "I don't actually, that is to say, I'm not entirely certain. But it *does* work. A chance combination of ingredients that came together in the proper sequence needed to produce a time displacer. Actually," he said, lowering his voice, "I was trying to refute the Third Law of Thermodynamics. Or is it the First Law? The Second? You know the one I mean."

I nodded knowingly. I had no idea which one he meant, and wouldn't have known the Third Law of Thermodynamics from Willy May's lifetime batting average.

"The one about getting more energy out of something than you put into it," he said.

"Oh, ttat one!"

"Yes. I was trying to construct a—well, don't laugh, a perpetual motion machine."

"Oh," I said.

"But I got a time displacer instead, which is even better, really."

"When did you first realize this?" I said, still trying to get the story.

"When I turned on the machine and the dinosaur came through. He went right through that wall there, in fact, cut across a vacant lot and into the street."

"The wall looks all right to me," I said, and it did. No brontosaur-sized holes at all. Not even any mouseholes.

"Well, I refocused the displacer at a shorter range and repaired it by going back to the moment before it was knocked out."

"Why don't you do the same thing to send that brontosaur back where it came from?"

He shook his head ruefully. "Out of range. I could hardly run down the street after it with the machine on my back. Not when the machine weighs over fifteen hundred kilos."

He had a point there.

"Listen," I said. "What would happen if I used your machine to go back and kill my grandfather before he met my grandmother?" It was a question that had always fascinated me.

"I'd advise against it," he said simply.

"Do you have a radio?" I asked.

"Yes. Certainly. Why?"

"I'm curious to hear what's happening with our scaly friend. There's probably reports coming in on it now. I'm certain of it."

"Sure," he said.

He went over and pushed some junk out of the way on a workbench and turned on a

radio cleverly disguised as a statuette of the Venus deMilo. One knob switched it on, the other selected the stations. Her navel lit up after a moment and the announcer's voice came through clearly.

"...at least four persons have been injured in Millville alone. At last report the brontosaur was being herded into the municipal parking lot by police armed with riot guns. Scientists from all over the world are converging on Millville to examine the fabulous beast. Wait a moment. Our man on the scene, Jim Bartelli is ready. Go ahead, Jim."

Another voice spoke, diluted through a remote pickup mike. "This is Jim Bartelli in the municipal parking lot at the corner of High and Maple Streets in Millville. A raging brontosaur—you can hear it in the background—that appeared from nowhere at about noon today, has been temporarily subdued by chemical mace wielded by local police. Requests from numerous scientists not to kill the dinosaur have resulted in this temporary measure that seems to have rendered the creature semiconscious.

"But those cops are keeping themselves clear of the monster's tail. It's whipping around, back and forth, breaking up the blacktop. That tail, ladies and gentlemen, is about the size of two automobiles, very big at the root and tapering near the end.

"I have here beside me Professor Wilhelmm Von Deutchland, world renowned paleontologist and teacher of that subject at Cloister University. Tell us, Professor Von—"

"That charleton," said Dougherty in a vicious hiss. "He was on the committee that demanded my dismissal. How about that phoney 'Von' in his name? Huh? How about the time he exposed himself before a classroomful of simpering sophomore girls? How—?"

"Shush," I said.

"Well, Jim," said a deep, professorial voice, heavily accented, "though I haven't as yet had the opportunity to examine the dinosaur, actually a brontosaur of the late Mesozoic Period, I would guess that it is the last remaining living animal of its type in the world today."

"Pretty goddam safe guess, scheisskopf," sneered Dougherty.

"Please," I said.

"—how it might possibly have gotten here in the middle of Millville?" the announcer was asking.

"Ja, Jim—" said Von Deutchland, when Dougherty grabbed the armless Venus and smashed her furiously to the floor. Her insides scattered, tubes and transistors everywhere. I was commencing to sober up, and the feeling was far from being pleasant.

"That fool!" Dougherty said.

"Why'd you break the radio?" I asked. I had been genuinely interested in hearing the professor's theory on the dinosaur's origin.

"What does *he* know from time displacers? I'll sue!"

"Chances are even more likely you'll be sued when the city finds out you're the one who set that creature loose around here."

That stopped him. "That is a possibility, isn't it?" he said, looking nervous and vengeful at the same time, an interesting combination.

"Almost a certainty," I said.

"We must do something."

I felt like feeding him that what-do-you-mean-*we*-paleface? line, but instead I said, "Okay. Any suggestions?" I figured, at the very least, I was sitting right on top of the biggest story to come down the pike in a long, long time.

"There is one possibility," Dougherty said, looking at me thoughtfully. "But I, ah, hesitate to ask you."

"Don't be coy," I said. "Speak right out."

"I could send you back into the past..."

"Out of the question!" I yelped.

"Now wait a second. Listen..."

"Absolutely not!"

"If you'd just let me..."

"No chance!"

"It's probably the *only* chance," he said. "Think of the lives you might save."

"Nobody's been killed," I said.

"But they might be."

"So might I be."

"A balance could be maintained," he said quickly. "I could send you back to the moment before I plucked that brontosaur out of its primeval forest. You could scare it off, and you'd return instead."

"Sure," I said. "Romping and stomping and knocking over Volkswagens. No."

He reached behind the worktable and took out a bottle of scotch. Not Jack Daniels, but what is? And a couple of glasses. He set them up and poured two slugs. Two big slugs. He held one out to me.

"I won't accept a bribe," I said.

"I hate to drink alone," he told me.

"So do I," I said, and took the glass.

After a while he said, "Why won't you go back?"

"I can think of any number of good reasons. Like, because there's an excellent chance that monster might step on me and not even notice. Or one of his friends might. Hell, you haven't even got that thing figured out yet. I could end up in the middle of the Spanish Inquisition or the sacking of Rome. And what if I do get back all right to the Meso— the Mez, you know..."

"Mesozoic."

"Right. What if I do? That brontosaur might not scare so easily. I wouldn't if I was his size. And how will I know the exact spot to stand?" I shook my head solemnly. "I won't do it."

Two hours later we had it all worked out.

The time, the location (I'd recognize the exact spot because a big doorway leading to Dougherty's lab would appear; such things are usually out of place in a prehistoric jungle and I couldn't fail to notice it, he said) and a handgun to scare the monster with. We'd tossed a coin, and when Dougherty lost he pointed out that he had to stay behind and operate the machine. By then I was too far gone to argue.

It was a goddamn stupid plan, full of holes big enough to march a *herd* of brontosauri through, but the scotch was gone and we were halfway through a bottle of Irish, and I was just about ready to march up front with Jeanne D'Arc to save France the Fair if need be.

I've since given up drinking.

I mean, you've got to get the picture: me, in my blue drip-dry summer suit and hand-painted paisley tie stepping through into the Mesozoic Age with a big .44 Magnum pistol in one hand and a bottle of whiskey in the other, a look of grim determination on my face as I prepared to terrorize a dinosaur weighing roughly two hundred times what I do. Got the picture?

It was hot. It was hot and moist and very, very humid and the air was thick with a strange taste. I wished I'd left the suit behind. With me in it. I was instantly bathed in a sheet of perspiration. At my feet an—insect?—the size of a cocker spaniel came snuffling up and I put a slug in it, not missing my foot by much. The recoil nearly broke my wrist and, in the absence of all mechanical noise, the shot sounded like all creation coming apart.

A pterodactyl flew by overhead, wings half folded and motionless. He was followed by several others. The jungle was lush and steaming, rich in plantlife in an incredible variety of psychedelic colors. It made its own noise, and not at all like a jungle back

home. A florist could have made his fortune importing flowers back from this natural hothouse.

Back! My God, back was millions of years away. I wiped my forehead with the sleeve of my suit and learned you can't remove moisture with wet cloth very well, so I settled on a good sized slug of whiskey which didn't cool me down at all, but helped immensely.

A little monster of a type I'd never encountered in my childhood picture books came by, baring an infinite number of teeth at me, but I held my fire. I had extra cartridges in my pockets, but the little creature wasn't doing me any harm, and was sort of cute in a murderous-looking way.

No big dinosaurs around. None.

Another little monster, apparently less friendly than the first, or more friendly depending on your point of view, ambled near, too near, and I fired three shaky shots into its thorax. The reports crashed wildly, but without echoes. The créature chittered, took several drunken steps ("I know just how you feel, buddy.") and toppled over, writhing.

Which was when something tapped me on the shoulder. I turned so fast I almost fell on my face and nearly put a bullet into him before I saw that it was a fellow human being wearing skintight overalls and a look of grim disapproval.

"Who the hell are you?" I screamed.

His hand was out, palm up, "Your hunting license please."

"What?"

"License." No please the second time, but he was quite insistant.

I shrugged. "I don't know what you're talking about. What the hell is going on here, anyway?"

"You'll have to come along with me, then," he said soberly. I realized what his attitude reminded me of. A cop.

I swung the gun on him. "Sorry," I said, "but I've got some business to attend to first."

He made a gesture, I felt a sharp pain in the wrist and my gun wrenched itself loose and flew into a thicket of giant ferns. I dived after it and something booted me in the ass. I went all the way down, my face plowing up a cluster of bouquets. I rolled and tensed to meet his attack, mind spinning. The bottle was still clutched in my other hand.

But he wasn't attacking. He just stood there, feet planted widely, a glittering device in his hand that looked like a spiral tube. "Identify yourself and your terminal sector," he ordered. Fun and games were over. His eyes were narrowed to slits. That's a sure sign.

I tried to stand and a wave of force from the hollow tube (I imagine it emanated from the tube, but it wasn't visible) knocked me down again. Hokay. "Webb Williams," I said. "Who are you, sir?"

"Jok Plasta, Game Warden for this preserve."

"Right," I said. "Sure. *What the hell is this?*"

He frowned. "Terminal sector?"

"Grand Central?" I said at random.

"I am not familiar..." he paused. "What year are you from?"

"1970." I was beginning to get the drift.

"No personnel are authorized to hunt from that terminal sector," he said severely.

"I'm not a hunter."

"But you have been hunting," he pointed out, indicating the two dead creatures I'd shot.

"I'm here," I said, "to—you won't believe this—to stop a brontosaur from making a mess of my city. It came in through a time displacer invented by Mason Dougherty. And so did I."

His face took on a new look, altogether

different from the cop look of before.

"Mason Dougherty," he said, like in awe.

"Sure. You've heard of the old fart?"

"But, yes. Every school child has heard of the Great Mason Dougherty, inventer of the time displacer, of the perpetual motion machine, of the electric light."

"That was Edison," I said.

"Oh." He reached down and helped me to my feet. This was more like it. He brushed me off.

"Drink?" I said.

He declined and I took a sip. I hate drinking alone, but I will. I outlined the situation for him quickly. Then *he* outlined the situation for me. It seemed the later Mesozoic was being used as a game preserve for hunters from the future. Well, why not? Livestock was more precious where he came from. As a matter of fact, he told me, that was how dinosaurs had become extinct, sort of like the fabled North American buffalo.

"Well," I said when he'd finished. I polished off the Irish and tossed the bottle away. He swung the tube up and the glass vanished in a puff of dust.

"I'll see to it the brontosaur does not come through Professor Dougherty's machine," he said.

"I'd appreciate that," I told him sincerely.

"It is fortunate I happened along," he said, "because you are over a kilometer away from the swamp where it must have come in through. Professor Dougherty failed to take into complete account the rotation of the Earth. Of course, he's just beginning."

"Of course," I said, thinking that one kilometer would have been the cause of my being stranded here. Then I stopped thinking about it.

"I'll send you back with my own time displacer," he said.

"Fine."

There's probably some truth in the observation that the smaller a technical device gets, the more advanced and refined it is. The Game Warden's time displacer was a little larger than a transistor radio. He made a few adjustment, said his farewell, and I was back in Dougherty's lab with no sense of transition.

He seemed surprised to see me.

I handed him his gun and he took it numbly.

"Well," I said, "that takes care of your dinosaur."

"Dinosaur?" he said, like he'd never heard the word before. "What dinosaur? What are you talking about? Who are you?"

He looked at the gun and I realized that it had all never happened, of course, and that it was past time to leave.

"Never mind," I said, turning to go. I was still soaked with sweat, and wanted nothing more than to go home and slip into a warm tub of bubblebath.

"Wait," he said. "Did I have you for a student a couple of years back?"

"Everybody thinks that," I said, and left.

Outside, it was a quiet day. You know the drill.

—Robert E. Toomey, Jr.

NOBODY LIVES ON BURTON STREET

GREG BENFORD

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

Nobody lives on Burton Street, but men still have to work there. It's not a pleasant job, but as time goes on it is an increasingly necessary one . . .

I WAS STANDING by one of our temporary command posts, picking my teeth after breakfast and talking to Joe Murphy when the first part of the Domestic Disturbance hit us.

Spring had lost its bloom a month back and it was summer now—hot, sticky, the kind of weather that leaves you with a half-moon of sweat around your armpits before you've had time to finish your morning coffee. A summer like that is always more trouble. This one looked like the worst I'd seen since I got on the Force.

We knew they were in the area, working toward us. Our communications link had been humming for the last half hour, getting fixes on their direction and asking the computers for advice on how to handle them when they got here.

I looked down. At the end of the street was a lot of semi-permanent shops and the mailbox. The mailbox bothers me—it shouldn't be there.

From the other end of Burton Street I could hear the random dull bass of the mob.

So while we were getting ready Joe was moaning about the payments on the Snocar he'd been suckered into. I was listening with one ear to him and the other to the crowd noises.

"And it's not just that," Joe said. "It's the neighborhood and the school and everybody around me."

"Everybody's wrong but Murphy, huh?" I said, and grinned.

"Hell no, you know me better than that. It's just that nobody's *going* anyplace. Sure, we've all got jobs, but they're most of them just make-work stuff the unions have gotten away with."

"To get a real job you gotta have training," I said, but I wasn't chuffing him up. I like my job, and it's better than most, but we weren't gonna kid each other that it was some big technical deal. Joe and I are just regular guys.

"What're you griping about this now for, anyway?" I said. "You didn't used to be bothered by anything."

Joe shrugged. "I dunno. Wife's been getting after me to move out of the place we're in and make more money. Gets into fights with the neighbors." He looked a little sheepish about it.

"More money? Hell, y'got everything you need, we all do. Lot of people worse off than you. Look at all those lousy Africans, living on nothing."

I was going to say more, maybe rib him about how he's married and I'm not, but then I stopped. Like I said, all this time I was half-listening to the crowd. I can always tell when a bunch has changed its direction like a pack of wolves off on a chase, and when that funny quiet came and lasted about five seconds I knew they were heading our way.

"Scott!" I yelled at our communications man. "Close it down. Get a final printout."

Murphy broke off telling me about his

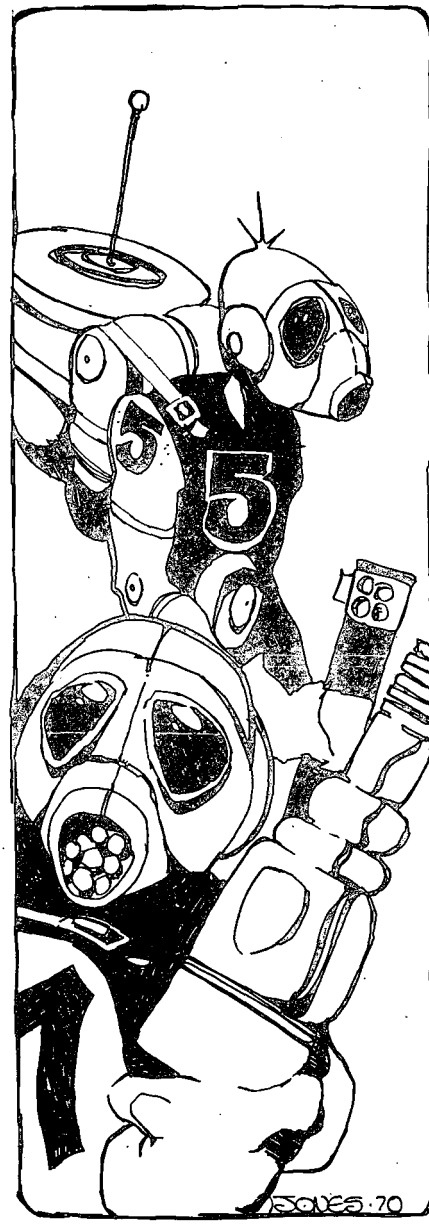
troubles and listened to the crowd for a minute, like he hadn't heard them before, and then took off on a trot to the AnCops we had stashed in the truck below. They were all warmed up and ready to go, but Joe likes to make a final check and maybe have a chance to read in any new instructions Scott gets at the last minute.

I threw away the toothpick and had a last look at my constant-volume joints, to be sure the bulletproof plastiform was matching properly and wouldn't let anything through. Scott came doubletiming over with the diagnostics from HQ. The computer compilation was neat and confusing, like it always is. I could make out the rough indices they'd picked up on the crowd heading our way. The best guess—and that's all you ever get, friends, is a guess—was a lot of Psych Disorders and Race Prejudice. There was a fairly high number of Unemployeds, too. We're getting more and more Unemployeds in the city now, and they're hard for the Force to deal with. Usually mad enough to spit. Smash up everything.

I penciled an ok in the margin and tossed it Scott's way. I'd taken too long reading it; I could hear individual shouts now and the tinkling of glass. I flipped the visor down from my helmet and turned on my external audio. It was going to get hot as hell in there, but I'm not chump enough to drag around an air conditioning unit on top of the rest of my stuff.

I took a look at the street just as a gang of about a hundred people came around the corner two blocks down, spreading out like a dirty gray wave. I ducked over to the edge of the building and waved to Murphy to start off with three AnCops. I had to hold up three fingers for him to see because the noise was already getting high. I looked at my watch. Hell, it wasn't nine AM yet.

Scott went down the stairs we'd tracted up the side of the building. I was right



behind him. It wasn't a good location for observation now; you made too good a target up there. We picked up Murphy, who was carrying our control boards. All three of us angled down the alley and dropped down behind a short fence to have a look at the street.

Most of them were still screaming at the top of their lungs like they'd never run out of air, waving whatever they had handy and gradually breaking up into smaller units. The faster ones had made it to the first few buildings.

A tall Negro came trotting toward us, moving like he had all the time in the world. He stopped in front of a wooden barber shop, tossed something quickly through the front window and *whump!* Flames licked out at the upper edges of the window, spreading fast.

An older man picked up some rocks and began methodically pitching them through the smaller windows in the shops next door. A housewife clumped by awkwardly in high heels, looking like she was out on a shopping trip except for the hammer she swung like a pocket book. She dodged into the barbershop for a second, didn't find anything and came out. The Negro grinned and pointed at the barber pole on the sidewalk, still revolving, and she caught it in the side with a swipe that threw shattered glass for ten yards.

I turned and looked at Murphy. "All ready?"

He nodded. "Just give the word."

The travel agency next door to the barber shop was concrete-based, so they couldn't burn that. Five men were lunging at the door and on the third try they knocked it in. A moment later a big travel poster sailed out the front window, followed by a chair leg. They were probably doing as much as they could, but without tools they couldn't take much of the furniture apart.

"Okay," I said. "Let's have the first AnCops."

The thick acrid smell from the smoke was drifting down Burton Street to us, but my air filters would take care of most of it. They don't do much about human sweat, though, and I was going to be inside the rest of the day

Our first prowl car rounded the next corner, going too fast. I looked over at Murphy, who was controlling the car, but he was too busy trying to miss the people who were standing around in the street. Must have gotten a little overanxious on that one. Something was bothering his work.

I thought sure the car was going to take a tumble and mess us up, but the wheels caught and it righted itself long enough for the driver to stop a skid. The screech turned the heads of almost everybody in the crowd and they'd started to move in on it almost before the car stopped laying down rubber and came to a full stop. Murphy punched in another instruction and the AnCop next to the driver started firing at a guy on the sidewalk who was trying to light a Molotov cocktail. The AnCop was using something that sounded like a repeating shotgun. The guy with the cocktail just turned around and looked at him a second before scurrying off into a hardware store.

By this time the car was getting everything—bricks, broken pieces of furniture, merchandise from the stores. Something heavy shattered the windshield and the driver ducked back too late to avoid getting his left hand smashed with a bottle. A figure appeared on the top of the hardware shop—it looked like the guy from the sidewalk—and took a long windup before throwing something into the street.

There was a tinkling of glass and a red circle of flame slid across the pavement where it hit just in front of the car, sending smoke curling up over the hood and obscuring the inside. Murphy was going to

have to play it by feel now; you couldn't see a thing in the car.

A teenager with a stubby rifle stepped out of a doorway, crouched down low like in a western. He fired twice, very accurately and very fast, at the window of the car. A patrolman was halfway out the door when it hit him full in the face, sprawling the body back over the roof and then pitching it forward into the street.

A red blotch formed around his head, grew rapidly and ran into the gutter. There was ragged cheering and the teenager ran over to the body, tore off its badge and backed away. "Souvenir!" he called out, and a few of the others laughed.

I looked at Murphy again and he looked at me and I gave him the nod for the firemen, switching control over to my board. Scott was busy talking into his recorder, taking notes for the writeup later. When Murphy nudged him he stopped and punched in the link for radio control to the firefighting units.

By this time most of Burton Street was on fire. Everything you saw had a kind of orange look to it. The crowd was moving toward us once they'd lost interest in the cops, but we'd planned it that way. The firemen came running out in that jerky way they have, just a little in front of us. They were carrying just a regular hose this time because it was a medium-sized group and we couldn't use up a fire engine and all the extras. But they were wearing the usual red uniforms. From a distance you can't tell them from the real thing.

Their subroutine tapes were fouled up again. Instead of heading for the barber shop or any of the other stuff that was burning, like I'd programmed, they turned the hose on a stationery store that nobody had touched yet. There were three of them, holding onto that hose and getting it set up. The crowd had backed off a minute to see what was going on.

When the water came through it knocked in the front window of the store, making the firemen look like real chumps. I could hear the water running around inside, pushing over things and flooding out the building. The crowd laughed, what there was of it—I noticed some of them had moved off in the other direction, over into somebody else's area.

In a minute or so the laughing stopped, though. One guy who looked like he had been born mad grabbed an ax from somewhere and took a swing at the hose. He didn't get it the first time but people were sticking around to see what would happen and I guess he felt some kind of obligation to go through with it. Even under pressure, a thick hose isn't easy to cut into. He kept at it and on the fourth try a seam split—looked like a bad repair job to me—and a stream of water gushed out and almost hit this guy in the face.

The crowd laughed at that too, because he backed off real quick then, scared for a little bit. A face full of high-velocity water is no joke, not at that pressure.

The fireman who was holding the hose just a little down from there hadn't paid any attention to this because he wasn't programmed to, so when this guy thought about it he just stepped over and chopped the fireman across the back with the ax.

It was getting hot. I didn't feel like overriding the stock program, so it wasn't long before all the firemen were out of commission, just about the same way. A little old lady—probably with a welfare gripe—borrowed the ax for a minute to separate all of a fireman's arms and legs from the trunk. Looking satisfied, she waddled away after the rest of the mob.

I stood up, lifted my faceplate and looked at them as they milled back down the street. I took out my grenade launcher and got off a tear gas cartridge on low charge, to hurry them along. The wind was going crosswise

so the gas got carried off to the side and down the alleys. Good; wouldn't have complaints from somebody who got caught in it too long.

Scott was busy sending orders for the afternoon shift to get more replacement firemen and cops, but we wouldn't have any trouble getting them in time. There hadn't been much damage, when you think how much they could've done.

"Okay for the reclaim crew?" Murphy said.

"Sure. This bunch won't be back. They look tired out already." They were moving toward Horton's area, three blocks over.

A truck pulled out of the alley and two guys in coveralls jumped out and began picking up the androids, dousing fires as they went. In an hour they'd have everything back in place, even the prefab barber shop.

"Hellava note," Murphy said.

"Huh?"

"All this stuff," he waved a hand down Burton Street. "Seems like a waste to build all this just so these jerks can tear it down again."

"Waste?" I said. "It's the best investment you ever saw. How many people were in the last bunch—two hundred? Every one of them is going to sit around for weeks bragging about how he got him a cop or burned a building."

"Okay, okay. If it does any good, I guess it's cheap at the price."

"If, hell! You know it is. If it wasn't they wouldn't be here. You got to be cleared by a psycher before you even get in. The computer works out just what you'll need, just the kind of action that'll work off the aggressions you've got. Then shoots it to us in the profile from HQ before we start. It's foolproof."

"I dunno. You know what the Consies say—the psychers and the probes and drugs are an in—"

"Invasion of privacy?"

"Yeah," Murphy said sullenly.

"Privacy? Man, the psychers are public health! It's part of the welfare! You don't have to go around to some expensive guy who'll have you lay on a couch and talk to him. You can get better stuff right from the government. It's free!"

Murphy looked at me kind of funny. "Sure. Have to go in for a checkup sometime soon. Maybe that's what I need."

I frowned just the right amount. "Well, I dunno, Joe. Man lets his troubles get him down every once in a while, doesn't mean he needs professional help. Don't let it bother you. Forget it."

Joe was okay, but even a guy like me who's never been married could tell he wasn't thinking up this stuff himself. His woman was pushing him. Not satisfied with what she had.

Now, *that* was wrong. Guy like Joe doesn't have anywhere to go. Doesn't know computers, automation. Can't get a career rating in the Army. So the pressure was backing up on him.

Supers like me are supposed to check out their people and leave it at that, and I go by the book like everybody else. But Joe wasn't the problem.

I made a mental note to have a psycher look at his wife.

"Okay," he said, taking off his helmet. "I got to go set up the AnCops for the next one."

I watched him walk off down the alley. He was a good man. Hate to lose him.

I started back toward our permanent operations center to check in. After a minute I decided maybe I'd better put Joe's name in too, just in case. Didn't want anybody blowing up on me.

He'd be happier, work better. I've sure felt a lot better since I had it. It's a good job I got, working in public affairs like this, keeping people straight with themselves.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 146)

The old pulps of science fiction were full of the roaring tales of space heroes adventuring across the known (and unknown) universe. But what of them now, when they are old and advanture exists for them in tattered memories . . . ? What now, for—

SATURDAY'S CHILD

BILL WARREN

IT WAS GOOD to stand beside the stream and let the cool air wash over his seamed face. The trek to and from the village had been over a hot, dusty road; Dorn reveled in the breeze that swept air around his bent body.

With a sigh, he lowered himself onto the rock he always sat on when returning from town. He stretched his good leg, and fished for his pipe; smoke soon billowed. He leaned against the furry tree with a satisfied sigh. *It's still better to walk the road home,* he thought.

The hunterbeast lay in the shallows of the stream, soaking up the refreshing water like a violet-striped blotter. The old man frowned in compassion. The long walk had been worse on the cold-climate creature than on himself, yet it had accompanied him all the way and had laid panting outside the doctor's office and each shop he entered, its jade eyes focused on the door.

For the thousandth time, Dorn wondered what made a hunterbeast of Algol III adopt a human being. Three planets and over a hundred years earlier, he had met the creature in a purple field. Dorn had been old even then, yet prepared to battle the 200-pound carnivore. Dorn had reached for his stunner, but as his hand touched its stock an image formed in his mind, an image of the hunterbeast bringing him a slain creature as a peace offering, overlaid by a blend of loyalty, affection and respect. Love.

The semi-telepathic beast had adopted him at that moment, and had never left him for more than a few minutes since.

The old man tapped the dottle from his pipe and stood up. He directed one command at the hunterbeast, and resumed his journey; the beast stalked ahead with dignity.

He must have been adopted because he possessed something that fulfilled a need in the long-lived creature, but what that need was, Dorn had never known for certain. Perhaps, he pondered, the beast was a kind of parasite on his thoughts. Even so, he had never regretted their near-symbiosis. The quiet animal had provided him with companionship when no one really remembered him other than as "Saturday's Child," the old spaceman who never stopped wandering. A jagged scar beneath one of its eyes told of one of the many times it had saved the old man's life.

Dorn became aware of a delicate touch at his mind, and gave permission to the beast to leave the trail in search of its food. In a violet flash, it melted into the spongebrush.

How intelligent is it? Dorn wondered as he walked through the glade in the shade of the furry and nart trees. Intelligent enough to understand his commands and know

what he wanted and needed, at least. Beyond that, Dorn was unsure.

Dorn paused, sweating, and gazed at the clouds above the distant peaks. He knew clouds formed there only when hot weather was coming. Although it was indeed hot for spring, he didn't think the air was warm enough to conjure up the clouds. Shielding his eyes, eyes which had gazed into the hells of countless stars, he looked at the star that was this world's sun. If he didn't know that his vision was failing, he would have thought that the disk was flecked with shadows.

It was dark before they left the forest, and he let the hunterbeast guide him. He felt death-weary, and longed to lie down. But the valley was just a little further.

The forest whispered and screamed in the gloom as its many creatures carried on long-lasting battles. Once, a battle approached. A heavy creature lumbered through nearby trees, while hovering jubjub birds dropped boulders on it. Against the starlit sky, Dorn could see four of the things pelting their prey below.

The fleeing animal stopped, swayed, and toppled. Jubjubs dropped and began feeding. As Dorn and his companion passed the monsters an image entered the man's mind. It was a picture of a tiny jubjub beside one of the rocs that infested the last planet back. The contrast was ludicrous, and Dorn smiled. *Yes, old friend,* he thought, *those rocs were really impressive.*

Steady travelling soon brought them to the canyon of pillars. Nestled between two towering spires was his small, neat cabin of wood-toned panels. Dorn opened the door, waving on the lights as he entered. The hunterbeast left him to make its circuit of the grounds.

Dorn lowered his body into his pilot's seat, the most comfortable chair. He pushed a button, and the chair tilted back. He pressed another, and the chair swung to face the wall covered with mementoes of his days in space.

There was his pilot's commission, on the Earth-Titan run, dating soon after the hyperlight drive had been perfected. That was a good ship, the *Helene.* Beside the commission notice was a holofoto of the squat, ugly ship. Dorn savored each memory to its fullest.

Dorn was 600, twice the usual life-expectancy of his generation. Centuries of wandering had filled his mind with people and places which blended into a fog of memories from which thoughts gleamed like stars. The room was cluttered with aids to his memory.

There were the photographs of his mistresses and wives. There were mates on voyages, and captains under whom he had served. There were ships, ports, worlds and friends living in the pictures. A Saturday's Child meets many people, goes many places, sees many things.

The hunterbeast entered and curled up on the hearthmat, regarding Dorn with unwinking solemnity. The old man closed his eyes and leaned his head against the back of the seat. *So many years, so many worlds,* he thought. *My body has been a cosmic shuttlecock, tossed here and there.*

I've changed—he fingered the plastic plate that made up a portion of his skull—*I'm mostly not me. My legs—neither is mine; that last graft on the left didn't take too well. My eyes—one corneal transplant for each, and they need another. My body—half metal under the flesh.*

These are my real souvenirs. I was a hero and have paid the price. He touched his sunken throat. *No, this last—injury—wasn't due to heroism, but to a body overloaded with rejuvenation treatments. After all these centuries, cancer is still with man. So now I'll never speak again; don't want a*

sonovox; too old to learn silent-talk.

Maybe I should give up . . . .

A whine from the hunterbeast interrupted his thoughts. The creature was standing beside his chair, projecting imageless waves of compassion.

He smiled and touched its head. It lay down, watchful as the old man waved out the lights.

Dorn spent a slow day trying to complete a painting of the sandstone pillars that filled the canyon, but after a while the slight weight of the electrobrush was too much for his arm. He regretfully folded a cover over the canvas. It might have brought enough for a null-g chair. *Heard I'm in demand around Center. See the paintings of Saturday's Child! Hero of a thousand worlds! Man has a way of turning everything he touches to gold leaf. Precious, but so very thin.*

The next day the hunterbeast killed a bouncebuck, and brought it to the cabin. Dorn slowly cleaned and preserved it.

Another day, he hid in the cellar from the unseasonably hot sun and read from his battered copy of Shakespeare. When he finished *King Lear* he worked for a while on his memoirs.

He went to bed. In the early morning he was awakened by a distant sound. He sat up stiffly and stared at the pale circle of the window. A million tiny, tinny rumbles rose and fell in pitch. Dorn's eyes widened. The sound was the one he had come so far to avoid, one that filled him with longing. Tears trickled down the grooves of his face. He impatiently brushed them away.

Later, Dorn made an entry in his journal:

The sound of starships lifting . . . there must be many of them for the noise to reach this far. The doctors told me my capillaries wouldn't take any more liftoffs. Hemorrhage! So I moved out where I couldn't hear the ships. I want to space again. I want to look at a million stars, to see another world from beyond its sky, to . . . .

His shaking had placed a period after "sky" and crossed out the "to." He began again:

The sound is still going on. They must be moving the whole population off-planet. This happened on a world I was on 250 years ago. I was old then, too. The sun was getting hot. I escaped, but some didn't. They died when the sun went nova. That must be what is going to happen. But I can't leave. I'd die in the leaving. I gaze at the tall pillars silhouetted against the lavender. I don't want to leave.

He laid down his pen, closed the notebook, and walked out into the hot yard. Sweat trickled down his neck and along his ribs. Dorn stepped down the sandy path, carrying his fishing pole. The hunterbeast ran ahead, mentally calling "Come." As he walked, the man listened to the distant thunder of departing ships. He sighed and hummed a song to drown the noise of their flight.

Then he thought of his nickname. It suited himself and all men who chose to wander in search of something they would never find. "Saturday's Child." This Child had no farther to go.

Dorn lay on the bank of a pool, in the shade of a tall stone pillar. His pipe was in his mouth but the ashes were cold. The waterfall left the cliff above to descend in crystalline beauty, scattering a rainbow over the beach. The sound of the water almost drowned that of the ships. He was glad, yet agonizingly aware of his yearning.

The hunterbeast swam into the torrent of the falls, where it was forced under. It erupted a few yards away, then swam again under the falling water, grimly determined to enjoy the coolness.

Dorn caught movement in the sky, and

watched a jubjub bird above the valley, spiraling slowly upward on a current of heated air. Despite the falls, he occasionally heard the sound of ships, and at times a flash of silver would arc across the sky. With each flash, Dorn felt a part of himself flake away. Even if he managed to survive takeoff, he would be a shrivelled piece of useless baggage. No, he had to stay.

He lay in the mist of the falls until the jubjub bird rose beyond sight.

As he climbed the cabin steps, Dorn became aware of one final dying whistle. Probably the last of the ships had departed. *I must be alone,* he thought. He placed his hand on the door latch. The hunterbeast made a low moan. Dorn directed a quieting thought, opened the door and faced a stranger.

"I'm sorry to break into your house, Captain Nelsin, but we have to take you off-planet. I'm sorry," he repeated, looking away from the stricken face of the man slumped against the doorway.

Dorn stared, bewildered, at the denuded cabin. All the pictures, the souvenirs, the certificates of record, of reward, of merit were gone. His memories had been raped.

The earnest young man in Space Force black stepped forward. A junior officer, probably newly commissioned, stuck with the job of talking the old buzzard into leaving his roost, Dorn decided.

"Let me help you, Captain. I—"

Dorn evaded the outstretched arm. He sat heavily on his bed and looked again at the room.

"We took everything to a ship, sir. Now we've come to help you. Saturday's Child has far to go, sir . . ." The young officer smiled weakly.

Dorn's eyes blazed. He felt a sense of betrayal at the use of his public-yet-private name. He stood up shakily, mentally calling the hunterbeast.

"We tried to contact the base doctor, but he had already gone, sir."

Dorn pointed to the door, his other hand on the beast's neck. The officer hesitated. Dorn's outstretched arm trembled and ached, but he locked his jaw and kept pointing. The intruder's face reddened. He took a step forward. "Nova, Captain Nelsin! This sun's going nova. You'll die!"

The hunterbeast moaned, and crouched for a spring. "But sir, we just want to help you."

Dorn lowered his arm and called the beast back. He took a slate and stylus from his desk. *He could be me,* the old spacer thought, glancing at the other man as he began writing. *He could be one of my bastard children. Must be hell now in that heavy uniform.*

Dorn wrote: "Bring back my belongings. Then please leave. I'm through travelling." He began to tell of his physical danger if he left the planet, but erased the words with a touch and handed over the slate. *What would this boy think if he knew I'm ashamed to tell him that space can kill me?*

The young man read the note. "But sir! You *cannot* stay here! The Space Force promised to take care of its oldest member. Please, sir . . ."

Dorn waved wearily at the door. He was almost through fighting.

An image flashed into his mind of the hunterbeast standing over the still body of the spaceman. Dorn directed a negative thought and felt the tense animal relax against his leg. *Odd,* he thought, his hand on the beast's neck. *You have never threatened an intelligent being without my approval.*

Another image appeared: the cellar with its stored food, a cool darkness, the two of them alone.

"I'll be right back, sir," the flustered young officer said. "Don't worry,

everything will be all right." He was gone.

Dorn glared at the closed door. Talks to me as if I were senile, he thought. He looked out the window and his dark mood changed. The officer was striding down the canyon, often flicking a look at the swollen sun. *He even walks like I used to.*

The man was going for reinforcements or knockout drops, Dorn decided. He turned to the cellar door. *We'll show them, old friend,* he thought defiantly. *We'll hide. When the end comes, we'll never know. Better burning instantly than bleeding slowly.*

He crept down stairs, calling the softly moaning hunterbeast after him. He crossed to a small reactor in the corner and lay down in the shadows behind it.

Why can't they leave me alone, he thought. *They are cruel. I'm an old man, and famous. I deserve better* . . . A scaly paw touched his arm. He looked into the emerald glow of his companion's eyes. *That's right, old fellow. You know when I'm feeling sorry for myself.*

Dorn felt the beast turn to face the stairs. Moments later he could hear it too—footsteps. A new voice commanded. "Captain Nelsin? Come out, sir."

The hunterbeast launched itself at a dark shape descending the stairs, throwing it to the floor. A shout and a hum from the top of the stairs ended the struggle. The young officer stood up, back braced against the wall, arm bleeding. The hunterbeast lay still.

It's stunned, Dorn thought. Then he noticed the blank spot in his mind, an emptiness where for a century there had been a curled, watchful loyalty, affection and respect. This was gone, replaced by nothingness. The hunterbeast was dead.

Dorn sobbed, the first sound he had uttered since his operation. Staggering to his feet, he limped across the cellar and fell to his knees, cradling the animal in his arms. His tears fell on its ugly face and dulled, sightless eyes. The old man was alone.

An interim, then, of whirling blades, of men carrying him and gently strapping him to an acceleration couch.

Another interim, then a smashing weight which pressed him painfully into darkness.

An awakening in agony. Dorn could feel his face damp and sticky with blood from his nose and mouth. He lay dying.

Then voices and exclamations and questions. He turned his head to the figures about him. His hands made motions for a tapwriter. When one was brought, he wrote slowly, absolving his captors from all blame. Then he tapped a request that they carry him to a window.

Dorn stared into myriads of stars, so thick that there was no real blackness, more distant, fainter stars reaching on to infinity. The lovely doomed planet they had fled swung into view.

Dorn closed his eyes. *Goodbye friend, companion, fellow Child,* he thought. *You gave me more and were more than I knew. I hope I did the same for you.*

He died without regret.

Beyond the reach of an exploding star a coffin was propelled from the side of a ship, launched on an orbit of eternity.

On its lid were the words:

CAPTAIN DORN NELSIN, ISSF Ret.
b. 2027 d. 2632
Saturday's Child Has Far to Go
Wander in Peace

—Bill Warren

BY FURIES POSSESSED

by TED WHITE

Illustrated by GRAY MORROW

(Second of Two Parts)

One man—Bjonn of Farhome—had brought a strange alien parasite to Earth. In the course of one day, he infected a girl with it; the following day another couple. All too soon there might be no one left on Earth uninfected—save Tad Dameron, and what could one man do? Or was that the real problem, after all . . . ?

SYNOPSIS

My name is Tad Dameron, *and I work for the Bureau of Non-Terran Affairs. I've been with the Bureau for ten years, and I'm stuck at Level Seven, which makes me a field investigator confined to Earth-local operations. As you might imagine, I've been less than happy about this—I've put through for promotion into space any number of times, but my psychological file has always stood in my way.*

I met Bjonn *on one of my infrequent shunts up to the Moon. He was the first colonist from the world of Farhome—our first successful colony outside the solar system—to return to Earth, and my job was ostensibly to guide him about during his stay here. In actual fact my job was somewhat more subtle: I was to investigate him and assess him, both as a human being and as a colonist. I'm well suited for such an assignment; one of my few important talents—and the one which had kept me my job—is my ability to intuitively assess facts and situations . . . accurately.*

On my first meeting with Bjonn I noticed a subtle alien *quality in his bearing and movements. He seemed somehow too sure of himself; he was too composed, too able to cope with strange and unusual circumstances. For a man visiting Earth for the first time in his life, he didn't fit.*

What cinched it was his offer, once in his Megayork hotel, to share a meal with me. I was so shocked that I had to excuse myself immediately.

On rustic colonial planets they may follow more primitive modes of behavior, but for a civilized individual, eating *is one of the most personal and private of acts, and one eats only within the privacy of an eating cubicle where one may also evacuate as one swallows fresh algae soups from the tube.*

I asked one of my fellow agents, Dian Knight, *to act as Bjonn's escort. She did so, but tearfully reported to both myself and our boss,* Tucker, *that she too had been propositioned to share a meal with Bjonn. And this time he no longer had the excuse of ignorance—if, indeed, he did before. Nonetheless, I managed to talk Dian into taking Bjonn sightseeing again the following day, and when I joined them early*

that evening in Bjonn's hotel room, I found that Dian too had undergone that change *into something curiously alien. They invited me to join them, and I left precipitously.*

Tucker roused me from my sleep the next morning to chew me out in the strongest possible terms. Dian and Bjonn had disappeared, and he held me responsible. He reminded me of my own psychological records, informed me that of the two of us Dian was the more valuable to the Bureau, and then challenged me to find them—something he already had the Bureau's bloodhounds working on.

I talked to Dian's roommate and found Dian had switched her credit card with her roommate's, which explained the lack of any credit records for Dian or Bjonn. I found they'd flown out to Southern Pacifica, to the landmark area of Santa Barbara, where they met another couple, and then took a rented car north on the old Coast Road. They never reached Bay Complex, but passed the car on to a young hitchhiker to be turned in. Their trail ended in the open countryside of Big Sur, and I was all for getting warrants for Invasion of Privacy and searching the area when Tucker called me off. We'd pressed the case as far as we could; technically no crime was involved. Warrants for Invasion of Privacy were out of order.

So I returned to the East Coast and went back to work on more humdrum cases, and several months passed by, during which time Tucker installed a girl named Ruth Polonyck *in Dian's office. Having the time to think a few things out, I decided that, number one, Tucker had been having a sub-rosa affair with Dian (which explained why nobody else had gotten to first base with her, and also his anger at her sudden disappearance), and, number two, that Ruth was slated to replace Dian outside the office as well as in. Having worked up a fairly*

strong resentment against Tucker for betraying my (no doubt misplaced) trust in him as a father-figure (my own orphaned me at six), I embarked upon a campaign to steal Ruth from him. It was as successful as it was cold-blooded, and it culminated in a night at a high-society party. I took her home with me afterwards, bedded her and all the rest, and found myself liking neither her nor myself for it. We had words and she left—for good, as far as I was concerned. I had bigger things on my mind: although the fact had hardly penetrated my mind at the time (drugs had flowed indiscriminately and involuntarily), I had seen both Bjonn and Dian on a 3-D broadcast during the party.

It was easy enough to trace down the broadcast and discover that Bjonn had set up some sort of religion—he called it the Brotherhood of Life—out in Cloverdale, California, a small town north of Bay Complex. I went out, confronted both Dian and Bjonn, and achieved no satisfaction from it at all. Everything I said, every accusation I threw at them, they responded to with double-talk, loaded replies or simply what struck me as evasions. Sick to my stomach, I left, taking with me on the spur of the moment a girl I found out in their grounds, named Lora. I had her body impounded on suspicion of alien infection—she too had that alien *quality I noticed in Bjonn and all those who had taken his "Sacrament of Life."*

Once back at home I found my sense of impotence and frustration building. Nothing seemed to be developing clearly; I couldn't resolve any of the things which were disturbing me. In an effort to find a social distraction, I looked up Veronica, *a girl I'd met at that party. I found upon meeting her again that she made sensuals, and she tricked me into making one with her, promising me afterwards a share of the royalties. It made me feel unclean.*

Finally I did something I'd been putting off for a long time. I made an appointment with a shrink.

She was my mother.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"IT WASN'T COINCIDENCE, was it?" she said.

"No," I agreed. "I checked a directory. The name caught my eye—not many of us Damerons around. I had a check run."

"So you came to see me."

"I wanted to know."

"And I," she nodded. "My son." She shook her head and repeated it: "My son."

"What did my file tell you?"

"You've read it yourself," she pointed out. "What does it tell you?"

"Not much that I didn't already know."

She nodded. "You decided you needed therapy," she said. "*Then* you found my name. Did you think you could find valid therapy with me?"

"I don't know," I confessed. "I don't like the way things have been going lately. I had to do *something*. And I've tried just about everything else."

"I think I should disqualify myself," she said.

"For God's sake, *why?*"

"I am your mother. Are you relating to me as a therapist, or as your mother? The distinction is important. How could I ever be sure?"

"Look—you've set up this whole office like an apt, and you present yourself as a mother, as an earth-mother type. Isn't it a little disingenuous of you to disqualify yourself just because you really *are* my mother? If I was somebody else, you'd want me to pretend you were my mother, right? So it's a little easier, isn't it? Because, I know you really are."

"But—"

"Look, *Mother*—I last laid eyes on you

more than twenty-five years ago. I don't even have a good *memory* of you! I walked in here, wondering, trying to remember, and I looked at you and *I didn't even know!* That's how much my mother you are. Why, I remember my *den* mothers for God's sake, better than you. Don't you think you *owe* it to me to try to help me?"

She shook her head as if confused, tears that looked real glistening in the corners of her large soft eyes. "I don't know, don't you see? That's just it. What if it's *my* fault—that you're . . . the way you are . . .? How could I help you then?"

"Why don't you tell me why you gave me up?"

"I've been listed all these years," she said. "Why didn't you ever look me up before?"

I shrugged. Standoff. "I'm here now," I said, finally.

We regarded each other. Her eyes dropped first. I was making her nervous.

"Well." She shuffled the printout sheets. Then she raised her eyes again, almost as if imploring me in some way. "Your father and I," she said, and stopped. "It was a question of priorities," she said, backing off and starting again. It didn't appear to take her where she wanted to go. "Tad," she said, "I'm sorry. I had to do what I did. Perhaps it was wrong." She stared down at the plastic sheets she was still gripping. "It turned out to be wrong. But nonetheless, it had to be done, then. Your father and I were not happy with each other. We decided to revoke our contract. You were a problem. Contracts are non-revocable where children are involved—I guess you know that. We discussed it. Your father decided to abandon us. Under the law, an abandoned contract is null and void after one full year of absence. I went on Public Care, and you were taken into a public den; it was automatic."

"And you went on to become a therapist."

"Yes. It was a matter of years, Tad. It took me twelve years to earn my license. During those twelve years I could not have been a mother also."

"So you became a counterfeit mother, you earned a license to become an ersatz mother for profit. Did it ease your conscience?"

"How can you talk that way to me?" she cried. "Is *that* why you came here? To confront me and revile me for abandoning you?"

"No," I said. "But can you blame me for being bitter?"

She shook her head. "No," she said in a low voice. "No, I can't blame you."

"So," I said. "Here I am." I gestured at the file in her hands. "And there I am."

"Thousands of children," she said, slowly, as if picking out the words one by one, "maybe millions, are raised in public dens. They don't all turn out as you have."

"No," I said. "Some are worse."

"Don't you *see*, Tad, I can't—I just *can't* handle this situation properly? How could I be your therapist when you already have me feeling so guilty about you, about your problems?"

"I didn't give you that guilt," I said. "You did. How are you going to get rid of it? By throwing me out and never seeing me again?"

"I couldn't do that," she said.

"Maybe you should take me on as a charity case," I suggested.

Her eyes blazed angrily, and then subsided, a sudden spark of flame from dying embers. "You didn't come here with that in mind," she said.

I shook my head.

"I have an enormous overhead," she said "The rent on this office—you have no idea the amount they get for space like this now. And the taxes—! Private enterprise—" she snorted— "is far from what it's supposed to be. I work here all day, every day of the

week, just to keep my accounts straight."

"I've checked your credit rating," I said.

"I'm not going to give you a free hour every day," she said.

"I didn't ask for it," I said. "I merely suggested a sop for your conscience."

She frowned and straightened herself on the couch. I found myself sprawling even more indolently on mine. It was a very relaxing couch; no doubt a tool of her trade. "If we are not going to waste the rest of your time—?" she said briskly.

"Okay," I said. "You're the therapist."

"I can't seem to become involved with people," I said. "I try, but . . ."

"In what way do you try?"

I told her about my visit with Veronica, minimizing what we'd done. "I wanted just to, well, get to know her. You know what I mean?"

"How do you mean it?"

"Well, hell. She's a girl."

"You seem to have taken care of that aspect of her," she observed dryly.

"I wanted something, ummm, less physical. I wasn't a real person to her; I was an object. She treated me like an object."

"Does that surprise you?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"How do *you* treat people?"

"Like people."

"I don't think so. Think about it."

It went on like that. Back and forth. I tried to explain myself. She forced me into word games, kept me on the defensive. I never seemed to get to the things I wanted to talk about. Finally she told me, "Your problem seems to be that you have difficulty relating to people."

And I said, angrily, "That's what I've been trying to tell *you*, dammit!"

It was not a very productive session. And I wondered if future sessions would be any better. I'd always distrusted shrinks; why should I expect more of my mother? What reason had she, of all people, ever given me to trust her? As I left the session I turned black thoughts over in my mind, and wondered how a mother could make money from her own son's psychological problems, when she was undoubtedly at their root.

I had to skip the following day's appointment. I was called to Geneva.

Tucker and I took the same HST; he'd come to Megayork the day before, although I hadn't known it. I found my seat, settled in and prepared to doze off when someone sat down next to me, and a warning bristled in the back of my mind. I turned my head casually, and found myself staring into Tucker's slate-gray eyes.

"Greetings," he said.

"I guess you're coming to Geneva too," I said brightly. I had not actually confronted him in the flesh since the episode with Ruth. Now he was strapped into the twenty-four-inch slot immediately adjacent to mine. His knuckles grazed mine as he laid his left arm on the armrest that separated us. The recirculating air suddenly made my forehead icy.

He chuckled, and I knew he was enjoying the situation. "That's right," he agreed, saying nothing.

"Have you any idea what is going on?" I asked. The demand—or maybe command—for my appearance in Geneva was unprecedented, at least to me. All my previous dealings with the home office had been by infomat.

"Ayup," he said, volunteering nothing more.

I didn't want to give him the satisfaction of asking more questions, so I shut my mouth and kept my silence. He chuckled once or twice more, and then became quiet. Maybe he was becoming bored by his own game.

The seatback cushions inflated, pinning us into our seats, the warning lights flashed, and in short order we were rising into a low orbit which would carry us outside 82% of the atmosphere, and drop us almost a quarter of the way around the world. The acceleration was brisker than on the west-coast hop, but, because we had a more favorable ballistic curve, the trip took no longer. Soon enough the flash of the sun on the waters of Lake Geneva heralded our touchdown into the late afternoon of another continent.

We were met by couriers and taken by private pod to the Concordat, wherein our Bureau's offices occupied a secluded niche (although no less grand to my eyes for that fact). We were ushered across an interior lawn under an artificial sun, to an office framed by a living wall of flowering vines. Several men were reclining in sun-deck chairs there, and I felt absurdly out of place in my North Am clothes. I didn't feel a lot better when I noticed Tucker seemed similarly disconcerted.

We were seated and ignored, while the others conversed in low voices. I was wondering why we had been brought here, if not simply to humiliate us with a better knowledge of the insignificance of our roles in the Bureau, when a man with a young face, but tired old eyes and dead-white hair turned his chair around and addressed us.

"Gentlemen, the Bureau is indebted to you for your forthright perseverance in your duties as you saw them. I am going to tell you something, and I am going to state it for your ears only—because you have earned the knowledge.

"The girl brought in by Level Seven Agent Dameron has been exhaustively examined by our labs in Lima, and we have definitely established the fact that her body has been entered—invaded—by an alien parasite."

He spoke in a dead flat tone, almost wearily conversational, as if repeating a common fact for the thousandth time—but the small chill that had been crawling slowly up and down my back suddenly spread its icy fingers and clamped them into my intestines.

"We have established," he continued without pause, "that this parasite has created a second nervous system, directly parallel to her own, with its own nervous center at the base of her neck. The filaments of this parasite not only penetrate her ganglioplexus at many points but also along her spine and her brain. The relationship appears symbiotic. She is in excellent physical health. She claims voluntary control of many body functions, such as ovulation. She also claims that the effects of this parasite in her body are entirely beneficial. This, of course, remains open to doubt, inasmuch as she could easily be under its mental domination." *I'd sensed it all along.*

"Sir," Tucker said. "You're suggesting this girl has been taken over by an alien parasite? Via the colonist from Farhome, Bjonn?"

The man shifted his gaze directly to my superior and seemed to examine him as coolly as he might have a minor insect. "I *stated,*" he said, coldly, precisely, "that the girl's body and brain have been invaded by an alien parasite. I infer that the parasite was brought to Earth by the colonial emissary, Bjonn. This is not a known fact, although it seems very likely."

"Has—has the girl said anything, about how she was given the parasite, sir?" I ventured to ask. My voice sounded shrill in my own ears, but the man appeared to give my question due consideration.

"She spoke only of a religious ceremony," he said.

I nodded. "The 'sacrament of life.' "

"Exactly." He seemed on the verge of thawing a little.

"Then," I said, a little more boldly, "it's reasonable to assume that Bjonn established this religion of his for the purpose of spreading his parasites."

"That is our assumption," the man agreed. I noticed the others were also watching me now, and I felt suddenly very conspicuous and dangerously out of my own level.

"Exactly our suspicion, all along," Tucker said, throwing his hat into the ring. I kept a straight face and didn't risk any sidelong glances at him. "I'm sorry we had to lose a valuable agent to them."

No one was looking at Tucker. They were still watching me. I felt suddenly apprehensive. *They hadn't called us all the way to Geneva just to tell us this.*

"You said this was for our ears only," I said, surprising myself a little. But what the hell; I was already on the spot. "Why? What do you plan to do with Bjonn and his Church?"

The man smiled and nodded; it was like the sun breaking through a winter overcast. "You're right," he said. "We are not going to interfere with Bjonn at this time. Religious freedom is always a touchy issue. Instead, we want you, Agent Dameron, to join his Church."

It sure sounded easy—on the surface. That's why I had cramps in my stomach and strong misgivings about the whole plan, all the way back to Megayork. They'd rather carefully outlined the whole plan to us. I was to infiltrate Bjonn's Church, but *without* becoming a host to one of those parasites. I had a valuable talent: my intuitive sense of situation and my ability to grasp by hunch the key to non-apparent problems. I was to exercise my fine talent—which had, after all, been the first to alert the Bureau to the problem—to get in deeper and decipher the colonist's motives and purposes. You bet. It made a certain amount of sense, if you didn't ask yourself certain key questions, like *What more is there to find out?* and *How will this help contain the spread of these parasites?* and also, *Why aren't they acting against Bjonn* now? I had the distinct feeling that I was being neatly maneuvered, that I was a rather minor pawn in a much larger game. You can record it officially: I was less than pleased with my new assignment.

The girl was to be brought to Megayork; I was to ferry her back to the Church. I spent an hour in my office staring at the dreary Sound, and then went down to the office lounge. My time-scale was shattered by the intercontinental hops and I had another hop upcoming. I decided on a brief nap.

The dimly-lit lounge looked deserted when I went in. The odor of marijuana incense floated in the air, and I flopped on a couch and let my mind loose. I rarely use the lounge, despite the fact that everyone in the office is urged to take a break here at some point in his day. I've never liked the idea of artificial relaxation; I preferred to take my tensions home with me and sleep them off. Just now, however, it seemed like the easiest way to kill time.

"Say, hey there, Tad." It was Ditmas' lazy voice, still full of vitamins, from a couch on the far wall. I rolled my head and saw a vague shape sprawled out there.

"Didn't see you when I came in," I said, feeling a minor irritation at this intrusion on my mental privacy.

"I figured you didn't," he said.

I said nothing more. It was my profound hope that Ditmas would reciprocate.

"That guy from Farhome," he said, breaking the silence after what may or may not have been a long time. "Wasn't he your baby?"

"What about him?" I asked, tightening my fingers into fists.

"Just wondered, that's all."

"I was in charge of him," I admitted. "Why?"

"No real reason," he said. His voice was distant. "They're setting up the next run out to Farhome, and it just occurred to me he was your baby, that's all."

"What's that you said?" I asked, suddenly alert.

"It just occurred to me, you know, when I was thinking about it, that he was your man—the fellow from Farhome, I mean."

"Not that," I said, sitting up. I felt dizzy. "Before. What you said about a run to Farhome."

"What about it?"

"*What* run to Farhome?" I demanded. I felt like screaming. "There's no return expedition planned for another year, yet."

"They changed it," he said, dreamily. "They changed it around."

"How do *you* know?"

"Gave me the assignment," he said. "I'm going out with them. How about that, huh? Next time I see you, you'll be a lot older, ol' Tad."

Ditmas was Level Eight. He didn't have a black mark in his files. No one had classified *him* "Unfit for space"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I MET THE GIRL at the terminal. She was accompanied by a grizzled-looking woman who spoke in an incongruously sweet voice as she said goodbye to Lora. Lora clasped the woman's hand for a moment, and it looked as if they'd become genuinely friendly. I wondered how she'd receive me. I made a small noise in my throat to signal my presence.

She turned confidently, and said, "Hello again, Mr. Dameron."

"Hello," I replied, feeling a little awkward. "I know it's not part of the schedule, but I wonder if you'd mind sharing the last leg of your trip with me?"

"Back to the Church, you mean?" Calm, very calm. Her escort had already vanished into the crowd. She knew her business, that one did.

"That's right."

"Why? Why should you want to come back with me?"

"I guess it's, well—" I did a figurative toe-scuffle in the non-existent dust—"I guess I just feel responsible for you. I mean, for grabbing you like that, and all."

"They didn't hurt me, you know. They didn't take me apart and string me out over their laboratory."

"I know. I mean, I knew they wouldn't really do that. I was trying to scare you."

"Why?"

"It seemed to be what was called for—then, I mean." She wasn't making it any easier for me.

"Now you regret it?" she asked.

"It was my job." I shrugged my shoulders, unhappily. "Where does it say I have to like my job?"

Her eyes seemed to pierce mine, and for a moment I felt she was looking directly into my mind. "I can see that," she said. "You *are* unhappy, aren't you?"

"Yes." No lie.

"What good do you think it would do to go back with me?"

"I—I've quit my job," I said, pitching my voice into an awkward impulsiveness. "I can't go on with it."

"You feel guilty? Is that it?"

I nodded gratefully. "Yes."

"You want to join the Church?"

I looked at the floor and made myself sheepish. "I . . . don't know. I mean, *eating* . . ."

"It still bothers you? That much?"

"It's not something I can accept overnight."

"But you want to?"

I couldn't meet her eyes. "I've got to see. I've got to find out."

"Whether you can go through with it, you mean?"

"Yes. That's it."

She reached out her hand and touched my wrist. The significance of that gesture was not lost on me. "All right," she said.

It was a strange sort of conversation; it reminded me of sessions spent with shrinks. I kept my guard up, since it had occurred to me the girl might be looking for flaws in my story. But at the same time I felt a need to talk to her. It had been a long time since I'd been with someone I knew I could talk with—since Dian, in fact. My need to talk didn't sit too well with my fear of becoming trapped in an inadvertant lie; I was pretty uncomfortable, all through the trip.

We talked about what had happened to Lora; I'd wondered how she felt about it. "What must happen will happen," she said, philosophically. "We all play the roles assigned us."

"Yeah?" I wondered. "Did Bjonn assign you that role?" I was wondering if she'd been planted there, waiting for me to leave the house and find her. Had I been goaded into nabbing her? Or had Bjonn—warned by Dian's knowledge of the Bureau—simply guessed I would take someone, and made her handy?

"No one *gave* me the role," she said, smiling a little. "It simply became mine by necessity."

I shook my head. "Tell me something I can understand," I said. "That sounds like dogma of some sort." Actually, it sounded a lot like something Veronica had told me: *We all perform; life is just one continuous show.*

"You have to come to terms with yourself," Lora said, a little enigmatically. "You'll see."

"You think I will?" I wondered that myself, half fearfully, half hopefully. I was starting to believe my own phony role.

"You need to," she said. "You're groping. I can *feel* it in you. But you're—you're fighting it."

I changed the subject. "How'd a lawyer like you ever get hooked into that Church?" I asked.

She laughed. "It *is* absurd, isn't it? I was a serious young lawyer, you know. My specialty was Tax Credit Deductions for members of The Guild of Plastic Artisans. I spent five years, buried in printouts from the files of the tax courts of Bay Complex, and came out of it with what I thought was a permanent squint, a positive aversion to sunshine, and a specialty that would serve exactly two hundred and thirty-seven men within my licensed area." She shook her head and wrinkled her nose. "What a ninny! However, it just happened that one of my clients was the son of old Dr. Benford, and when his father donated his house to the Church, Jim Benford—my client—decided I should handle the tax-credit declaration. So I met the old man, talked to him, and decided that if the Church was responsible for the way he glowed with good health, then just maybe it could do something for me. Which it did—including a free trip to Lima!"

"You were waiting for me, though, weren't you?" I said.

"No. It was all your idea, Mr. Dameron. You can't shift responsibility to someone else."

"I was upset," I said. "Bjonn was pretty nasty."

"I don't believe that." She put her hand on my arm to forestall my interruption.

"That's just the way it seemed to you, that's all. You *were* very upset. I gather, from what I've heard, that you were involved with Bjonn, and with Dian too, earlier. I can understand the emotional undertones which must have been involved. But when you came storming out of the house, I had no idea you were there, or who you were even. Nobody *put* me there just for you to find."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry. I'm not. I was worried, but I needn't have been. They were very nice to me; they didn't hurt me at all. Oh, I see! You still feel guilty about it—about what happened to me. Don't you?"

I massaged my temples with my fingers. "I guess I do," I said. "You were pretty cool to me when I approached you, back there in Megayork."

"I was unsure of you."

"You aren't now?" I held my breath unconsciously.

"No," she smiled. "I know what you are, now."

I wondered how she meant that.

Another rented car took us on the final leg. It was dusk when Lora gestured at the glowing windows of the house on the hill, and I pulled off the opposite side of the road and parked. Two other cars were parked ahead of mine this time.

We climbed the path, our way lit by tiny glowing lamps, like fireflies frozen in stasis. It had a strangely magical effect, as if by climbing this crooked path we were leaving behind the mundane world and entering a new world of seclusion and mystical contemplation. *Complete rot,* I kept thinking, and yet the feeling haunted me. The autumn night was growing chill, and we'd shivered a little when we'd crawled out of the cocoon of the car, but up here where the winds should be pushing the damp cold even more readily through our scant clothes the air was quiet, scented with summertime, and if it weren't for the throb of fear I felt in anticipation I might have become completely a part of the other-worldly atmosphere.

The door was an open invitation, the interior of the house warm and beckoning. I followed Lora hesitantly, dreading the confrontation that must come.

Perhaps twenty people—all ages, both sexes—were sprawled in robes upon the cushions of the church-like room where I'd met Bjonn and Dian before. But neither Bjonn nor Dian was there now.

A stocky young man with short curly blond hair rose from a cushion near the door, and extended his hands to Lora, smiling all the while. They said nothing that I could hear, but embraced, almost passionately. I turned away from them and let my eyes wander slowly around the room while I waited for the prolonged greeting to end.

As my eyes crossed glances with others, seated about the room, they seemed to look up at me and then nod a silent greeting. But no one else rose; no one else said anything at all. I turned back to Lora and the young man to find them engaged in a long, mutual oral kiss. I felt the heat of the blood which rushed to my face, and turned away once more.

"*Tad.*"

The voice was very low, very soft, but it startled me as much as would have a tap on my shoulder.

"Dian!"

She had come up from behind me. Now she reached out to tug at my arm with one hand, a raised finger to her lips. Still gesturing for silence, she led me out of the big room and down a long hall. My last glance back at the doorway of that room showed me Lora and the other still locked in each other's arms.

Dian led me into a small room that had once served a previous owner as a study; most of its old furnishings still remained. She seated me in a comfortable chair and took another. "They're in meditation," she said, nodding back the way we'd come. "It's best not to disturb them."

I shrugged.

"I'm surprised to see you here again, Tad," Dian said. In the soft light she seemed to glow, almost as if from within. "Did you wish to see Bjonn again?"

"I suppose so," I said. "But that's not why I came back."

"Why did you come back, then?"

I leaned forward. "I quit my job," I said.

"They sent you here?" she asked.

"No, no, I quit the job," I repeated. "The Bureau. I walked out. Like you did." I shrugged again. "Well, less dramatically."

"Did you?"

"Don't you believe me?" I worked hard to get a throb of honesty into my voice. *Infiltrate the Church—sure! Easy as—what? Breaking a leg?*

"I'm not sure I do, Tad," Dian said. Her voice seemed less controlled, a little less certain. "Why should you quit the Bureau? It was your whole life, wasn't it? The Bureau—and space?"

I screwed my face up into a grimace of sorts. "Yeah, but if you know that much, you know the rest."

"They wouldn't let you into space," she said, nodding. "And finally . . . you gave up?"

"Things have changed since you left, Dian," I said. "You don't know how Tucker chewed me out about your disappearance. He's still burned about it."

She sighed. "I can imagine. Poor Arthur. It must have been a blow . . ." She stared past me, her eyes distant, reflective.

"Well, anyway, there was a lot of friction," I said. "I could have stayed on—hell, I could've held out to retirement—but it would have been bad, every single day of it." (One corner of my mind spoke up about then: *And you think you're making this up?* It sure wasn't much to look forward to.) "So I quit."

"Why did you come here, Tad?"

I stared at her. "You know that," I said.

She dropped her eyes and I thought I saw her blush. It might have been the lighting. "Will you join the Church, Tad?" she asked, low-voiced.

"I—don't know," I said. "You know why."

"The ritual," she said. "You're afraid to eat with us."

I nodded.

"There's no way to avoid it, you know," she said. "Not if you want to join us."

"I *know*," I said. "But—well, could I just hang around for a while? You know, just to kind of get used to the idea a little more?"

"Perhaps you should not try so hard, Tad," she said. "We don't ask people to overcome basic objections to our ritual; not when they are as strong as yours. Perhaps you should try something else, somewhere else."

"Don't you even *want* me to join you?" I asked.

She gave me a grave smile. "Of course I do, Tad. But some things don't happen just because I'd like them to. I wanted you to join us a long time ago. Do you remember that?"

I did. "I couldn't help that—my reaction, I mean," I said. I didn't even like to think about it.

"Just so," she said, nodding.

"But maybe if I, you know, hung around for a while, I could, umm, overcome my reactions some. I've been fighting it you know. I *have* thought about it."

She sighed. "I can't throw you out," she said. "I don't know what to do."

"Ask Bjonn," I suggested.

"I can't. He's not here just now."

"Oh." If he wasn't here—could they hold their Sacrament of Life without him? "Will he be back soon? Could I wait?"

She nodded, slowly. "He'll be back in two days," she said. "I'll have a room made up for you."

My room was on the third floor, up under slanting eaves, with an unpolarized dormer window that looked out upon a starry night. Down the hall was a curious little room which Dian pointed out to me on our way to my room. Inside was an anachronistic old evacuation unit, a bowl with faucets for running water, and, a more recent addition, a 'fresher cubicle. It was a curious mixture of inappropriate appliances. I experimented with it after Dian had left me in my room, sneaking almost guiltily down the hall, and carefully locking the door against intrusion. (Dian had said meditation would continue for another two hours, leaving me with very little to do during that time, so I wasn't really worried about someone walking in on me. I'd asked about the meditation, too—since it really didn't fit with what I knew to be the facts about this alien-parasite cult. She'd told me only that it was a necessary emotional-cleansing process for new recruits.)

I found myself unable to use the evacuation unit, since I had no food tube with which to replenish myself, and my body had been well-trained never to relinquish what it could not replace. That reminded me: there were no eating cubicles here. *Just what was I supposed to live on?*

But I used the 'fresher to good advantage, ran the water in the bowl over my hands just to enjoy the sensation of openly running water, and went back to my room, falling asleep on top of my bed, fully clothed.

I had strange dreams, and in my dreams I found myself constantly arguing with or fighting a strange female whose identity I could not fathom. At times it seemed she was my mother, but then again she seemed to be manipulating me as Veronica had, while yet again she was perhaps Lora, or Dian. When I saw her face, it was a face I'd never seen before. My final and most lasting memory was that she had drugged me in some way and was dancing about me, unwinding a bolt of cloth in her hands and wrapping it around me. It kept growing tighter and more constricting, and I was struggling against it, sweating, and—

Something—I didn't know what it was at first—woke me up. My clothes were twisted around my body and were tight and uncomfortable. My face felt sweaty and greasy. My feet were very hot in their bootlets.

Then I heard a board in the hall creak, and I realized I'd heard a similar sound before—that it had been what awakened me. The door rattled as someone turned its knob, and then it swung open, the light from the hall silhouetting a slender body in half-transparent robes.

I sat up as she came into the room. I reached out and fumbled and found the old light-switch.

"Hello, Mr. Dameron," It was Lora, and she was carrying a covered bowl of some sort.

"Uhhh, hello," I said. "Must have dozed off, I guess."

"Did I startle you?"

"No. That's all right, you didn't wake me up." Well, not precisely. "I didn't intend to *fall asleep*," I added.

She nodded, very seriously, and sat down at the foot of the bed. "I brought you something," she said. "It occurred to me that since you don't—wouldn't—umm, eat with us, that, well . . ." She flushed. "Maybe it would be easier for you here."

I stared at her with surprised gratitude. I'd been wondering how I'd be able to eat—and she'd brought some food up to my room. "Thank you, Lora," I said. "That was very nice, very thoughtful of you. I *am* hungry . . ."

"It's mine," she said earnestly. "I wanted to do it."

I didn't understand her. Not yet. "I'll take it down the hall," I said, intending to create an impromptu eating cubicle out of the little room with the appliances.

"I'd rather you did it here," she said. Then she uncovered the bowl.

She thrust the bowl at me and I took it automatically, my fingers closing over it before I'd even noticed the smell, like dry earth and musty, or my eyes had registered the obvious fact that this was no bowl of algae gruel, soup, or stew.

Then I looked at it. Then I saw it.

It was alive.

Dead-white in color, amorphous in shape, jelly-like, moving, pseudopods forming and dissolving in it. Fetid-smelling. *Warm.*

I dropped it. The dish fell to the floor and the—*thing*—flopped from it, squirming. "Oh my God, my God!" I said, leaping to my feet in shock and horror. "Oh sweet God!" I brought my bootheel down hard on the squiggling thing and felt it *squish* slimily underfoot.

"*Oh, no! Oh, stop!*" the girl cried. "*Oh, don't—please don't!*"

She threw herself on me, sinking to her knees, her arms tightening on my legs as I stomped the alien parasite, shock still erupting in my stomach, bile thick in my throat.

"Get off me!" I shouted at her as I ground the white slime into a paste on the floor, still kicking at it. I grabbed a bunch of her hair in my hand and yanked her head back. "Get away from me!" I screamed, tears running down my cheeks.

"*Killer!*" she was crying, "*murderer!*" She was hysterical.

I kicked her in the face, and she fell away from me with a low moan.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I'D BLOWN IT.

In one moment of blind panic, I'd thrown out all my chances for infiltrating the damned church.

I stared at the girl, lying on the floor, her hair loose in the drying chalky film that had been the parasite, blood trickling from her nose. Yeah, and I'd blown it on the parasite, too—on my chances for taking out a live parasite, free of its host. My pulse hammered in my head, and I had trouble seeing clearly. I'd blown it and all that mattered now was to get out.

I went to the door and peered out. I didn't see anyone. If nobody had heard us, me stomping on the floor and Lora screaming at me, if nobody was curious enough to check us out, maybe—just maybe—I had a chance.

I wondered if they might know when a parasite was killed. Hell, I didn't know anything about the damned creatures—just that they extended their own nervous system through the body. Were they telepathic? Did they stay in communication directly? Or was it all through the host-creatures? It seemed important to me, right then, to know. It would give me some idea of the odds on my escape.

I tiptoed down the old hall, keeping to the side, where the boards seemed to creak less. Then it was the stairs. This top flight was narrow and walled in and turned corners. The lower flight was wide, bannistered, and straight. I made both of them and was in the main hallway before I had my first encounter.

It was the blond guy who'd greeted Lora so passionately. He came out of the meditation room just as I was abreast of the door—we almost collided.

"Oh, hello there. You're the new fellow, right?" He thrust out his hand. "I'm Jim Benford."

I didn't want to take his hand. I didn't want to touch him. In the half-light of the hallway his posture, his expression, even his words seemed tilted and odd—*alien*. Somewhere inside this man a white blob the size of my fist had anchored itself, spreading ganglion-thin pseudopods throughout his body. I might even be touching the ends of several such nerve-like white threads if I shook his hand. My mind recoiled.

But I did it. I took his hand, giving it only the most minimal quick squeeze. I nodded, and told him my name.

"Stepping out for some air? It's lovely out on nights like this—so crisp-smelling, you know," he said. He gave me a shrewd look. Had Lora told him what she planned?

"Umm, yes," I said. "I have, umm, a decision to make."

It was the right response. He gave me a nod. "I know it can't be easy for you, Tad. But I want you to know, we're all pulling for you." Behind that transparent sincerity lurked—what?

I mumbled a few appropriate words and pushed out the front door.

The air was chill. "Crisp" has to be a euphemism. A wind had come up, and it cut right through my thin clothing. The night had a rawness.

The panic had ebbed a little. The necessary caution involved in making my escape had thrust it back, and my chance encounter—or was it chance?—with Benford had demanded a veneer of apparent calm. Playing that role had forced me into a calmer state. But the chill air, and the shivers it produced, soon had me agitated again. Halfway down the path I glanced back up at the house. I couldn't see "my" window from this side; most of the others were dark. I wondered if everyone was asleep—and how long it would take to spread the alarm among them. By the time I hit the bottom of the hill, I was running.

I started the car and then glanced up through the transparent bubbletop—now completely unpolarized in the absence of sunlight—to see three lights suddenly wink on from the second floor of the house. It seemed to me for a moment that their light was like the beams of searchlights, probing for me in the outside darkness. I felt a moment of *deja vu*, and the panic came back, hard. I swung the car around on the empty highway in a tight arc that brought screams from the tires, and accelerated the vehicle like a manned projectile into the night.

The darkness enclosed me on all sides, the wide beam of my driving lights a bar of light that shone down a narrow rectangular tunnel through which I raced. A red light began flashing on my dash, and a buzzer sounded. The car leapt and bounded like an earthbound missile, struggling to become airborne. I kept my foot flat on the go-pedal until the red light remained steady and the buzzer was a constant keening sound in my ears. I flicked my eyes from the road ahead to the rear-view screen for only split seconds—it was all I could do to keep the car on the obsolescent highway. But I saw no pursuing lights behind me.

Then I was in Cloverdale, its dimmed lights and sleeping buildings passing in a clangorous jangle. I had to slow as I went into the curve at the south end of town, and at that I'm sure I left long black ribbons of rubber on the wrong side of the road behind me.

When I got up the entrance-ramp and onto the automatic highway, the car slowed

itself to half its former speed, the red light on the dash vanishing, the shrill buzzing silenced. I'd done all the running I could Now all I could do was wait.

It was 02:40 when I turned the car in at Santa Rosa, but Bay Complex was as alive as it would be twelve or sixteen hours later. I found an infomat and placed a direct call to Tucker, in Oldtown Chicago. I wasn't surprised when he came on looking fully awake and functional.

I had to explain my flight from Cloverdale, and the reasons for my call, and it was difficult to put into words the feelings I'd had, the premonitions and the intuitions. I had to justify the fact that, after less than twelve hours among the aliens, I had left them. I did not go into details about what I'd done; I simply described the parasite and let it go at that.

Tucker sighed, spoke a few mild expletives, and told me to get a room in a local hostelry. Call in my whereabouts to the local Bay Complex office, and he'd have a man out to see me the next afternoon. He seemed calmer than I'd seen him before; the sarcasm was missing, and with it his drawl. He acted almost human.

I found myself a room in a quiet hotel in San Rafael, called in to the local office, and went to sleep. It wasn't easy getting to sleep—I had to resort to ten minutes of public-channel 3-D for a soporific—and when I did, I had long sequences of disturbing dreams each of which culminated in nightmares which jerked me awake, usually in an upright, sitting position, my heart racing as if I'd just run the two-minute mile.

I don't remember the earlier dreams—only that I had them—but the final dream was quite enough for me. It concerned me as a small child, back when I still lived with my real parents. I recognized my mother immediately, but the man who was my father remained caught in the shadows until I followed him, deliberately tagging along after him, to where he could no longer hide his face.

It was Tucker's face.

I screamed when I saw who he was, and the knife-edge of fear sliced through my heart, because I knew, suddenly and certainly, that this was a secret I was not meant to know. Tucker turned and looked at me and his eyes were glowing, rays of light streaming from them, pinpointing me, paralyzing me, holding me.

I wanted to run. I was only a frightened boy and I wanted to run away. But he wouldn't let me. His gaze pinned me down and while fear climbed into my throat and choked my breath, he *smiled* at me. It was a terrible, knowing smile, inhuman—*alien.*

Then he opened his mouth, reached up his hand, bent forward as if to regurgitate into it, and then stood up again, impossibly tall, towering over me.

He held his hand down to me.

In it was a pulsing, living object of translucent white jelly.

It formed a mouth and smiled at me.

I woke up to find myself sitting up in the middle of the bed, my heart pounding and my face streaked with running sweat. The images were still fresh in my mind, the sense of shock still immediate. I thumbed on the light and staggered over to the fresher. My mind was confused; I could not distinguish fully between what had really happened and what I had only dreamed. I knew I'd been offered one of those alien slugs—and it seemed at that moment as likely true that it had been offered me by Tucker as that it might have come from Lora.

Why?

I stepped from the 'fresher into the eating cubicle—the reverse of my more usual procedure—and after I had restoked my body I found myself better able to think again.

Item: dreams are commonly understood as a man's attempt to deal with the emotionally unacceptable—or, alternatively, to understand something which he has not yet fully admitted to himself.

Item: I am gifted with a remarkable sense of intuition. Intuition is simply another word for deep-consciousness reasoning powers—for the ability to encompass a wide variety of data and process it unconsciously, receiving the results of that processing as a "hunch" or a "feeling" without conscious reasoning to back it up. I always play my hunches and I'm rarely wrong.

Item: my intuitive powers sometimes work best when my conscious mind is laid low by shock, fatigue, or the like. As it had been, the night before.

Conclusion: I'd observed more than I'd realized. My deep-consciousness was doing its best to push an emergency response up to where I'd notice it and act upon it. And just what *was* it I'd noticed?

Tucker had been taken over by the aliens.

I had to think of them as "aliens" now—not simply as human hosts to alien parasites. Too unwieldy, that notion. Their behavior was alien, their goals alien. Forget what they *had* been—*a flash of Dian perched on my office console, swinging one leg*—they were *aliens* now. Inhuman, presumably hostile, and increasingly dangerous.

I'd sensed this all along. Or, more properly put, my deep-consciousness 'computer' mind had noticed this quality of *alienness* all along, and had started ringing bells to bring it to my attention as soon as it could.

It was as I'd first told Dian: I'd recognized a quality in Bjonn—a defining quality in all the aliens—which distinguished them from normal humans. A sort of too-intense quality, a behavior which seemed a little out of kilter, responses which didn't seem to quite fit the situations. Their gaze was too direct, too obviously in violation of one's privacy. They spoke too directly, as well—while at the same time usually evading the very questions one asked. Lora—I'd almost come to think of her as human again, on that trip back. She'd made it easy for me to talk to her, or to *want* to talk to her. But—she'd been the one, come at last to seduce me with her alien offering. It made me snort a little at my own naivete: she'd made me want to talk to her, indeed! She'd probably all but plied me into confessing everything. Who knew what alien mentality directed her now? Who knew what roles she was being manipulated through in order to charm and disarm me?

And now Tucker.

I'd seen it the night before, when I'd spoken to him. The unreasonable calm. The wakefulness at an hour when he, of all people, would be sleeping. The direct gaze. (The infomat diluted the intensity of that direct gaze, but it had been enough to perturb me, somewhere deep.) All the signs. But I hadn't been looking for them then; I'd had no idea they'd reached *Tucker*. It had been there, before my eyes, and I had not understood it; not then.

But now I did. And cursed myself. I was a fool.

There was a tap on my door.

I glanced at my chronometer: 13:30, local time. Afternoon. (The room had no windows; the day, therefore, was arbitrary in its divisions. My timepiece said afternoon, so it was afternoon. Had it for some reason stopped hours earlier, I would

have found it to be morning.)

A man from the Bureau, then.

I slid back the door and found myself staring into Ditmas' smiling face.

"Hiyuh, Tad," he said.

"What are *you* doing here?"

"They sent me out to see you—to debrief you."

I waved him in and closed the door. "I was expecting a local," I said.

"Sure, I know. I think they figured it would be better to send somebody you knew—know what I mean?" He settled himself on my bed.

"Why here?" I probed. "Why not down at the office?"

"Hmmm?" he looked up as if he hadn't heard me. "Why what?"

"Why debrief me here? Do you have a *recordomat*?"

He shrugged. "You can just tell me," he said. "We'll get the prelims down later."

"No good," I said, shaking my head. I stalked around until I was directly in front of him, looking down at him. Deliberately, I looked him in the eye.

He stood up, suddenly decreasing the distance between us. I think he expected me to step back. I didn't. We were uncomfortably close.

"What's gutting you, Tad?" he asked. His tone was deceptively quiet, deceitfully pleasant. It might've worked, had I not already looked into his eyes and seen the truth.

"You," I said, matching his tone with my own forced calm. No warnings. "You, Ditmas." Then I hit him.

This time there was no panic involved. This time I knew exactly what I was doing.

I was dealing with an alien. That had been a foregone conclusion: Tucker had set me up. I knew too much. If they'd reached Tucker, they'd be all through our Bureau by now, and it was a cinch they'd have the local office.

Ditmas had been a surprise, though. I hadn't been expecting him, and he threw me off for the first few moments—no doubt as they'd expected. *Ol' buddy Ditmas. Pleasant surprise.* Sure.

My fingers were stiff and straight, thumb in, wrist straight, fingertip to elbow one smooth line, as I drove my hand into his upper belly, just under his left rib-cage. The nail on my middle finger caught in the fabric of his blouse, and later I found the nail was ripped and torn and it hurt some. Just then he was jackknifing over, his face meeting my updriven knee, the cartilage of his nose smashing into his skull. Something—maybe his jaw or chin—struck the nerve on my knee and strummed it like a hot wire. But I followed through with my other hand: a swift finishing chop on the back of his neck. When I stepped back, he crumpled lifelessly to the floor.

I learned to fight in the den. There were twenty-seven of us, ranging in age from five to twelve. I was not yet seven, and small for my age. I learned that in my position a kid had two choices: accept the beatings and squeal a little to make the older kids happy, a self-perpetuating sort of misery which one or two of the other kids almost seemed to enjoy—or make it a point to get back at my tormentors so that they'd learn to leave me alone. I opted for the second choice. One of the eleven-year-olds picked a fight with me the first night I was there, while I was lying on a bunk over two other young kids and crying to myself. He grabbed one of my legs and before I had any idea what was happening the floor came up and hit my face. My nose bled and I dripped all over the floor and myself, all the while crying, while the sadistic eleven-year-old worked me over. He was fat, had pimples, and seemed to think it was important to impress

upon me the pecking order of the den. The way he saw it, I was bottom man on the list.

I cried myself to sleep that night, and my bunk was filthy with the dried brown stains of my nosebleed the next morning. But I waited for my chances, and caught the fat kid in the 'fresher the next afternoon, after calisthenics. I jammed the catch on the door from the outside with my shirt, which I'd taken off for that purpose, and I opened the maintenance locker and changed the setting on the 'fresher controls. I damn near burned that kid alive in flesh-dissolving enzymes, and when I let him out he was missing not only the largest portion of his epidermis—his dermis very shiny and pink—but most of his arrogance towards me. Just to impress the fact on him, I tripped him—an easy task, since he still had his eyes screwed shut—and had the pleasure of watching him smash his own face against the tiled floor.

After that I didn't have too many fights to worry about. Occasionally we'd get a new kid, and if he was older or bigger, he usually felt he had to beat up on someone with a reputation in order to establish his own. Mostly he'd pick me, and usually he'd lose. I was a pragmatic kid and I'd learned in a few easy steps that it wasn't how you played the game: what counted was winning. Don't get me wrong: I wasn't a bully. I was a loner. I let the others alone and all I asked was to be let alone in turn. Since I had to earn this right the hard way, I'd learned the proper methods. And I'd never forgotten them.

I stared down at the still figure of Ditmas on the hotel room floor. I hadn't meant to kill him. I hadn't realized my own strength.

The last time I'd hit someone else was better than seventeen years ago. I'd still been a kid, then, fighting to keep my own against a bigger kid. I had not raised my hand against a single person since.

It wasn't the same. I'd reacted as I had years before, but with the power—the muscles and the frame—of a grown man and not a half-grown boy. I'd had sixty pounds additional weight behind my blows, and, truthfully, any one of them might have been enough in itself. Driven deeply enough, and at the right upward angle, a single thrust of the hand under a man's rib cage can rupture his heart. The splintering of a man's nose, if the blow carries bone and cartilage back into his skull, can penetrate his brain. And a precisely-placed blow to the nape of the neck can break it. Any one or all: the result was the same. Ditmas wasn't breathing any more.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I STARED DOWN at the man's body and knew real fear.

This time you've crossed the line, Dameron, a voice inside my head told me. *This is murder.*

I stared down at the man's body. Somewhere within it lurked a white jellied lump of protoplasm, its ganglioid pseudopods shrivelling at this very moment.

Ditmas was an alien. It wasn't murder; Ditmas was an alien.

Sure, fellow. But he *looks* like a human named Ditmas who worked for the Bureau of Non-Terran Affairs, and you can bet that's the way the police will look at it.

I thought about cutting him open, looking for the parasite. I didn't have the nerve.

I was shaking. I stared down at the man's body and I couldn't see it clearly and then my knees began to buckle. I made it to the bed, sat down on its edge, and then threw up. On Ditmas.

I killed him. What can I do now?

I stared down at the man's body, and I shook with fear.

My body rebelling, I stripped the alien of his identification as Ditmas. I was nearly sick twice more as I moved him about, turned him over, and breathed in the stench of my own vomit and the discharge from his bowels. Once as I shifted him his jaw sagged open and I thought I saw something white in the back of his mouth. I let him fall back as he'd lain before, his face to the floor.

I'd had time to think a little, to turn over the possibilities in my mind. Hotel rooms are cleaned only when the room is unoccupied. If I left the body here, it would register as occupied. Therefore, no cleaners. And possibly no discovery of the body for days.

That might give me some time. I'd need it.

I used Ditmas' credit card when I took the tube to Oakland. I used Ditmas' card when I took the HST to Hawaii to the shuttleport. And I used Ditmas' card and Bureau Clearance for the hop up to the Moon.

I'd put a few of the pieces together, you see.

Ditmas had already told me he was going out with the next expedition on the *Longhaul II*. And that it was leaving soon. That meant he'd be expected on the Moon, and that clearance for the trip up was prearranged. What simpler, then, than for me to take his place?

Farhome.

Everything pointed back to Farhome. The aliens came from Farhome. I had to go there. Farhome was where the answers lay.

Simmons wasn't there this time. My identification as Ditmas took me through Bio-Customs without delay, however. Then I was on my own. On the Moon.

Did I say Lunaport was small? It had always seemed that way to me: small, cramped, almost provincial. Man's major outpost on the Moon. But Lunaport exists in three dimensions, like some of those new cities they're carving out of nowhere in Africa. Conceived as a cube, rather than a flat map, Lunaport exists almost entirely beneath the lunar surface, twenty levels deep. That doesn't mean much when you stack it against the average city building, Earthside, fifty to a hundred stories high. But Lunaport is a *cube*— more or less; I doubt its perimeters are that geometrically precise—and there are no open avenues, no parkstrips, malls, or canyon-like streets. It's packed, densely, with little cubicle-like rooms, narrow institutional corridors, and box-like lifts. It's twenty small cities packed on top of each other.

And me without a native guide.

Fortunately, I didn't have to go blundering into the heart of the city. I was on the surface-level, just below the actual lunar surface, somewhere immediately under the Earth-shuttle landing area. Not too far off would be the interplanetary field, and the *Longhaul II*. I tried to remember the way Simmons had taken me, and how we'd escorted Bjonn from there to here. The day I'd met Bjonn seemed long ago and far away; my memories were flat and sepia-tinted and hard to believe. Had it been only a few months?

I must have shown my indecision. A girl in Bio-Customs uniform stopped and gave me a curious look. "Can I be of help?" she asked. Her smile was warm and concerned.

I gave her a tired smile in reply. I really *was* tired; I hadn't been able to sleep on the hop up. "I want to get over to the *Longhaul II*, I said. I've been assigned . . ."

"Oh yes," she nodded, "you'll be Mr. Ditmas."

I agreed.

"I'll take you over," she said. "It's not far

away, but for newcomers it *is* complicated to explain."

"Thanks," I said. "That's very nice of you."

She gave me another smile, her eyes leveling with my own. "I'm glad to," she said. I was too tired to care.

It wasn't far. I vaguely remembered the way, once she had me firmly in hand and led me there. Memories of the sort which pop back up the instant after they're no longer needed; useless for anything but confirmation. I was running on reserve energy, and it felt like I didn't have much left.

We skipped the room where I'd met Bjonn, took a different corridor at that point, and then went through a curious double chamber. Then we were in the interstellar ship.

The knowledge hit me with a jolt of adrenalin.

"This is the ship, isn't it?" I asked. It wasn't exactly a stupid question. The corridor we were now in was of about the same dimensions, its walls plastic instead of tiled, the floor underfoot no different to tread upon—but the *smell* was different in a subtle way. The air no longer had that almost antiseptic, vaguely ozoned odor. It smelled of men and machines and yes, even plants. And I knew, because space had always been my dream and I'd studied the published plans for this ship just as I'd hero-worshipped its captain, I knew that this ship carried a mixed crew of fifty-eight, a hydroponics section wherein algae were grown and supplementary oxygen generated, as well as the life-support machinery for the entire globe of the ship. Right now the *Longhaul II* was resting in its cradle, the cradle lowered below the lunar surface, its exit port (or ports; there were others on other levels and other quadrants) aligned with and sealed to the life-system and corridors of Lunaport. I'd expected something more, though, the first time I stepped aboard an interstellar ship. A subtle throb in the decks under my feet, I suppose, and the patina of journeys between the stars. It was, somehow, mundane—anticlimactic.

"That's right," my guide said. "I'll show you to your quarters, and then I'm sure the captain will want you to report to him."

"That's it?" I asked. "No more red tape? No additional Bio-Customs check? I'm *here*?" It was at once both more and less real than I'd imagined.

"You just checked through Bio-Customs, didn't you?" she said with a brief laugh. "And I brought you directly here. What more could there be?"

It all seems too easy, was my unspoken thought.

"Here," I said, echoing her. "Which deck are we on?"

She pointed at an inconspicuous letter on the wall of the intersection we'd just reached. A tightly coiled stair led both upwards and below. "This is E Level," she said, confirming the point she'd made visually. "Your quarters are up two levels, on C. You'll find the Captain on A Level, I believe."

I followed her up two levels. E Level is the business-level of the ship. The mysterious engines of the Feinberg Drive lurked somewhere beyond the unbreached walls of that featureless corridor. Below were the shops, gardens, and kitchens, as well as the small-craft docks and additional quarters. Above—

It was easy to follow my guide up the tight spiral of the stair—she was built to be followed up stairs. But you can climb sixteen feet in lunar gravity very quickly, even under such constraining and distracting circumstances. I wondered if the brief climb had put the slight flush in the

girl's cheeks.

She showed me to an empty cell with a number on its door. Inside was a double bunk, a mirror on one wall, a set of drawers under it, an audio-only ship's phone, and a prison-like sense of cramped confinement. I wondered if I could live for a period of weeks—hell, months—in that tiny room. I doubted it, even then.

She pointed out the phone. "You'd best call up—I don't know when the Captain was expecting you."

I threw my bag on the lower bunk and nodded. I didn't know either. "Thanks again," I said.

She gave me a wistful look that said she was open to an invitation to linger, but I was too tired to intercept it. I let her innocent green eyes gaze unblinkingly into mine for a moment, and then turned and picked up the phone. I heard her expelling her breath as I punched the code thoughtfully listed on the wall for Captain Lasher. When I turned around again, she was gone.

I was tempted to do a little exploring first. The memory of the plans I'd studied as a boy were sharp in my mind, the different colors that coded the different sections of the ship were as vivid now as they'd been those many years before when I'd translated them into one of many scale models.

But maps do not the territory make. My model was just that: a thing of plastics and thermal joints; *this* was the *Longhaul II*. As I went back out into the corridor again, I felt something of the old thrill seize me again.

I was walking the decks of an interstellar ship.

But I'd have time to do my exploring later. Right now I was up to see the Captain, to officially check in. For a fleeting moment while I'd spoken to him on the phone I'd wondered if he might remember me from that day when Simmons and I had been part of the reception committee. But there was no good reason for him to recall my face: I'd been one of a horde of greeters, lost among the men from the media. I'd never even spoken to him.

I swarmed up the stair to the A Level and found myself in a large, almost dark room. Directly overhead were stars; for a moment I had the heart-stopping fear that I had somehow blundered out onto the lunar surface. Foolish, of course; I was in the control room of the *Longhaul II*. The A Level was but a single vast room. Somewhere nine levels below was the torch of the Feinberg Drive, aimed at the Moon's core.

I glanced around. Consoles and recliners rimmed the gloom of the vast—or so it seemed, after my tiny bunkroom—room. The viewport overhead was immense, a transparent dome through which I could see not only the starry night above—incredibly rich blackness punctured by a million pinpoints of colored light—but also the distant rim of the lunar crater and beyond it, either just rising or just setting, Earth. A jewel in a treasured setting.

"Quite a sight," a dry voice commented from somewhere behind me; Captain Lasher's voice.

"It is," I said. My voice was hushed, involuntarily. This was *my* church. Reluctantly, I turned.

The glow of his console unit was a spot of light in the darkness of the deck, and I saw his figure silhouetted against it. He was leaning toward me from a recliner. I moved across the deck towards him almost like a man in a trance. I was lucky there was nothing in my path. Had there been, I would have stumbled over it. I was conscious with every step of the tapestry of space which hung so closely over my head—and also of the immediate

confrontation with Captain Lasher, my boyhood idol.

"Ditmas reporting, sir," I said, when I approached him.

His expression was hard to read in the dim light. The console's lights behind him seemed to cast a reddish halo around his head. He looked stern. "Ditmas, is it?" he said.

"Yessir," I said. "Bureau of Non-Terran Affairs." I expected something on the order of 'Glad to have you aboard, Ditmas,' from him. Instead:

"I think not, Mr. Dameron. I think this charade has played itself out."

My mouth went dry, and my tongue felt glued to my palate. "I, uhh, Dameron, sir?"

"Let's don't run a bluff, Dameron," Lasher said. "You have an old friend here." He gestured.

A shape peeled itself loose from a recliner I'd thought empty; it had been facing three-quarters away from me. It was still too dark for me to make the man out, but I recognized his voice, of course.

"Your journey to the stars is over now, Dameron," Bjonn said. "This is as far as you go."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IT WAS EASY to see in retrospect; I'd been blind to miss it.

Of course Bjonn had spread his parasites among the ship's crew. He'd had months in which to do it. Months in which to win them over, subtly, insidiously, starting with first just one of them, the weakest, most easily swayed among them. Possibly a woman. Then with the help of his first convert, another, and then others, pairs perhaps, and then larger groups. The ship was a microcosmic society. Once he had won over the important people, or perhaps just the bulk of the personnel, his battle was won. The rest was easy—perhaps even a matter of simple force. I wondered why I hadn't seen it.

And then Lunaport. When Bjonn came to Earth, he left behind fifty-eight men and women who were now controlled by the alien parasites. Lunaport too was a closed system, a somewhat larger microcosmic world from which there was no escape. Perhaps they started with the Bio-Customs Department. Their aid would be helpful, after all.

I looked back on the memory of the girl who had so efficiently guided me aboard the ship. They'd been expecting me. She was one of them. *Why hadn't I seen it then?*

Because I was tired, and the girl was too distractingly female. I'd misinterpreted her looks at me. *Where's that much-vaunted talent of yours now, Dameron?*

They took me into custody. Bjonn had a hand-weapon, a device which fired a chemical spray. I recognized it as part of the ship's stores. The chemical, he assured me, penetrated directly through the skin. It would paralyze my nerves. If it struck me in the wrong place, it might kill me. He pointed this out more in tones of regret than anger; he told me he hoped I would not cause him to use the weapon.

"So why threaten me with it?" I asked. "You've got me; isn't that enough?" He was marching me back to the cell-like cubicle in which I'd stowed my bag and briefly considered home.

"You're a dangerous psychopath, Dameron," he said. "You've already killed one man—yes, we know all about Ditmas—and we don't propose to let you try it again." He ushered me back into the bunkroom.

"You've got your way of looking at it," I said, the nervous, physical and emotional exhaustion all crowding into my voice,

"—I've got mine. Don't call me names, *alien.*"

He gave me a strange look and started to slide the door shut.

"Wait a minute," I said.

He paused, the weapon still directed at me through the half-closed door. "What is it?" he asked.

"What are you going to do with me?" I asked. I was wondering why they were putting me into this cell—*aboard the ship.* For a moment my heart leapt with wild surmise.

"We're taking you back to Earth," he said, dashing my last hopes.

I felt the exhaustion sweep over me. "I'm surprised you aren't disposing of me here," I said. "It would seem to serve your purposes better." *They weren't going to let me make the trip, after all. I wasn't going to see real space.*

"Your mind is an endless source of melodramatic claptrap," Bjonn said. He looked about fed up, probably with me. "We're holding you here until we can get clearance for a special shuttle back to Earth. Then we'll be taking you down. Is that all you wanted to know?" He began sliding the door panel shut again.

"A special shuttle?" I said. "You bastards must have worked your way all the way up to the top."

The door closed shut.

I passed the time in dreamless sleep. I slept for fourteen hours, by my chronometer. But I still felt drained and exhausted when they opened the door again and took me out. There were three men—Bjonn and two who were strangers to me. All carried the same weapons. All looked deeply annoyed, with me as the focus of their emotion. They answered my few questions in monosyllables, and I didn't pursue the topics I'd raised. Mostly I wanted to know what they were going to do to me, and mostly they said I would find out soon enough.

I had passed beyond fear to a kind of exhausted stoicism. I moved like a puppet in another's dream, going through the motions demanded of me. My curiosity remained, but it was a blunted emotion, rather like that of a bewildered child. The last time I'd felt that way was when they'd taken me away from my parents. This time I was dry-eyed, though—if that was any improvement.

I had been caught, well and fairly caught. I had penetrated to the core of their conspiracy, and now they had me. I wondered what they planned for me, but it was an abstracted, intellectual curiosity. There were only two things they could do to me now: they could kill me or take me over, turning my body into a host for one of their jelly-like parasites. Either way, *I* would be dead. It wouldn't matter much.

Oh, I'd thought brave and heroic thoughts, back in that cell before I'd fallen asleep in the midst of their jumble. I'd thought of somehow dramatically warning the world, or bursting into the Executive Session in Geneva to herald the parasites and the doom they brought—but it was all public 3-D nonsense, and a little beyond even that. Daydreams: thriller-stuff. It was all of a piece, I realized bitterly, with my dreams for a career in deep space—in the end it was only nonsense. I wasn't going to warn anyone, because, first, *they* wouldn't let me—and, second, pretty soon now there would probably not be anyone left to *warn.*

I'd done a little elementary math, and it frightened me.

One man brings one parasite. God only knows how fast the things multiply, but I could assume no less than one a day—Bjonn had given one to Dian one day, and two to her friends the next (although the second of

those might have been Dian's contribution—how fast did the pasty little slugs settle in before they started to breed again?). So work it out. One man the first day. Two the next. Four the next. Keep doubling. Do it every day for several months. The sum gets astronomical pretty fast. No wonder they'd gotten to Tucker. I wondered if anyone over his head was still human yet.

Oh, sure, there must be millions—even billions—they hadn't gotten to yet. People exist in pockets, and the recruitment program wasn't flawless. There had to be delays and snags. The whole world wasn't gone yet. Just the best part of it.

Heroics are for the 3-D. In real life I'd be lucky—unbelievably lucky—just to keep my own personality alive.

Simmons was there to see me off. He stared at me with alien and unwavering eyes, his face devoid of expression. I felt sorry for the son of a bitch. At least he'd been a prig before—when he'd been human. I felt real pity for him. Anything was better than this.

The shuttle was empty but for me and my captors. I suppose I should've felt honored. I didn't.

We took seats in the public lounge—no nonsense about the private berths this time. A shame; despite my lack of any real appetite, it had been a long time since I'd eaten.

"You're treating a plain old Level Seven Agent pretty special, aren't you?" I asked Bjonn. Mostly I was just jabbing away at the dark. I didn't expect to get much of a rise from him.

"Oh, you are special, Tad," he said somberly.

"Tell me about it," I suggested. *Talk to me, alien.*

"What made you think you could get away with it?" he said.

"With what?"

The gymballed seats swung gently from horizontal to vertical. I glanced at the narrow viewport. Soon now the Moon's arid surface would come into view. Just now there was nothing but lights and darkness, the lights swinging past in a blur.

"With this Farhome nonsense," he said. "Passing yourself off as Ditmas. How long did you plan to keep the impersonation going?"

"It wouldn't have mattered, once we were underway," I said. "They wouldn't have aborted the trip."

"I see," he nodded. "Ditmas—Farhome—it was all just an excuse."

"An excuse?" I echoed.

"To get into space. Into *real* space." He seemed to be sneering at me.

"I figured that maybe on Farhome . . ." I let my voice trail off.

"Yes? What? What did you expect to find on Farhome, Dameron?"

"Some answers," I mumbled.

"I didn't hear that." A vibration had started up in the shuttle rocket. I felt it more than I heard it.

"Answers," I said, more distinctly. "I was looking for answers."

"What were your questions, Dameron?" Bjonn asked, his voice relentlessly probing at me.

I turned my head away from him and stared out the viewport. I'd never watched during a liftoff. Now I could.

"I asked you," Bjonn repeated, "what were the questions you thought you'd find answers for, on Farhome?"

I ignored him. Beyond the port the distant ridge on the strangely close horizon was a sun-washed slate-gray. A black needle shadow pointed directly towards the ridge, its broad base disappearing beneath the

viewport. It divided the pocked lunar landscape neatly into two equal sections. As I watched, the ridge seemed to shift position, to fall back a little, and I realized that what I was actually seeing was the point of the black shadow racing across the flat moonscape towards the ridge. For a moment the shadow stood free and I could see it in its entirety: exaggeratedly long trunk, stubbed wings at nose and tail, stretched out but shrinking by the moment. The ridge dropped suddenly away, no longer anywhere close to the horizon, the shadow over it in one ripple and darting out of the sawtooth shadows of the ridge to race over the floor of the Moon as an ever-tinier splinter of darkness. Beyond, the Earth rose sharply in the deep blackness of the sky, and then disappeared above my vision. We passed over into the nightside of the Moon.

"You don't know, do you?" Bjonn said, breaking the silence. "You really don't know why you wanted to go to Farhome."

I tore my eyes away from the viewport. "I know," I said.

"Tell me."

"You're an alien," I said. "Your body is possessed by an alien slug, a parasite. It's taken over your nervous system. *You*—Bjonn, the human being—don't exist. The *you* I'm talking to is an alien creature—like everyone else aboard this shuttle. So tell me why I should tell you anything?" Did I have the creature just a little worried?

Looks passed between Bjonn and my other captors. I didn't attempt to translate them.

"You were going to Farhome, then, because that's where you figure it all started?" he asked.

"That's right," I said. Did he look relieved? What else was he afraid I might have thought of?

"Dameron," he said, "you're one of the most mentally unstable people I've ever met—and, believe me, I have met a few other extreme cases on Earth besides yours. Is your rampant paranoia so strong—are you so completely compulsive about space?—that rather than travel a few miles to ask your questions, you'd make a trip of many light-years? Do you realize that if you'd made that trip, the earliest you could have returned here would have been a matter of some thirty years? Did you expect events to stand still, to wait for you those thirty-odd years?"

Oddly enough, what flashed through my mind when he said that was an image of Dian—I could not imagine her thirty years older. "Is that your line?" I asked. "I'm a nut? Is that the way you plan to handle your opposition? Classify me mentally unstable—how very pat for you, and you're not even a licensed shrink—and have me put away somewhere, worked over chemically, electrically, and all the rest? Or will you simply force one of those slugs on me and lobotomize me that way?"

Bjonn gave me a patronizingly pitying look, and turned away. I was just as happy: it gave me a little more time to gaze out the viewport at space. I wouldn't have another opportunity; I wanted to make the most of this one.

Time passed, and yet more time. I stared out the viewport and saw nothing—a nothing that extended across the infinity of the known and unknown universe. Scattered like glitter across the black and empty nothing were tiny and incredibly distant stars, pumping their energy out into nothing; slowly, infinitesimally, inexorably running down. Entropy. Out of nothing: something. And out of something, a return to nothing. One day the universe would run down and stop. Well, at least I'd never see it. I'd starve first. Much sooner.

I complained to Bjonn, and his reply was typical of him. "You're the most compulsive man about food that I've ever met," he said. "If the world was populated with nothing but people who thought as you do, it would come to a quick end."

"It wouldn't become dominated by *your* types," I said, bitterly.

"Tad, do you honestly think that mankind always ate its food in the rigid, obsessive manner it does today? Or even that a man *should?*"

"Eating is a private and personal act," I said. "There's nothing more private and personal than eating."

"Not even elimination—umm, 'evacuation' I believe is your word?"

I felt the blood leaving my face and hands. "You have a filthy mouth," I said.

"Do I?" he replied. "I wish you'd think about that—about your choice of phrases."

I did. When the implications sank in, I decided I'd been even more appropriate in my choice of words than I'd first thought. I said as much.

Bjonn sighed. "You know," he said, after a pause, "I wonder if you realize that there is not one eating cubicle on all of Farhome. Had you thought of that?"

"No," I said. "How could I know?"

"You could have asked. You might even have inferred it, from what you knew of me."

"I should have realized," I said, only half seriously. "You aliens never eat."

He didn't see the joke. "You're a fool," Bjonn said. His face was flushed and he looked more angry than I'd ever seen him. "You've lived from infancy on a diet of tasteless, tube-fed pap. You've never left the teat. You connect yourself to an 'evacuation unit' and your entire alimentary tract is plugged-in, part of the circuit of an obscenely sterile machine. You're a product of conditioned reflexes, of compulsive habit-

patterns. No wonder you're so deeply neurotic! The wonder is that *everyone* isn't as sick as you are.

"You think yours is the only way! You have the audacity to suggest that if we don't eat as you do, that we must not eat at all. And that from you—from an algae-eater who has never tasted fresh-cooked meat, never chewed crisp raw vegetables, whose palate has never known flavor, never savored the delicacy and the vigor of real food, of anything but homogenized pap! Your food, Dameron—do you know what it is?" A vein throbbed on the side of his forehead. His eyes were burning with intensity. "Your precious food is grown in algae vats. And you know what nourishes those vats, Dameron? Your own feces—your own wastes. Sewage: that's what you eat, Dameron, and that's what you are—you're a closed circuit, *a sewer!*"

One of the others reached out a hand and touched Bjonn's arm. He said something too low for me to hear. Bjonn stopped himself, and I watched him brake to a shuddering halt. Slowly the violent color left his face, the vein receded. His expression softened. He laughed a weak laugh: a timid bark.

"Sorry, Dameron," he said. "You've just had a concrete demonstration. I'm as human as you are. It just takes me a little longer to get wound up." His voice shook a little.

"No," I said, shaking my head. "I don't think so. But it was a nice try. You almost had the part down cold."

His eyes, when he locked them on mine, were as gray and cold as a winter sky.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THERE WERE two men waiting for us when the shuttle landed. One was Tucker. *The other was—Ditmas.*

Both gazed at me as a scientist might at a misbehaving guinea pig: condescendingly, but with annoyance and concern.

I couldn't take my eyes off Ditmas. "You said I killed *him*," I breathed in an undertone at Bjonn. The alien from Farhome was standing closely at my side. "*You said he was dead.*"

"You *did* kill him, didn't you, Tad?" he replied.

"I *thought* I did."

Ditmas stepped forward. "Hello, Tad," he said. His voice seemed choked—I had the fleeting thought that this was not Ditmas at all, but a ringer brought in to confuse me, but in the next instant I knew, with chilling certainty, that the man was indeed Ditmas, whom I'd killed and left without ID in a San Rafael hotel room. His nose was pink and purple—pink where new flesh had somehow grown, and purple tinged with yellow-green where the bruises remained. Somehow he'd been brought back to life and carefully repaired.

"Ditmas is another little advertisement," Bjonn said, "for our way of life." He accented the last word a little to underline the intentional irony of what he'd said.

"Hello, Ditmas," I said. I wondered what else I could say. "I—I'm glad you're not dead."

"Yes," said Tucker, joining the conversation, "it takes a certain responsibility off your shoulders, doesn't it?"

It took a while for that one to sink in. I'd been living with the thought of myself as a murderer for a matter of what my chronometer assured me had been days, now. I hadn't liked it, but I had accepted it. I had killed a man. I felt no pride in the accomplishment, but I accepted it as an additional fact in my internal reference file on Tad Dameron. Along with the statistics of my height, weight, spectrum, age, etc.,

next to my other achievements to date, I'd entered the notation: *struck and killed Ditmas,* along with the hour and date. And, lurking in the back of my mind all the while, the unspoken corrélary: *apprehended for murder on the ——th day of the ——th month of the year ——.* The blanks had just been waiting to be filled in.

But Ditmas wasn't dead.

I felt a strange weight lift from over my head and shoulders as I processed and assimilated the new data. *Ditmas wasn't dead.*

"You're right," I told Tucker. "It makes it a little easier for me to live with myself."

I surprised a startled look on Bjonn's face, a look that spread in ripples of relayed reaction to the others, Tucker last among them, his eyes momentarily widening a little as he noted it.

Then I added, "It's nice to know that, in addition to your other talents, you can't be killed. Makes world conquest a little easier—doesn't it?"

Tucker narrowed his eyes at me and resumed his once-characteristic pose of shucks-now cynicism. The only difference now was that he was better at it, and it fit him less well.

They took me to Bay Complex in an official aircraft. I didn't try to talk to them. I felt surrounded by my personal demons. Bjonn—the original alien, the one who'd taken Dian. Tucker—the father-figure I hated. And Ditmas—the good buddy who had everything going for him where I didn't, the one who had turned death back into life. Once they'd been human beings—or at least there had been a time when I'd thought of them that way—but now they were alien figures, the symbols of my torment, and they had me boxed. I tried not to think about what they'd do to me, at journey's end.

We were met by an official Bureau car, big and black and built to seat eight. Counting the driver, my captors and the two guards who'd accompanied me from the *Longhaul II,* we were seven. They let me have the back seat all for myself.

The day was drab and dreary. Long banks of fog sat against the mountains, higher clouds scudded low across the sky, and above them hung a dismal overcast. Someone had put a gray lid on the world, and it was draining all the color out. I felt gray myself.

It started to rain while we were still heading north on the automatic highway. The front spoiler buffeted most of the rain up and over the car, but the windshield still picked up spray. The side windows were useless, streaked with water on the outside, misted with condensation on the inside. It didn't change the view much; the grayness just became more blurred. The men on the seat facing mine—my two nameless guards—stared past me at the back window as if they might somehow see something beyond it. Their eyes grew fixed and unfocused.

The tires sang monotonously on the wet pavement, somehow counting each tiny drainage groove as it was crossed and adding it to their soprano tone. The air inside the car was close and a little too warm. It wadded up in my head. I felt life and purpose draining out of me, leaving me a husk, an empty shell, a zombi-creature waiting for its jelly-like new tenant.

Then the tune dipped and deepened, the car slowing its headlong pace, and we were rolling down the exit ramp. Cloverdale. Again.

It came to me then, how close I was to defeat—to total and utter defeat. I had already given up—it was hard to know when I'd first given up—but always I'd sensed a grace period, a little time yet

before the end.

Now the time was running out.

I did not shift my position, but I felt myself growing alert. From somewhere deep inside me nerves were drawing taut, muscles coiling. My brain came cleanly awake. I felt myself poised on the edge of eternity. Below was a bottomless black gulf. There was no other side. I was all but balanced on that edge. Could I cheat eternity? Could I move back again without losing my footing and falling?

The blackness seemed to rise up, like a thing alive—like no thing alive—totally empty, totally devouring.

And a part of me accepted it, was willing to meet it. I felt at once supercharged with energy, and very weary. Things had to break soon. The balance had to shift—in one direction or the other.

And we were already through Cloverdale.

The big car jounced and swayed on the old road, but its tires still keened to themselves, and the distance grew quickly shorter. A couple of miles? A mile? Half a mile?

The driver swore out loud. The car slowed, went into a momentary skid that threw the rear out across the road and then swung it back in again, and then stopped. I peered forward. Both my guards angled in their seats for a look.

"This damned rain," the driver was saying. "These cars aren't built for such slow speeds; the rain-shield doesn't work." The front windows were heavily beaded with water.

"Use your manual wipers," Tucker said. His voice was peevish. "That's what they're there for."

"That's just it," the driver complained. "They're not working. I've gone this far, but now I just can't see well enough. I'll have to get out and clean the windshield myself." His tone indicated that this was not his job and it was a damned shame someone else hadn't volunteered to do it.

The guards were still looking forward. I took my chance. One foot on the crumbling edge of the black abyss, I made my leap. I was out the door and into the roadside drainage ditch in one quick jump. The ditch wasn't part of the plan—but then, I hadn't much plan. I stumbled, rolled over, and was on my feet again without pause. Behind me I heard exclamations and a heavy grunt. Doors were popping open.

A hand closed on my ankle as I was scrambling up the low embankment beyond the ditch. Fear clutched my vitals in that same moment. I kicked backward with my free foot and felt the solid connection. The hand let go. The fear did not.

I didn't look back. Rain was falling all around me, and the light was muted, as at dusk. The palms of my hands were gritty with mud and my legs were streaked with it. I ran.

Tall dead grass whipsawed at my legs. My feet stumbled over the hidden furrows of the uneven ground. I was running blindly, without any backward glances, but there was some sense in the course I'd picked. The land fell away in a downward slope, and no more than forty yards ahead trees threw up a barrier against the broken field. There at least I might find cover. Beyond that I had no idea.

A sharp pain started lancing my chest with every gulp of air I took through my open mouth. My gasps were a roaring noise in my own ears. I felt like a runner trapped in a nightmare—doomed to ineffectuality.

I crashed in through the trees, ripping my thin tunic on a shrub of some sort. It was already wet enough to fall apart. I kept on running, blundering between the trees as they grew thicker, caroming from one to another, heedless in my panic. Then I tripped, and fell headlong.

I let out a cry—half a sob of anguish, half a forced exhalation—and then lay silent. Around me, water dripped in random patterns from leaf to leaf. I was lying amid the curled brown leaves of summer. They were soggy. It was almost winter now.

The woods were quiet. It came home to me, as I subdued my heavy breathing and tried to force my mind out of its desperate panic: I didn't hear the sounds of pursuit.

Carefully, fearfully, I rolled over onto my back and sat up. When I was a boy in the den they used to kid me about the bottom bunk. You had to look out for the things that lived under the bottom bunk, they said. It sure was too bad about the guys who had to sleep on the bottom bunk. I had the bottom bunk. I knew there was nothing under it. Nothing but tile and plastic and maybe dust. But when the lights were out I had to steel myself to reach over the edge with my hand. Things *might* lurk in the dark unseen.

I felt that way now.

I didn't want to see what was behind me. I was afraid to look. I was afraid that when I turned over the first sight I would see would be Bjonn's impassive face. Or, worse, a grinning Ditmas, just standing there. Right behind me. Right over me. I didn't think anyone was there—I hadn't *heard* anyone—but I had to steel myself to roll over and look.

Nobody was there, of course.

I felt like laughing, but I didn't laugh. I had the idea I was on the verge of hysterics. Putting my hand out on the wet trunk of a tree, I climbed cautiously to my feet. As soon as I put weight on it, my right ankle protested. In shooting spasms it informed me that I'd twisted it and pulled or sprained it. I told it to shut up.

Where were they?

They wouldn't just let me run off without doing anything about it. They couldn't. They had to be planning something. If they weren't chasing around after me, playing this wet game of hide and seek in the weeds, it had to be because they had a better way of catching me. An easier way.

I wondered what it was.

I thought of going out to the edge of the trees for a look, and that's about as far as I went in that direction: I gave it a thought. Then I started hobbling in the opposite direction, still downhill, deeper into the woods. Overhead, the rain made pitter-pattering noises on the leaves that sounded like hundreds of tiny animals scurrying this way and that. I wondered for a moment if they were running messages, keeping tabs on me. I wondered if there was any reason why the alien parasites had to restrict their jellied presence to human hosts. But that was a dark and alarming fantasy, and I shut it out before it had me believing in it. The rainy woods were too dark, too gloomy, for thoughts of tiny scampering spies to be at all amusing.

The land dipped, suddenly, into a narrow fold through which a stream ran. I made my way down to its bank, old and mossy, knit together by gnarled and naked tree roots, and stared at the rushing water.

It was neither a broad stream nor a deep one. But the bed was at least four feet below the overhanging bank in most places, and sometimes more. I looked down and thought about the mud and dirt with which I was covered, but I had no very strong inclination to clamber down that bank and wash myself in the stream. Romantic notions from the 3-D aside, the water looked cold, colder even than I felt, and I was already chilled to the bone and wet through. The thought of jumping down on my sprained ankle didn't encourage me either.

So I had the choice of turning upstream or down.

I turned downstream, to my left. That

meant north, away from Cloverdale, and somehow that seemed backwards to me. North is *up* on the maps, and rivers flowed south. But nobody ever told this stream that.

The way along the bank wasn't difficult. The leafy trees—almost equally divided between those which held their leaves and those which hadn't—thinned out and were mixed with and almost replaced by evergreens. Here and there the mossy bank was carpeted with a spongy layer of needles.

I hadn't gone far when I glimpsed a building through a gap in the trees ahead. I stopped and peered at it for a better look. I couldn't see much, however, so I went on.

The stream twisted, made a deep bend, and then I found myself staring at a rustic sort of dwelling which might have come right out of an earlier century—maybe even pioneer times.

It was built in a small clearing just above the stream. It was of weathered wood, its uncovered siding silvered and warped by age and exposure. Its roof, low and peaked, was shingled with splits of a darker wood. It stood on stubby footings that looked almost like the stumps of felled trees; its underside was open. Cut firewood was stacked along and just under one side. Blue smoke drifted lazily from its stone chimney, curling slowly up and then flattening into a layer of thin haze only yards above the gable.

Someone's refuge in the country. I debated approaching it; I feared taking the chance of going inside it. But I did. I climbed the wooden plank steps to its porch almost furtively, and pushed against the old hinged door. It moved open.

The house had no electricity; the large single room was lit by a burning lamp of some sort. There was also a fire in the fireplace, but it was half coals. A woman was sitting on a chair, doing something with her hands that moved her shoulders rhythmically. She had her back to the door, and to me.

The fire in the fireplace sprang up, and the lamp guttered. But she must have already heard me, or felt the breath of cool damp air against the back of her neck. Her face in shadow, she half turned. "Who is it?" she asked in a curiously muffled voice.

"I'm sorry," I said, hesitantly. "I didn't mean to intrude—I mean, to just walk in, but I saw the smoke from your chimney, and . . ."

"Come in, then, Mr. Dameron," she said. She turned the rest of the way. The light silhouetted her puffy lips, and cast a highlight on a livid bruise that ran along her jawline.

"Hello, Lora," I said. An elevator in my gut began to sink.

"Come in," she repeated, her swollen lips blurring her words. "Close the door, please. It's damp and growing chilly out."

I closed the door and moved further into the room. I could feel the heat from the fireplace, but it was like an unreal phantom, nibbling at the edges of my chilled reality. It didn't warm me. I was very cold.

She saw me better then, as I entered the pool of light shed by her lamp, and her expression seemed to melt and change. "What's happened to you?" she asked. The softness had returned to her voice.

I shrugged. "I was in the woods. In the rain."

"I can see that. But your clothes—they look like you ran into an old barbed-wire fence! And you're covered with mud and dirt! You look like a wild man. Have—have you been in the woods all this time?"

"All which time?"

"Since . . . since you ran away."

"No," I said. "That was—days ago." I couldn't tell how many days. I always lose my sense of time when I leave Earth. I glanced at my chronometer. It was broken.

It had stopped at 15:52. Hours ago.

"Well, you *look* like you've been out there for days," she said.

"Just a few hours," I said. "But it felt longer." I sidled up near the fire, putting my back to it. "I didn't expect to find *you* here," I added.

"I can understand that," she said. For a moment anger flooded her eyes. Then it washed away. "But now," she said, "we're both here. Full circle, you might say."

"I—I'm sorry," I said, "about what I did to you, I mean." I couldn't keep my eyes off her face. "I didn't want to hurt you."

"No, but you did," she said. "Why, Mr. Dameron? Why did you hurt me?"

I felt my shoulders sag. I was losing my last dregs of energy. "I don't know exactly," I said.

"Tell me about it," she said. Her hands had returned to her lap and a peculiar garment which she seemed to be weaving with two thin sticks and a ball of heavy thread or twine. Her hands moved with a rhythm and life of their own. She seemed to ignore them.

"I'd like to," I said, "but how can I trust you?"

She looked up and her eyes met mine. "Don't you think that's a peculiar question for *you* to ask, Mr. Dameron? Who, after all, has trusted whom? And who has broken that trust?"

CHAPTER TWENTY

"YOU'RE AN ALIEN," I said.

"I'm not," she said.

"Somewhere inside your body," I said, "an alien parasite has nestled itself. It has extended itself in ganglion-like threads throughout your body . . . including your brain. And it controls you. It thinks for you. It *is* you. And it—you—the others, they're starting to take over. . . ."

"No," she said. "You're wrong. You're completely wrong. I am myself, the same person I always was. I'm just better now, more whole, more complete. I'm a better person; I'm not a different person. Don't you know that yet?"

I wanted to believe her. I wanted, desperately, to understand her and to believe her. And I wanted the warmth of the room and of her own personality to displace the terrible cold that inhabited my body. I shivered a little as I spoke, and I bit my words out: "How can I believe you?" I asked. "How can I trust you, knowing what I do?"

"What do you know?" she asked in turn. "Lab tests, medical reports? Do you even know all that was in them?"

I shook my head. "But I know what I saw . . ."

She shared my memory for a moment and her face paled. The bruise was very ugly. "You killed it," she said. "I made it and gave it to you, and you killed it."

"Can you blame me?" I cried out. I felt my own guilt, my own anguish, tearing loose from me. I felt hysterical. I was shivering uncontrollably.

"Tell me ***why,***" she demanded. "Tell me ***why*** you did it!"

"I—couldn't help myself," I said. My teeth were chattering.

She shook her head as if to clear it from a bad dream, then looked up at me again. "You're still cold," she said, as if surprised.

"Y-yes," I said. I was shaking uncontrollably.

She rose from her chair, neatly placing her work on it. She came closer to me. "You're still wet," she said. "Wet and filthy," she added, in a sort of aside. "We've got to get you out of those rags and cleaned up." She reached out and before I could stop her, she ripped my tunic right off me.

It was already in soggy tatters; it all but fell apart in her hands. "Come on," she said. "Get the rest off."

I turned to watch her as she went to a cupboard of some sort and took down a large plastic tub. It was three feet in diameter, and at least two feet deep. She put it on the floor next to my feet. "You can help," she said. "Get those things off your feet and take off your kirt."

I bent over and slipped loose the lacings on my bootlets. They were wet and caked with mud. My feet, when I touched them with my fingers, were dead cold, and numb. I couldn't wriggle my toes at all. My ankle was swollen and bruised.

Lora had reached inside the fireplace and swung out an arm hanging from which was a steaming kettle. At my questioning glance, she said, "I keep water hot. It's nice to have; you never know when you'll need it." She gave her words an ironic emphasis.

Strangely, the chill had already lessened its hold on me before she finished undressing me and had me stand in the tub. She dipped a towel of some sort in the kettle and wrung it out. I watched her do it, and although steam drifted up from the mouth of the kettle, the fact that she'd handled the towel left me unprepared for the scalding heat of it. She threw it over my shoulders, and I almost screamed.

She paid no attention to my reactions, but began rubbing and sponging me with the towel, starting with my head and neck—all but suffocating me in its steamy folds while she cleaned my face—and then worked down. She did it swiftly, competently, and without apparent emotion, pausing only to frequently rinse and wring out the towel again. Water trickled down my legs and collected in the tub at my feet.

At first the wet warmth only penetrated my outer layers. At first a stinging heat, it became gradually a deeper, more relaxing warmth. Blood returned to the shell of my skin and left it pink and flushed. And electrical pins kept pinching at my feet as the water rose around them.

She washed me and scrubbed me and rubbed me, and somewhere along the line the chills left me, and I became very drowsy, almost stuporous. I have the vague memory of being told to lift my feet, and then of setting them down again on something dry. My next memory is that of lying in a bed. It was warm and cosy in the bed, and when I shifted my weight from one shoulder to the other, I encountered another warm body. It felt soft and comfortable, and I felt no alarm as I drifted back again into sleep.

I had a dream. It was long and involved, and most of it I can't remember, but I recall it concerned my mother again. I was very young, and yet, as is the way with dreams, I was a grown man at the same time. My father did not appear in the dream, but I had a sister. We shared a room and slept together, in the same bed. The part I remember is this: we were lying on our sides, facing each other, and we were kissing. Long, slow, oral kisses. Our tongues were touching and I felt at once very wicked and very delighted. My sister's tongue pulled back from mine and I knew she was going to do something. I didn't know what it was, but I was feverish with anticipation. Then, suddenly, our mother entered the room, throwing on the lights and confronting us. She was very angry, and she shouted at us and called us names. We'd jerked apart of course, and I felt disappointed and angry because my mother had spoiled it—whatever "it" was to have been. I wanted to scream back at her, but then she told us that we were evil and that because of that she was going to give us away. She was going to give us to a den.

I woke up tense and rigid, Lora's hand on my arm.

"What is it, Tad? What's wrong?"

Across the room the gray of coming dawn was wan in the undraped, unpolarized windows. The room was cold. I pulled the heavy covers back up over my shoulders. "A—dream," I said. "That's all. Just a dream." I felt as if something had happened to me—or was about to happen . . . something profound. Somewhere deep inside me, something had been resolved. I'd made a decision.

"What were you dreaming about?"

I couldn't look at her. "You, I think. You were my sister. That doesn't make any sense."

"Maybe it does." She yawned and stretched, raising her arms over her head, then quickly slipping back under the covers. "Maybe you've made a decision," she said. Her words came so close to my own thoughts that they startled me.

"What decision is that?"

"That you can trust me. Did you feel that way about me in your dream—when I was your 'sister'?"

"Yes," I said reluctantly.

She rolled over and stared at me. Our eyes were on a level when I turned my head towards her. We were separated by only a foot or so. "I didn't betray you, Tad," she said. "I had plenty of opportunity if I'd wanted it."

"Betray me, how?" I asked. I was feeling deliberately obtuse.

"However you expected me to," she replied, the corners of her mouth turning up in a brief smile. "However it was you thought a, *an alien* would betray you."

I felt a sense of *deja vu* as I turned over to lie on my side and face her. I was coming too close to acting out my dream—and I had no mother near now to put a stop to it. "Maybe," I admitted. "But tell me what it means."

"Come on, now," she said. "You're the man with the talent, remember? You're the man they send out to take an intuitive measure of circumstances. Don't tell me your intuition doesn't work on your private time as well."

"What're you driving at?"

"Just this: Do you really think I'm some sort of alien demon, bent on world conquest? Really?"

"Well, I—"

"Forget the diagrams and schematics and lab test reports you've heard about. Forget everything except *me*. Just me, Tad. Am *I* alien?"

I moved my head against the pillow. "No," I said. "You're not."

"You *know* I'm not, don't you?" It wasn't really a question; she was driving the point home.

I agreed. "I guess so."

"Well, then. Maybe you'd better rethink some things."

"Tell me."

"Maybe you've got it all wrong. The whole setup, from beginning to end, Bjonn and all. Maybe you've been completely wrong. Could you accept that?"

I closed my eyes. "I don't know," I said truthfully. "I just don't know. How *could* I be completely wrong?" I felt painfully naked, and I clutched at the covers for protection.

"Think about it; that's all," she said. "Just think about it. Think it through again. New data. Integrate it."

My clothes were shot. She'd cleaned my bootlets, and they were about all I had left. I put them on, and put on the coat she gave me. It was several sizes too small, and despite the belt it kept coming open in front. I decided it didn't really matter.

She dressed as I did, slipping easily into a

lightweight robe. The fire in the fireplace was roaring, and the room had lost its chill. It was easy to watch her, easy to admire her smooth and economical movements as she dressed and tended to her chores. But in some strange way I understood the truth of my dream: she felt like a sister to me. There was a bond of affection between us, even an easy intimacy, but it had the familiarity of a close brother-sister relationship—nothing more. That seemed both strange and marvelous to me. I'd never had a sister before.

Some time the previous night she'd put new water in the kettle. Now she ladled out the steaming hot water into two bowls, and then added a powder from a canister. The powder seemed to soak up the water and expand, and as it did so, a strange smell rose from it.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Breakfast," she said. "High protein corn meal, with algaetes added for familiarity. Come and get it."

I stared at her without moving.

She carried both bowls to a table on the other side of the room. One chair already stood at the table; she dragged another over to it and sat down. "Come on," she said. "It's time you lost a few prejudices."

"I—can't," I said.

She sighed, pushed herself away from the table, and stood up. Then she came to where I stood and put her hands on her hips and looked me up and down. "For a big bold world-saver," she said, "you certainly are a coward." She seized my hand and tugged at me. I let her drag me over to the table and put me in the other chair. Sitting at the table's edge, so close it was almost under my nose, the bowl of 'breakfast' steamed its strange smells at me. I felt both dizzy and weak.

"Here," she said, picking up a narrow utensil with a cupped end. She dipped it into the bowl and raised it to my mouth. "Try it," she said. "Come on, open up." As if in sympathetic pantomime, she opened her own mouth wide.

I opened my mouth, and her hand darted forward. The next instant, the food was in my mouth.

It was more granular in texture than the food I was familiar with, and its flavor was at once stronger and more subtle—as if many different flavors of varying strengths were competing for my attention. At first I gagged a little, but I closed my eyes and pretended for a moment that I was home, safe, in my own eating cubicle, and that did the trick. I swallowed.

"There; that wasn't so bad, was it?" she cooed. "Try some more."

Obediently, I opened my mouth again, and she quickly shoveled in another load. This time I didn't gag, and I found it easier to swallow.

"Try it with your eyes open, this time, why don't you?" she said. I opened my eyes to see the third mouthful of the food hovering before my lips. Without thinking I opened my mouth. "Good boy," she said, smiling.

"Why don't you try it now," she suggested. She handed the eating object to me, and I turned its handle over in my fingers. "It's called a 'spoon,' " she said. "A very ancient eating device, I'm told."

"It seems inefficient," I said, dipping with it into my bowl. "A tube would be faster, easier."

"Yes," she said, "but have you noticed anything different about the taste of this food?"

I nodded.

"Well, that's because it *isn't* in a tube." She dipped her own spoon and took a mouthful from her own bowl. I watched covertly, from the corners of my eyes. "You taste with your nose as much as you do with

your mouth. That is, smell is as important as taste, really. You can only taste four things—sweetness, saltiness, sourness and bitterness. Everything else is really in the odor—in what you smell. But—" she continued to eat while she talked, pausing occasionally for the task "—but, when you get your food from a tube, you never really have a chance to see it or smell it, and besides which, it is deliberately made to have very little flavor. A big deal change in the 'menu' is just a slight change in flavor and texture. They never really change what's really in your food—it's always the same thing. Unless you're rich, of course. But who's rich?"

I could think of a couple of people. But I didn't feel like mentioning them. They belonged in another world.

"It's *unnatural*, eating from a tube, anyway," Lora said, nodding in agreement with herself. "It perpetuates the infantile instincts, I think. You get used to sucking at a plastic teat for your nourishment, and since you're completely plugged in, it's like you're still a baby, un-toilet-trained. You just react to the stimuli. You—"

I was squirming. I'd finished most of my bowl of breakfast, and her words had thrown a mental switch somewhere inside me.

"Oh!" she said. "It's, uhh, outside. A little house by itself, around the corner."

I barely made it there in time.

What was it Bjonn had called me? Compulsive?

I felt a little foolish, striding up the path in my bootlets and Lora's ill-fitting coat, but Lora assured me it would not matter. "Besides," she said, "I'm sure one of the guys up at the big house will have some spare clothes you can wear, if you decide you still need regular clothes."

I felt even more foolish when I realized that the path up which she was leading me was a direct route back up the hill to the highway and across it to the old house. All my struggles in the woods yesterday seemed silly and pointless. And I was beginning to understand why I hadn't been pursued.

The morning sun was a dim red disk in the morning haze and jumbled welter of the trees. When we came out of the trees into the field, I saw the mist still rising from the ground like low banks of miniature clouds. The world seemed very empty and still, and I found it hard to believe that several billion people lived only a few hundred miles to the south. From somewhere behind us a bird called mournfully, as if despairing the full warmth of the sun. Overhead, as if in answer to both the bird and my lonely thoughts, an aircraft trailed a sonic boom: a sudden whiplash of sound from the empty sky. A reminder that the emptiness was illusory. It made Lora jump. "It always does that to me," she said. "You'd think it wouldn't bother me, now. But it still does. I guess I have a ways to go yet before I can take over the world."

I felt like the butt of a bad joke. "Forget I ever said that, will you?" I said. But she only grinned at me.

"I'm going to rub it in, Tad," she said. "You're getting off lightly, you know."

I hoped so.

The sky overhead was blue by the time we climbed the meandering walk up to the big house. I turned to stare back down the hill and across the highway in the direction from which we'd come. The field was golden; the woods below were still hidden by the blue-white table of mist over the valley. I couldn't see the path, and there was no sign of the cabin.

As if reading my mind, Lora said quietly, "I went down there to be by myself for a few days. I was hurt, and I needed to be

alone, to heal." I knew she didn't mean just her face. She looked up at me and reached up her hand to touch my cheek. "I'm glad you found me there. Now I can come back."

But now we'd both come back. Something shifted, queasily, in my stomach.

"You're still just people, right?" I asked. I needed reassurance.

"Just people, Tad," she said. "You'll see."

We went in through the big front door and the weight of the house closed down over my shoulders. Unconsciously I felt myself slumping, hunching my shoulders inward a little. I'd come here twice before. Third time—for keeps?

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"WHY DID YOU come back, Dameron?" Bjonn asked. I stood at the entrance to the large room which I had labelled in my mind 'the chapel'. Lora hugged against my arm. The room beyond Bjonn appeared empty, but I couldn't be sure; it was unlit and gloomy with shadows. I couldn't even read Bjonn's expression in the dim light. "You had a chance to run away. Why did you come back?"

"I changed my mind," I said. It was hard not to let the old belligerence rise. There was something about Bjonn which challenged me, challenged my manhood, my very right to existence. It made me bristle. "I don't have to explain myself to you."

"That's true," he said surprisingly. "You don't. But don't you think you owe it to me?"

"What do I owe you, Bjonn?" I asked. It was hard to keep the bitterness from my voice.

"You owe me a great deal," he said. His voice was somber. "You owe me your second chance at life. In more senses than one. Do you realize that?"

"I'll have to think about it," I said. But I knew.

"So tell me why you came back."

"It—it's not easy."

"I know that," he said. "But lots of things aren't easy. You will still have to face them, you know."

"I know."

He waited.

"I—was wrong," I said. It was hard to say the words.

"Wrong?"

"About—you. About—the people here. About—about, Lora."

"How so?"

"Do you have to ask?"

"I want to hear it from you, Tad."

"I—*I saw conspiracies where there were no conspiracies.*"

"Why, Tad? Why do you think that happened?"

"I—don't know."

"How do you know you're wrong, now? How can you be sure you weren't right all along?"

"What's the idea? Are you trying to argue me out of it?"

"No. I just want to know the footing for your new position. Explain it to me."

"Why you?"

"Because you owe it to me—and to yourself."

"Could I sit down?" I was feeling very uncomfortable, even with the silent Lora beside me in the doorway.

"Come on in and sit down," he said. "You'll have to use the floor; there are cushions for the purpose."

I took a cushion and let myself down on it, facing Bjonn, who took another. It felt uncomfortable; I didn't know what to do with my legs and I couldn't lean back. I was relieved to be sitting, and yet I could not

relax. Lora sat somewhere behind me. I found myself wishing she hadn't; I missed her.

"Now then," Bjonn said. "Let's continue."

"What do you want me to tell you?" I asked.

"What do you want to tell me?" he countered.

I shook my head. "I don't know where to begin."

"Begin with Dian," he said. "Isn't that why you resent me so much?"

"Because of Dian?"

"Isn't it?"

"I don't know. I hadn't thought of it that way." I had, though. It inkled at the back of my mind.

"I took her away from you."

"Yes."

"But, did I?"

"I don't understand."

"Was she 'yours', Tad?"

"Well, no, not exactly. I mean—"

"You thought she was Tucker's mistress, didn't you?"

"Yes. I think so."

"Well, that's between you, Dian, and Tucker. I don't believe she was—not in the sense you regarded it, anyway. But you thought I seduced her from you, didn't you?"

"You did, didn't you?"

"No."

"No? I can't believe that."

"That's your problem, Tad; not mine. I am not in the habit of lying; I have never lied to you."

"You—seduced her with the, the alien whatever-it-is."

"No. You're wrong. I offered it to her, and she accepted it. I don't believe she has at all regretted that, but it was her free choice."

"It *has* to be, Tad," Lora said from the darkness behind me. "It has to be your own choice."

"Dian wanted to offer the sacrament to you, just as I did," Bjonn said. "But she was afraid for you. Do you know why?"

"She knew I'd reject it."

He nodded. "And do you see why you rejected it?"

"I was—am—too compulsive. Too much the creature of my—habits."

"You can see that now?"

I nodded. Moisture stung my dry eyes. "Now," I said, "yes."

"What brought you back?"

"I had to come back."

"Why?"

"I—I couldn't just turn my back on it. Not on—the chance for something—something better."

"I don't know whether or not we can help you, Tad," he said.

"*What?*"

"I'm impressed by what you've told me. I'm even more impressed by the fact that you've come back again." He lingered on the last word. "But you're a convincing dissembler, Tad. You're skilled at lies and half-truths. I don't know whether I can believe you."

I felt as if he'd kicked my stomach in. I clutched at it despairingly. "You're not being fair," I whispered. "I came back. I ran away from you and I came back."

"Yes," he said. "I can see that. But—"

"That's enough," came Lora's suddenly forceful voice. "It's not necessary to subject him to some sort of ordeal."

"—but," Bjonn picked up where he'd been cut off, shifting the thrust of his words from me to Lora, "Dameron has proven himself dangerously psychopathic. You don't know, Lora. He only kicked you in the face, but he killed someone else."

"That's not entirely true," I said, feeling my voice turn sick. "Ditmas isn't dead."

"No. Fortunately, his *arapad* lived, and was able to restore his life to him. But that is hardly to your credit, Dameron. And," he added, returning to Lora, "he took the identity of the man he killed and went to the Moon. He tried to pass himself off as his victim in order to join the next voyage of the *Longhaul II*."

"Back to Farhome?" Lora asked. She breathed the planet's name as if it was Heaven. Maybe it was.

"Back to Farhome," Bjonn agreed. "His only explanation was that he was seeking the answers to the conspiracy he saw to be taking over Earth. *He has yet to admit to himself that he murdered a man and stole his identity solely to satisfy his long-standing compulsion to enter deep space.*"

The words struck me like hammer blows, and I tried to defend myself against them:

"No, that's not true," I cried. "But where else could I go, when I saw the very agents of my own Bureau being taken over? I killed him by accident, but once I'd killed him, what could I do? I had to escape. I had to escape Earth entirely."

"So you ran away to the Moon. To a veritable nest of those of us you considered your enemies. You came straight to *me*." Irony was thick in his voice. "What *could* you have done? Did you ever think of giving yourself up? Of turning yourself over to the local authorities? The Bureau of Security was your obvious answer. You could have pleaded, oh, self-defense, if you'd wished. You might even have told them your conspiracy theory. That way you might have gotten some worthwhile therapeutic help."

"You know why I didn't," I muttered.

"You thought they were in on the conspiracy."

"Weren't they?"

"*What* conspiracy, Tad? You told me you'd been seeing conspiracies where there weren't any conspiracies. Isn't that right?"

"I *thought* there was one, then. At the time, I thought there was a conspiracy. What do you want me to say, Bjonn? That I was out of my head the whole time? But that I'm still responsible for everything I did?"

"Weren't you?" he replied. "Aren't you?"

They left me alone in the heavy darkness of the room, closing its door behind them. "You have a lot of thinking to do, Tad," Lora told me before she followed Bjonn. "You have a decision to make. I—I pushed you too fast, that other time. I didn't understand then. Now I do." She stooped and gave me a chaste kiss.

Then I was alone with myself.

I had a decision to make. I'd known that. I'd known it for some time. And I'd done everything in my power to avoid facing it. Now I couldn't put it off any longer. I'd recognized that this morning, when I'd decided I could trust Lora. Now I had to follow through on that decision with another—with the Big One. In a strange and subtle fashion they'd made it clear to me: no one else was coercing me. My battle was with myself.

When had I first started fighting that battle? How long ago?

I had so few memories of my childhood. When I thought of my mother, it was the face of the woman in the shrink's office that I saw in my mind—not the face of a younger woman, the woman who had mothered me. My father—why couldn't I remember him at all? Why had I so flatly rejected my memories of the man? I'd known him for the first six years of my life. By then I'd learned to read, write, code and punch. I hadn't lost *those* memories . . .

. . . sitting on a chair that was too low to be comfortable, pulling my legs up and squatting on my feet before the infomat,

hesitantly poking my fingers at the standard keyboard. *How old? Three? Four?*

"Hello, Tad," said the disembodied voice of the infomat's special voder. "Will you play a game with me? I'd like you to spell your name for me. Can you do that? Let's start with 'Tad'. Look at my screen—what do you see? That's right—a 'Tee'. Will you find the 'Tee' on my keyboard and punch it? . . . Very good. And now an 'A'. . . . That's right. You're very fast; that was an 'A'. And now, 'Dee'. . . . Right. And what do they spell when we put them together? Look at my screen. 'Tee,' 'A,' 'Dee.' That's 'Tad', isn't it. Will you *say* the letters with me, and punch them as you say them? 'Tee'. . .'A'. . .'Dee.' That's very good. And now for your last name, 'Dameron.' This is a longer name and it has more letters . . ."

Sure, I could remember my lessons, sitting on my legs until they cramped, day after day. But where was my mother? Where was my father?

I remembered the public shrink. They'd sent me to see him when I was ten. "Tad doesn't relate well to the other children," my den mother that year said. *The other children*—I could still hear the patronizing tone of her voice. We were little aliens to her, a race apart. They called us "children." I never thought of myself as a child. I was a person, denied my rights to existence as a person by the bigger people, the so-called adults. I was surrounded by other persons, closer to my age, who contested me for those somehow unquenchable rights every day of my youth. It was a state of armed truce which often erupted into momentary war. Who "related"? That was a word the grownups used to cover up their ignorance.

"You're something of a loner, aren't you, Tad?" the shrink had said. He seemed old and used up to me then. Defeat crowded the features of his face. "Why do you suppose that is?"

I'd just stared at him without bothering to answer him. It was a stupid question. We were all alone; I knew that and so did he. That was obvious. The only difference between us was that he was still going through the motions; he still hadn't admitted the truth to himself yet.

He reached out a hand and put it on my bare knee. I let it rest there for a single moment that stretched for too long; then I removed it. I broke his wrist.

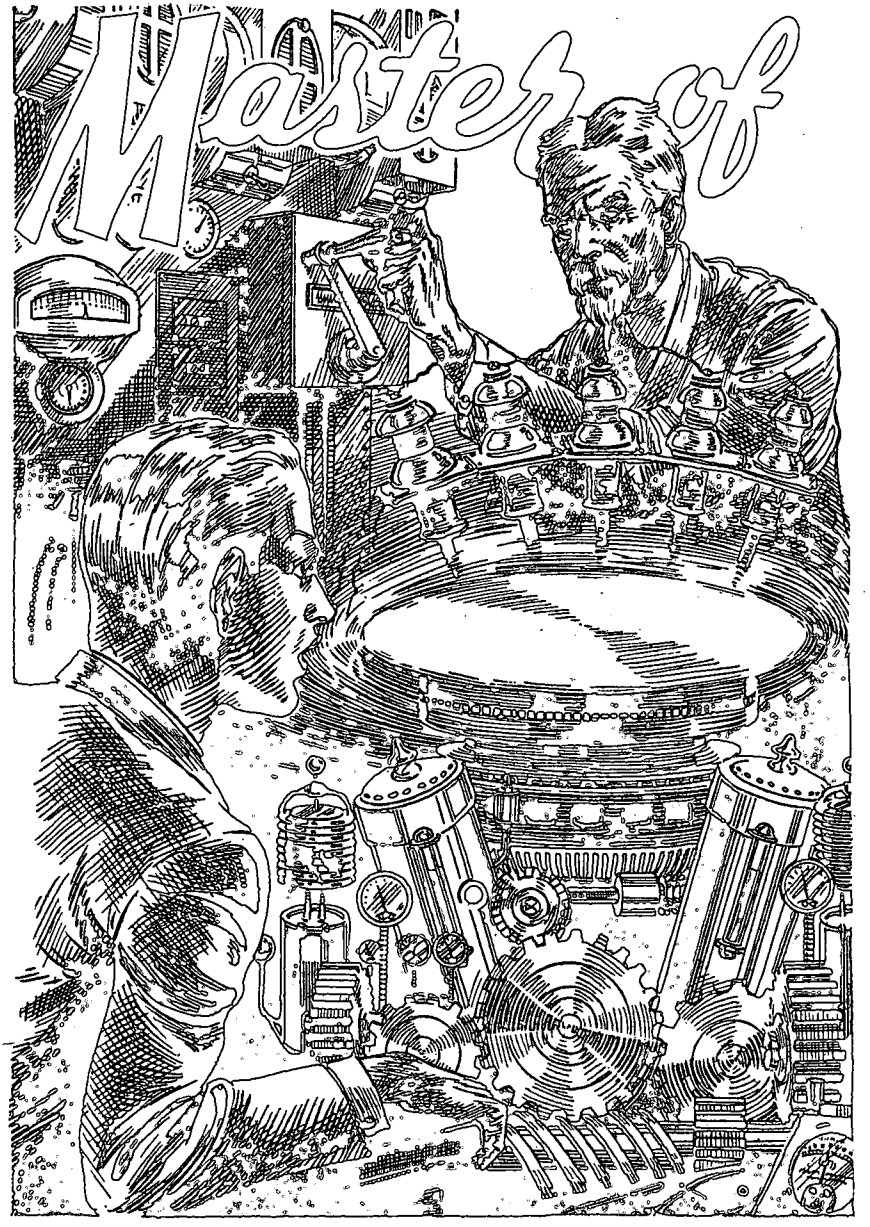
He screamed, and leapt to his feet, fear and anger fighting for control of his expression, and he cursed me very fluently, very expressively. And threw me out.

I never liked shrinks. They sent me to others, and they seemed cut from a common pattern—even my mother, as I thought about it: they were all failures. Each and every one had failed at his own life and given it up. Now they wanted to try again—on someone else. While I was in the den I had no choice. I went to whom I was sent. And I endured them. The silly women who wanted to "break through my shell," either to seduce me or to mother me. The men who saw "an interesting challenge" in me and wanted either to seduce me or to father me. I endured them all, stoically, and as silently as possible.

Later I tried going to shrinks on my own. I knew I'd only seen the worst, the ones who worked for Public Care. I knew they were the dregs, and I hoped, stupidly, that if I invested some money I might have better luck.

All that happened was that I met a higher class of failure: the ones who lived on others' troubles, feeding purse and soul from their victims. They hid it better, but it was there if you searched for it. There was no sense relying on such people. It only made you their property. I preferred to remain my own, for better or worse.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 123)


Master of

Telepathy

By EANDO BINDER

Overnight Warren Tearle changed from a weak-willed, shy introvert to a dominant, ruthless telepathic giant. Using the vast power that came to him from the third level of mental telepathy, he sought to build a financial empire

A Classic Reprint from AMAZING STORIES

CHAPTER I
An Amazing Test

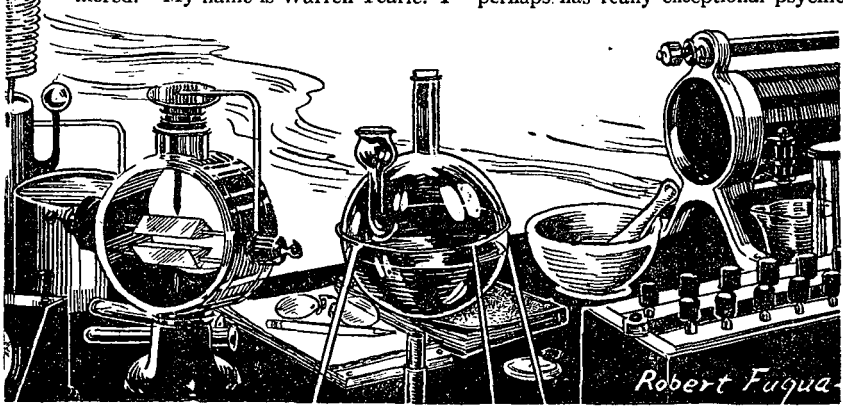
MISS DARCE HENDERSON, the scientist's secretary, had brought Warren Tearle in with an apologetic expression, as though he were an undesirable character, then left.

The visitor was a rather unimpressive figure, angular and awkward, somewhat shabbily dressed. Professor Ray Oberton put him down immediately as a young man of about 24, with a strong inferiority complex. His face was slightly bitter.

"You're here for the tests, young man?" the psychologist asked kindly.

"Yes, professor," the visitor stammered. "My name is Warren Tearle. I heard you paid five dollars to anyone who took the telepathy tests and came out high. The five dollars—I, er, could use it."

"Of course, anyone can," Oberton said considerately, to put him at his ease. "Sit down. The five-dollar offer is an inducement I've had to use to get people here for the tests. You see, telepathy and telesthesis—the latter usually called clairvoyance—are psychic qualities that vary considerably in people. Most have detectable psychic perception. But one out of a thousand or so have somewhat more remarkable abilities in that line, and they are what I'm looking for. Again, one out of a million perhaps has really exceptional psychic



powers. I'd like to strike one of that sort."

Warren Tearle sat stiffly in his chair, listening attentively.

The scientist had picked up a pack of clean cards with lace-work on their backs. He selected five and laid them face up on the desk in front of Tearle. Each had a simple design on its face, all different—a cross, circle, square, star, and three wavy lines.

"Ever seen these before?"

Tearle shook his head.

"These are the standard ESP cards," explained Oberton. "They were devised by Professor J. B. Rhine at Duke University.* 'ESP' means 'extra-sensory perception', a term also coined by him. He opened a marvelous new field."

The scientist dreamily tapped the cards in his hand.

"Obviously, it is extra-sensory perception—even the conservatives admit it. But just *what* is it? Is it second sight, mental telegraphy, a sixth sense, a new dimension, or specifically what? That is the question that psychologists are asking the world over. Hundreds of thousands of tests have been made on thousands of people. The law of chance has been ruled out entirely. Something, somehow, carries messages to the human mind without the use of the five senses. *But what?*"

Warren Tearle shrank back a little as the last two words were delivered with an almost explosive inflection.

"Now," said Oberton, clearing his throat, "the idea of the test is this. The deck I hold has 25 cards, 5 of each of those common symbols I've shown you. By the inexorable law of chance, over a sufficient number of trials, the average result of *guessing* the symbols is exactly one out of five, or 5 out of 25. You understand?"

"Yes," asserted Tearle. He was becoming deeply interested.

"*But*—if there is some strange property of the mind that allows a glimpse now and then of a card through mysterious channels, the average will be *more* than 5 out of 25. And these results have been achieved. Most people, apparently with weak psychic ability, run very little above five. But others will consistently average around 6 and 7. Exceptional subjects have even averaged 9 and 10, which is *twice* as much as the law of chance will allow."

Oberton began shuffling the deck carefully.

"To win the five dollars, you have to make an average score of 8 in five trials. There are two types of tests—telepathic and clairvoyant. In telepathic, you would name the symbols as I hold up the cards in front of me, concentrating on what I see. There you would be reading my mind, so to speak. The clairvoyant test you would carry out alone. The deck is simply placed face down and you would attempt to name the symbols in order from the top card down."

"Like — like seeing *through* the cards?" gasped Tearle.

"In a way," smiled Oberton. "You have your choice."

Tearle sat further toward the edge of his chair. "I'll try it," he said suddenly. "The clairvoyant, I mean."

The scientist nodded and placed the deck, face down, directly before him.

"You may take as long as you wish to name the symbols. However, when you get a strong impression of knowing what one is, don't hesitate in calling it out. This psychic perception is almost

* It was only four years ago, in 1934, that Duke University announced its epochal experiments in parapsychology, thereby raising that study of psychic phenomena from a pseudo-science to an exact science. Since then there have been many verifications from other laboratories of those classic researches. The strange telepathic and clairvoyant powers of the human mind have been amply demonstrated.—Ed.

an instinct—it doesn't come right out and hit you on the nose. Now start. I'll take down the record."

Warren Tearle felt utterly foolish for a moment, staring down at a deck of cards. How could one see through them and name them! It was ridiculous. But it was too late now to back out, and besides, if he was lucky, he might win the five dollars.

The five-dollar inducement had ensnared Warren Tearle for the simple reason that he needed five dollars. Long orphaned, out of a job, and somewhat bitter toward life, he could not pass by an opportunity to win some money, no matter how crazy the thing sounded. He had barely heard of telepathy in his grim struggle with life.

If Tearle was doubtful about his ability to see through a pack of cards, Oberton had equal misgivings. He reflected that his visitor looked no more psychic than a mudturtle.

Tearle was vaguely aware of someone coughing impatiently. It must be the professor. Tearle felt his eyes blur from his concentrated stare at the deck. What could that first card be? How was he to know when to say it? How did this queer clairvoyance work? A stab of panic went through him. He'd even forgotten what the symbols were! He could only remember one—the star. Well, he might as well say it—

"Star," said Tearle, hesitantly.

That broke the ice. He began calling the symbols regularly. He gained speed as he went along. Some subtle intuition seemed to guide him.

When the five tests had been made, Oberton, already excited, took the average. "Fifteen!" he announced. "Three times chance!" He stuffed his pipe, breaking three matches before he got it lit. Then he smoked jerkily. All the while he stared at Tearle so hard that he felt uncomfortable.

"Pardon me," said Tearle timidly at last, arising. "But if you will give me my—the five dollars I won, I'll leave now, I guess."

"What!" Oberton almost roared.

"Didn't I win it?" gasped Tearle.

Oberton took him by the arm and gently forced him back into the chair as though he were a fragile China piece.

"Tearle," he said earnestly, "do you realize that you are—for lack of a better term—an outstanding psychic? You have truly amazing telepathic powers. I'm going to study them; I'm going to find out how it works, if I can. You're going to become my collaborator in research. Five dollars? Young man, I'll get you a $1000 a year grant from the university!"

CHAPTER II

A Mental Guinea Pig

FROM that day on, there was a quality of confusion in all things, for Warren Tearle. It was more like a vivid dream than real life. Events developed swiftly and incredibly, as though he had been marked by destiny. . . .

Daily he was put through telepathic tests by Professor Oberton. It quickly became obvious that Warren Tearle was a human being with astounding powers of non-sensory perception. Why he should be such, where most people were dull in the psychic sense, was not explainable. It was just a fact. But the science of parapsychology was a new science, the professor reflected. There were many things to learn.

Professor Oberton thereafter spent more and more of his research time with Tearle. Pedantic and earnest, he was determined to run down the will-o-wisp of extra-sensory perception, now that he had the super-psychic Tearle to work with.

As Warren Tearle daily associated

with him and absorbed the background of the research, he became fascinated. His intellect, eager and quick, was more keen than even he himself had suspected, beneath his inferiority complex. The two men worked on with a common interest in the intangible mysteries of mind and its psychic range. Day after day they labored, striving to push back the frontiers that Rhine—the Einstein of psychology—had first invaded.

Professor Oberton soon found the standard ESP cards too simple and unilluminative, and began devising new ones. He tried a wide range of symbols, from a mere dot to a dodecahedron.

Warren Tearle mastered them all within a few trials. It was a crowning achievement when he was able to name correctly 95 out of 100 different symbols, all given within three-second intervals. Only one thing dampened Oberton's enthusiasms—he couldn't arrive at any scientific explanation of how extra-sensory perception worked. No matter how often he asked Tearle just *how* he was able to perceive those hidden things, the young man would only shake his head helplessly.

A MONTH after that day when Warren Tearle, a shabby, underfed figure, had first climbed the steps of the building, there was an air of tenseness in the parapsychology laboratory.

Professor Oberton, Tearle, and Darce Henderson were together. Tearle was staring dreamily out of the window at several feeding pigeons, calling out symbols. Before him, on the desk, was a thick steel strong-box, securely closed. Within it reposed an invisible deck of cards.

Tearle paused, puzzled, on the twelfth card. Professor Oberton and Darce Henderson looked at one another significantly.

"Hand!" said Tearle finally. He closed his eyes a moment. "*Left* hand," he stated.

He stared out of the window. His voice became a little hoarser now and a slight dew of sweat glistened on his nose. He went on with a rush.

"Flower — carnation. Insect — bee. The Gettysburg Address. Map of Europe—"

After the 25th call, he raised his bewildered eyes. "I named them all," he whispered. "And I named them right—I *know!*" He shivered slightly. "It's uncanny!"

He slumped forward suddenly, resting his head on his arms, trying to control a nervous hysteria that gripped him. Professor Oberton opened the steel box, grabbed up the cards, and checked them with the called list.

"A perfect score—25 out of 25!" he cried. "*And with a set of new imprinted objects he had never seen before!*"

Tearle sat up finally, in sheepish embarrassment. "Sorry I went to pieces, professor. But it was rather a ghastly sensation."

"*What* was?" barked the psychologist, leaning forward.

"The—well, the easy way it suddenly came to me," continued Tearle lamely. "Up to the 12th card, it was like before—the impressions coming slowly. When I got to the 12th—the hand—I found myself straining, striving, as though I had to climb a barrier. Suddenly—it all cleared up! It was like putting on your glasses and reading small print that you couldn't make out before. Or like"—he groped mentally for expression—"finding a dream real. I—I can't explain it, professor."

Oberton tugged at his beard.

"I suspect you have advanced into some new phase of extra-sensory perception," he mused. "The fact that you not only named the hand, but knew it to be a *left* hand is significant. Is it

mostly a sort of vision—a second sight? Think hard now, Tearle. Do you visualize images?"

The young man shook his head. "It's partly that, but much more of something else. It isn't seeing, but *knowing!*"

"Like a voice told you?" queried the scientist, though he had asked that question a hundred times before.

"No," said Tearle hesitantly. "More than just that. In a way, all the five senses are combined in one, it seems. When I came to the card with the hand, I seemed to feel it gripping mine. That was how I knew it was a left hand, because it fitted in *my* left hand, in a handshake. When I came to the flower, I smelled carnation as though it were in front of my nose. As I switched to the next card, a taste of honey was in my mouth. The Gettysburg Address seemed to be read out by some one in a sonorous voice. And yet in each case I simply *knew* what they were, too!"

The professor threw out his hands helplessly. "It's the old problem, trying to explain color to a blind man," he sighed. "I've averaged as high as 9.7 myself, in the standard ESP tests, but it's still a mystery to me."

He became enthusiastic again. "But let's have some more tests. Try running through the deck of 100 different symbols."

Tearle settled himself back in his chair, stared out of the window, and began naming them. Darce's eyes widened and her pencil flew busily as he rattled them off with the speed and assurance of a person reading from a list. The professor checked at the end.

"All hundred correct!" he announced. "Now I'll mix the pack of object-symbols with it. Try that."

Tearle found no difficulty in running off these 125 cards, though all the while they reposed invisibly within the steel box on the desk.

"Psychic perception 100%—never before recorded!" muttered Professor Oberton, as though he didn't want to believe it. "Try broadcast telepathy, now, with Darce as recipient."

With the deck before him, Tearle picked up card after card, concentrating on each as the girl, across the room, wrote down symbols one by one. Darce stared at the raw-boned young man in astonishment all the while. At the end she looked dazed.

"That came over clear as a bell!" she exclaimed.

"A voice?" queried the professor doggedly.

"No, unless it was a voice that reverberated from one end of the universe to another!" said the girl meaninglessly. She was excited. "It's more like a—an instinct of knowing. I can't explain it, either, professor."

Professor Oberton was checking the last run. "Perfect score again! This is almost incredible! Now transmit to me."

The score was once more errorless.

"Well, is it a voice, professor?" asked Darce sweetly.

"No, it's a—a rapport between the two minds, like—"

"Like a seance?" laughed the girl.

"All right, I can't explain it either," admitted the scientist, grinning. "But I'm determined to get at the root of telepathy and telesthesia. Heretofore, our experiments have been carefully controlled laboratory tests, but from now on I'm going to let my imagination lead me on—and see what comes of it!"

His eyes glowed. Then he waved a hand. "That will be all for today, Tearle. You may go. Wait—how much change have I in my pocket?"

"Forty-two cents," said Tearle automatically, though the question was unexpected.

The psychologist dug into his pocket, opened his fist, and displayed four dimes and two pennies. He sat down weakly. "Well, good night," he said.

Tearle followed Darce to the outer office. There was no one else in the room. Suddenly the girl turned to face him with a serious expression.

"Whatever you do," she said solemnly, "don't let this—get you. Don't let it go to your head, I mean. Or I don't know exactly what I mean, but don't get to feeling superior just because you have a wonderful gift of psychic perception." There was a vague uneasiness in her tone.

"Oh, no, of course not," said Tearle slowly. "I understand what you mean."

"I'm glad you do," said the girl. "Good night."

For a moment Tearle hesitated going. Almost every evening he did, with the thought of screwing up enough courage to ask Darce out to dinner, always to lack the courage to go through with it.

But tonight a sort of recklessness imbued him. He turned in the doorway. "Miss Henderson," he began, clearing his throat nervously, "I wonder if—that is—would you—"

That was all the far he got as a burly form from the hall suddenly blundered into him, knocking him off his feet.

"Sorry," said the newcomer, one of the several college boys who were satellites to Darce's queenly beauty. He picked Tearle off the floor and dusted him off hurriedly as though he were a rag doll.

"Beg your pardon, for being in the doorway," said Tearle meekly.

The college boy grunted and turned to Darce eagerly. "So I did beat the other guys here, eh? Honey, how's about you and me—"

"Wait," interrupted the girl. "Warren," she called to the gangling, embarrassed figure once more heading for the hall. "What were you saying?"

"Me? Oh, nothing important," stammered Tearle, over his shoulder, without stopping.

A month later a scene took place that would have struck any unknowing observer as being a necromantic ritual.

Warren Tearle sat twenty feet from a row of books, unable to see their titles. Professor Oberton stood near the books, peering at them. Darce Henderson wrote in shorthand, in a large notebook.

"The fifteenth book, page 245," said Oberton, at random.

Face blank, Tearle began speaking after a short pause. Steadily, he gave out words, starting in the middle of a sentence and ending a few minutes later with an unfinished sentence. When he had signified the end, the psychologist took out the 15th book on the shelf, turned to page 245, and read its contents. Darce checked with her shorthand record.

"Only ten words wrong," she announced at the end. "Which is four better than his average in the other nine trials."

"And damn good in any man's language!" cried the scientist jubilantly. "Now, Tearle, try reading the titles of books in my apartment, three miles from here! Physical dimensions have been proven to have no effect on psychic range. It should be just as easy for you to perceive them by clairvoyance as the books here."

"I'll try," said Tearle.

For several minutes he made no further sound. Puzzedly, he now and then turned his head, as though adjusting some intangible inner focus. Suddenly his eyes lighted.

"*Decline of the West* by Oswald Spengler," he said. "First book in upper left corner of a glass-faced wall case near the bed. The second is *Webster's*

Collegiate Dictionary. The third is *Daring Detective Stories* by Hack Ryter. The fourth—"

"That's enough," interrupted Oberton, after he had named ten. "Outside of the fact that you wonder what a scientist is doing with a detective-story book among his works"—he grinned briefly—"the test is perfect. Those titles are correct and in the proper order. Did you have any trouble extending your chairvoyance that far?"

"Just a bit of—well, twisting around in my mind, before I found your place," answered Tearle. He looked up with a faintly haunted stare in his eyes. "Does it mean that I can read any book anywhere—on earth?"

"The range of clairvoyance is probably unlimited," responded Oberton. "With suitable orientation, you could perhaps read the titles of books in an Indian Rajah's library, twelve thousand miles away! It's just a matter of practice and development."

Darce Henderson looked at the professor. "But that would be carrying matters too far," she said half earnestly, half jokingly. "You might find yourself reading people's diaries and exposing scandals!"

Professor Oberton made a sudden decisive gesture.

"Tearle," he said, "we'll now try straight telepathy. That is, Darce and I will alternately *think* of a symbol, without the use of the cards, or any tangible props. And you try to pick up our symbol-thoughts."

It was the first time they had worked without the cards in a telepathy test and Tearle missed the first half dozen calls. He was dealing now with pure mind, subtly removed in degree from card-calling.

He concentrated desperately on the next call. "Eight-pointed star?"

Darce bobbed her blonde tresses. A faintly mocking smile came over her face at the picture of the lanky, awkward youth fidgeting in his seat. Warren Tearle's eyes suddenly narrowed. Every time this lovely, haughty girl looked at him in that way, something inside of him seemed to snap. Anger, or something akin to it, always surged through him with the powerful beat of a lashing whip.

He shifted his eyes to the scientist. "Six parallel lines," he snapped.

Oberton nodded, pleased.

"Circle within a square!"

Darce nodded, reluctantly.

After a number of correct calls of symbols, a crafty look came into Oberton's face. Tearle hesitated a moment and then said, "Chair?"

The scientist started a little.

"Automobile!" said Tearle to Darce, who had taken the professor's cue. Thereafter, a wide variety of objects were named by Tearle as his psychic-ear heard them from the amazed two —anything from buttons to battleships.

Sometime later the psychologist called a halt, gasping. "A hundred correct calls!" he exclaimed. "My boy, that is what fantasy writers would call mind-reading!"

"It's a little weird!" Darce Henderson shivered a little. "Perhaps even—dangerous!" She looked from one to the other of the two men and then left the room hurriedly.

"Don't mind her," sighed Oberton. "Women have peculiar ideas at times." He lit his pipe and puffed at it furiously, blowing curling blue wreaths of smoke to the ceiling. Then he faced the young man with a glittering look.

"Tearle, I'm about ready now to search out the secret of psychic perception. So far we've just been doing preliminary work. From now on I'm going to put you through intensive tests designed to reveal the manner in which

your psychic powers work. In a way, you'll be a mental guinea-pig. I won't announce any of our results to the scientific world until I have some definite theory of how extra-sensory perception operates. So far I have only vague ideas. These will crystallize as I go along."

He pointed his pipe stem at Tearle dramatically.

"Mind-reading—unlimited clairvoyance—two-way telepathy! We'll startle the world! I can't help being melodramatic about this. You, Warren Tearle, are the key to unlock that vast, untouched domain of mind for mankind. You are Columbus at the shores of a new, psychic world!"

CHAPTER III

Tearle's Strange Power

WARREN TEARLE left the presence of Professor Oberton feeling like he had drunk a bottle of champagne. It all still seemed like a dream. He was to be lifted from poverty and obscurity to fame and fortune. All the world would soon hear of him. He might not be dominant of personality, but people would look up to him.

Warren Tearle had no altruistic thoughts of the benefits to science, and ultimately to mankind. His reflections were purely personal ones. He was made of common clay, as all humans are, and made no pretense of being otherwise. He was a psychic giant, but otherwise no different from others.

He straightened his tie, flecked a thread from his new suit, and reflected that it would be nice asking Darce to dinner that evening—if he only had the nerve. He set his lips grimly. He would, even if she had one or more of her admirers there. If she turned him down, he would walk out airily, for why should such trifles bother him—a man the world would hear about?

As usual, Darce was trying to make up her mind between her three most persistent male satellites. They all turned as Tearle came into the room.

One of the college boys looked him up and down in mock amazement. "Well, if it isn't Romeo in the flesh!"

Another said, with a leer, "Here's our competition!"

The third bleated, "We don't stand a chance with Darce while *he's* around!"

Trying to ignore their sallies, Tearle stopped before the girl. She looked at him half wonderingly.

"Darce, I—" he began, and choked.

"Sir!" said one of the college boys sonorously, "if you are attempting to win the heart of this fair lady, it shall be horsepistols at dawn!"

The following burst of laughter shook Tearle's remaining self-composure to shreds. He saw that Darce had to smile too, though she valiantly tried not to and hid it with her hand.

"Good night, Darce," mumbled Tearle, running out with face flaming.

"Damn fool!" he told himself out in the hall. "Why don't you just ignore their rude wit? After all, the world is going to hear about you!"

But the words tasted flat now. Tearle occupied himself on the way home with a wish-fulfillment wherein he was confounding those terrible three with rapier-like thrust of language—and triumphantly taking Darce out.

PROFESSOR OBERTON'S tests with Warren Tearle in the next month were intricate, and to himself, illuminative. He measured the speed of Tearle's perception and found it to approach that of light.

This he determined by a simple enough test. He took Tearle to the physics laboratory and seated him before a turntable that could be rotated as high as 5000 times a second.

A number was painted on it, unknown to Tearle, and the plate whirled at its highest rate of speed. Tearle had the answer without any trouble. Oberton assumed that his psychic perception of the number, therefore, must have occurred in the tiny split second that the number paused at each part of its rotary motion. The test was tried with Tearle miles away from the turntable in a speeding car, with a result still closer to the speed of light.

"I'm gradually building a theory of psychic perception," announced the scientist one day, pacing up and down before Tearle and Darce Henderson. "We must assume that in some mysterious subether there lies a vast field of strange force. Like gravitation in our three dimensional universe, which permeates all matter and space, this new force permeates, besides matter and space, all *mind!*

"This psychic-field is something which so closely links all parts of the known universe together that a full perception of the field would mean a full understanding of all things! But unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, man has little powers of extra-sensory perception, so that he has but a glimmer now and then of the things and thoughts going on around him which he can neither see nor hear nor feel nor taste nor smell."

The scientist puffed silently at his pipe for a moment. Darce Henderson and Warren Tearle sat motionlessly, trying to assimilate his theory.

"You, Warren Tearle," went on the professor, "are peculiarly gifted with the psychic sense. Why, I don't know. I haven't even the slightest idea just *how* you grasp extra-sensory impressions, nor what part of your brain or body is concerned. Perhaps it is some subatomic phenomenon that the physicists will eventually discover.

"However, through your remarkable results I've been able to map, so to speak, the psychic field. There are three parts, or levels, to it. In the first level, one is able to detect simple clairvoyant symbols and simple telepathic impulses. All people have this first level ability, in greater or lesser degree. In the second level, one is able to detect almost any concrete telepathic message.

"A month ago you passed into the second level, when you were so suddenly able to detect any objects, instead of just the often-used symbols. Like a child learning to use its legs, you suddenly learned how to walk in the second level."

The scientist took a breath and went on.

"The third and highest level would be wonderful to achieve. It would be like tapping the main power-source that serves the universe. I don't know exactly what it would mean—perhaps unlimited psychic perception in the mind-world. It would be like atomic-power in the material world. All human thought, even the most subtle and hidden, would probably be detectable. Transversely, a telepathic-impulse injected directly into the third level would undoubtedly reach all the mind-world. I have a suspicion that the great leaders and generals in history had unconscious contact with the third level and were able to command their followers through its tremendous power."

Professor Oberton, eyes shining, faced Tearle squarely.

"And maybe, for the first time in history, you and I will achieve that miraculous third level by deliberate and scientific means, and explore some of its stupendous possibilities! We will continue developing your psychic power toward that goal!"

Darce Henderson stood up suddenly.

"Professor," she said tensely. "You

must not go too far! You are dealing with tremendous powers and—"

"Quiet!" snapped the psychologist. "Miss Henderson, I'm fully aware of what I'm doing."

The girl shrugged and walked slowly to the door. Before she closed it behind her, she turned once and looked at Tearle strangely.

"That girl has too much imagination," said Oberton with a forced chuckle. Then, before Tearle could speak, he went on. "Now let's try some word transfer. See how rapidly you can speak out the sentences I think of."

They settled themselves and after a moment, with his eyes staring out of the window, Tearle spoke.

"Affective functions are mainly physiological in the human nervous system. Metabolism requires certain modifications of the chemical exchanges between phagocytic cells—"

Tearle spoke on, hesitating only over the pronunciation of words he had never heard or seen in his life before, plucking them from Oberton's mind.

Finally the scientist held up his hand as a signal to halt, but Tearle, unseeing, went on. "Lord, this is pretty weird I wonder myself sometimes what it will lead to Darce might be right, but then—"

Tearle started suddenly and jerked his head around, facing the professor in bewilderment. The latter stared at him wide-eyed.

"Tearle!" he gasped finally. "You began giving my involuntary thoughts! That's third level — you must have reached it!"

He sat down and dabbed at his forehead with a handkerchief excitedly. "Too late to start anything today. But tomorrow we'll begin an exploration of the third-level phenomena of the great psychic force-field!"

Professor Oberton, if he had not been so disturbed himself, would have noticed a queer look in Tearle's face, a combination of puzzled incredulity and half-fearful wonder. Tearle said goodnight and walked from the room stiffly. Almost like a robot he stalked toward the outer office. His mind felt as though it wanted to soar—

When he entered Darce's office, the three college boys whom he had seen so many times were there, noisy and boisterous. They caught sight of him and turned to bow stiffly, in mockery.

"Monsieur!" said one. "Allons, ze master-mind!"

"Senor!" said the second. "I am honaired!"

"Milord!" said the third. "Your bawth is ready!"

Warren Tearle did not flush and grin self-consciously as he usually did. Nor did he shuffle toward the door, with shoulders drooping. Instead, he stood erect before them, unflinching.

"I," he said slowly and firmly, "am taking Miss Henderson to dinner!"

The three college boys looked at one another blankly. Darce's eyes riveted on Tearle's face and slowly widened.

"How charming, I'm sure!" said one of the college boys.

"Little boys should be seen, not heard," said the second sarcastically.

"Scram, chump!" growled the third.

"Beneath the moonlight of the bay," spoke Tearle in measured tones, "Where the wild lilies sway; there I'll speak my love for you; and it shall be ever true!"

He turned to the girl. "They compose poetry for you, Darce!"

One of the college boys choked and turned a vivid scarlet. He clutched at his inner coat pocket, jerked out a piece of paper with writing on it, and then hastily jammed it back in again. He tried to face his companions, failed, and left after a hurried excuse.

Tearle faced the second college boy. "You don't write poetry to Darce, but I wonder what you think of her?" His eyes bored into those of the other. He continued, "She's a conceited, arrogant dame and I only take her around to show her off and impress people with my taste!"

Though Tearle had said the words, it was the college boy whose face turned all colors of the rainbow. "I didn't say that!" he sputtered. "I didn't say that, Darce!"

"Of course you didn't," returned Tearle. "No one said you did, either!"

Realizing his blunder, the college boy shrugged in pretended nonchalance and left without a word. The remaining young student edged toward the door. "I—" he began.

"You only have thirty cents in your pocket and hoped Darce would go Dutch with you tonight?" suggested Tearle. The young man vanished.

"Now, for Heaven's sake!" cried Darce. "What is this all about? What has come over you? What—"

"Will you have dinner with me?" asked Tearle quietly.

"I don't think I will!" returned the girl, swinging her chin up defiantly. "I don't like the way you treated those poor boys, and I'm indisposed!"

"Will you have dinner with me?" said the unsmiling Tearle in a dry, strange voice. His steady, grey eyes, unblinking, stared into hers. The girl felt momentarily dizzy.

"Why—why, yes, I'd be delighted!" she said.

CHAPTER IV

Tearle Demonstrates

WARREN TEARLE sat at the table with a faint, unhumorous smile on his lips. All through the dinner it had been frozen there. His eyes kept roving over the throng in the large, gilded dinner-dance place. He had answered Darce's conversation attempts only with grunts. At first she had been angry, then puzzled, and last frightened. This was not the same Warren Tearle she had known in the past months! There was a strange look in his eyes, as though he were listening to silent voices, and were amused.

"What are you doing!" she gasped suddenly. "Reading thoughts?"

He grinned.

"Look!" he pointed to a waiter treading his way between the tables, bearing a large platter of steaming soups. Suddenly the waiter seemed to deliberately tip the tray, spilling hot soup over a half dozen people.

"I didn't mean to do it!" stammered the waiter. "Somebody *told* me to!" Then he fainted dead away in the midst of indignantly shrieking guests.

"Let's go!" said Darce. "Come to my dormitory room at the college. I want to talk with you!"

A half hour later they were there, and Warren Tearle began speaking in that same dry, unemotional voice, while he paced up and down like a caged tiger.

"I have reached the third level of psychic perception! I now have practically unlimited clairvoyance and telepathy. It was like having dawn come, after the dark night. Professor Oberton had some inkling of what it would mean, but he had no idea of how much power it gives. I can read thoughts, Darce, as easy as pie. But more than that, I can give commands that must be obeyed! The example of the waiter is only a trifle.

"My mind is now in direct contact with what the professor called the main field of the psychic world. It is a sort of crossroads of all thoughts, all ideas, all minds, all things! I can see and hear what I wish. But more, I can

force my will where I wish, carried by the tremendous power of the third level!"

He stopped and faced the girl. A new, dominant Warren Tearle had replaced the old. His shoulders were square.

"Darce!" he said, "come here and put your arms around me. Say that you love me!"

Outraged, the girl tried to resist, but some strange force seemed to bend her will to his. She could not keep her arms from encircling him, nor her lips from saying, "I love you, Warren!"

He grinned triumphantly. Then suddenly he pushed her away, rudely. "Oh, I know it's a farce!" he growled. "But it gives you some idea of the power—*mental* power—that I have at my command!" His eyes became cold, glittering bits of stone.

"I'm going to develop my powers. One of these days the whole world will hear of me—and *from* me—"

He began pacing again and talked on and on, feverishly, deliriously, drunk with the thought of the new-found powers in his grasp. Finally the girl could stand it no longer and shrieked for him to stop.

"You're a madman!" she cried.

"Far from it," he returned coolly. "I'm just beginning to realize my great destiny!"

"A wish-fulfillment, that's all it is!" Darce's lips trembled, but determination was in her voice as she went on. "I'm going to be cruel. Your inferiority complex, your inhibitions, your secret yearnings, are overwhelming you, in one big mental upheaval. You want to be a leader and ruler simply because you know you never can be!"

"I have power!" ground out Tearle. "Mind power! And that is far more effective than cannon or bullets or money. Look, I will show you—"

He snapped on the radio and tuned to a commentator speaking rapidly.

"Silence!" said Tearle in his dry, queer voice. "Silence, I say!"

The veins stood out on his forehead as this incredible command rang out. The commentator's voice spluttered, went on chokingly for a few more words, then stopped. For a full three seconds there was no sound from the radio. Then Tearle relaxed and the commentator's voice went on, a bit puzzled and worried.

"He was forced to obey that command because it came with the great energy of the third level of psychic force," said Tearle. "Now, do you believe I can do what I want to—and that I can be a leader?"

Darce shuddered at the odd, dancing light in his eyes. She could almost see the mind behind them going to ruin.

"I knew it!" she said in a hopeless calm. "I knew it would happen! But you'll see all this in a different light, tomorrow, at the laboratory—"

"I won't be at the laboratory tomorrow," interposed Tearle. "Tomorrow, I'm going out in the world as a leader —as a power!"

Darce looked at him pleadingly.

"Warren, it's a dangerous thing to think like that," she cried. "You'll go mad! Don't you see? What you must do is continue your work with Professor Oberton and help him map the psychic-field completely. There are pitfalls in psychic-exploration, which you can expose. That way you will be doing good—"

But she knew she was talking to empty air.

"Doing good!" Tearle laughed harshly. "What good has the world ever done me?"

He brushed the girl aside and left abruptly. The expression on his thin face was one of sardonic anticipation.

CHAPTER V

The Power of Third Level

PROFESSOR OBERTON and Darce Henderson did not see Warren Tearle for a month. Then he came in one day. They noticed immediately the swaggering manner he had acquired, and the flush of some deep triumph in his face.

"Tearle!" exclaimed Oberton. He hastily locked the door. "Sit down, Tearle. I must talk to you. I've been trying to get in touch with you, but found you'd moved to an unknown address."

The scientist went on nervously.

"Now, Tearle, what is all this foolishness you've been up to? You've come to your senses, haven't you, and now you and I will continue our scientific research in psychic—"

Tearle held up a hand. Though he hadn't said a word, Oberton choked and stopped as though by kingly command.

"Listen to me," said Tearle in a hard, confident voice. "In the last month I've laid the foundation for an empire. Not a military empire, for they don't last. *A financial empire!* Money is the greatest power today. I'm going to amass a greater fortune than has ever been known."

The professor and Darce glanced at one another helplessly. They had hoped against hope that Tearle would give up his mad dream, and come back as a penitent.

"I am now the president of a certain munitions corporation," continued Tearle tersely. "It was easy. I visited the former president and forced him to sign his powers over to me. Forced him by means of the third-level psychic powers. He committed suicide the next day. You probably read it in the papers."

His two listeners shuddered at his cold-blooded tone. Yet Oberton noticed that for an instant Tearle looked remorseful. It had probably caused him some twinges of conscience before he had fully inured himself to the tragedy he had caused.

"I called a meeting of bond-holders," Tearle resumed. "They were antagonistic at first and wanted to oust me. I talked to them—swayed them a little through psychic channels—and now they're eating out of my hands. The corporation is part of an international ring of munitions manufacturers, with plants all over the world. As soon as I find out who the ring-leader is, I'll get *his* position. Nothing can stop me!"

His cold eyes snapped.

"Through munitions sales, I'll mint fortunes, as ordinary business men mint dollars. The world of finance will soon place the name of Tearle above those of Rockefeller and Ford, and above such former money-kings as Krueger and Zaharoff. To help my plans along, and speed things up, I'll precipitate the next world war if necessary!"

He leaned forward dramatically.

Professor Oberton, white faced, almost groaned aloud. Darce Henderson wanted to scream hysterically, but even that was denied her, by a look from Warren Tearle. Both of them knew that it was no idle talk. Tearle *had* the power to do it!

"But you haven't the nerve to do all that!" cried the girl finally. "You're a coward at heart. You'll never go through with such a fantastic scheme!"

"I will, because nothing can stop me," retorted Tearle coolly. He looked at her strangely. "And when I have built my great golden empire, I'll need a queen beside my throne of power. All kings have queens . . ."

The girl's face almost convulsed with loathing and hate. But before she could speak, Tearle went on.

"Yes, I know, you refuse. Your mind is an open book to me. No matter. I'll have my pick of women."

Turning slowly toward the professor, he hissed, "I said I could read minds, Oberton. I know you're about to grab up an automatic from your desk. Go ahead! Pick it up and aim it at me. Now—try to pull the trigger!"

Professor Oberton had snatched up the gun and aimed it, determined to end Tearle's mad career on the spot. But when he tried to pull the trigger, some tremendous force held back his finger. The scientist strained, till sweat poured from his face.

Tearle laughed. "No one can ever assassinate me. Now turn the gun on yourself, professor!"

Darce shrieked, but could not move, as the scientist's hand pointed the gun at his own temple. Oberton knew that at the mere mental command of Tearle, he would blow his own brains out.

Tearle laughed again, breaking the tableau. "No, professor, don't kill yourself. I have nothing against you. In fact, I owe everything to you! And I don't have to kill you two, as in murder mysteries, to keep my secret. No one would believe you if you told what I have in mind! Now toss me that gun, Oberton. You might hurt someone with it."

The scientist obediently tossed the gun and Tearle slipped it into his pocket. A yawn came to his lips. His face became a little haggard.

"I'm very tired," he admitted. "I've hardly slept, planning my course of action." He looked at his wrist-watch. "I've called another stockholders' meeting for the afternoon. Till then I'll take a nap. May I be your guest, Professor Oberton?"

Without waiting for an answer, Tearle walked to the small chamber equipped with a couch, in which the psychologist had taken short rests from his strenuous mental labors. Tearle locked the door behind him.

Darce Henderson burst out sobbing in the professor's arms.

"What are we going to do?" she asked in a terrified whisper. "He's not human any more. He's a monster. A mental monster! And *we* are responsible!"

"He must never come out of that room alive!" the scientist said grimly.

And then, as clearly as a voice over the telephone, Tearle's psychic voice came to them, from the other room.

"Don't make any plans, Oberton! Remember that I can read your thoughts, asleep as well as awake. I've trained myself in that. If you try to call the police, or burn down the building, or some such childish endeavor, I'll know it before you make the first move. That gives you an idea, professor, of how impossible it is for you, or anyone else on earth, to catch me unawares!"

PROFESSOR OBERTON sat for hours, thinking, while the inhuman ego that had once been timid and unimpressive lay sleeping. It was history repeating itself. As a psychologist, Professor Oberton knew that the history of the world could be rewritten in terms of human psychology. In the past, other human egos had inflated dangerously, usually because of an earlier bitterness toward life. Once given power, those frustrated souls burst the bonds of reason and sanity. They wallowed in false glory, unconcerned over human feelings and sufferings. Dictators, Napoleons, warlords—human history was replete with them.

Warren Tearle was now such a being. He would override the world like a monster, plunging it into war and chaos. He had more real power in his hands than any previous man.

And he, Professor Oberton, had helped develop those powers! The bitterness that filled the scientist's soul at that moment was almost suffocating. Was there any way of stopping this menace to the world's welfare? But how could he even *think* of a way to do it, with his every thought open to Tearle, sleeping or waking?

Oberton sensed that Tearle's tired mind had gone to sleep almost immediately. With his own psychic perception he could feel the relaxation of Tearle's conscious will. But his subconscious mind was still alert, sensitive. At the least sense of danger, it would wake Tearle.

What could be done, if anything? Oberton groaned mentally.

Darce went out for sandwiches after a while, though she knew neither of them would eat. She wanted some fresh air.

Left alone the full force of his responsibility struck Oberton in a wave of realization of what it would surely mean if Tearle went on his unmolested way toward a financial empire—or something else. He sat tense for long moments, fingers gripping so hard he became conscious of pain as the nails bit into the palms.

And it was now, *at once,* that something must be done!

"Asleep!" whispered Oberton hoarsely. "He's asleep now . . . his full will forces robbed of much of their resistance! If only I can impose my own upon his . . . !"

He groaned. "No," he mumbled in despair. "The suggestion is untenable . . . *suggestion!*" He jerked erect. "Suggestion—perhaps . . ."

Forgotten now was the physical pain of his muscular reactions, forgotten altogether his body, the very fact that he lived. Instead he became in effect a disembodied mentality, a tense, straining intelligence, concentrating . . . concentrating . . . and at the root of his concentration lay one basic significant fact. Warren Tearle, in spite of the telepathic giant he had become, *still possessed a conscience,* still was able to feel remorse over a wrong deed, even though he thrust it from him. That munitions manufacturer who had committed suicide, *at Tearle's suggestion!*

Even as his mind strained, his voice whispered hoarsely the verbal expression of the concentration in his brain. He did not notice that Darce had returned, was standing transfixed in the doorway, her eyes riveted on him in nameless fascination.

"Warren Tearle," he muttered, "you are a despicable creature. *You have murdered a man!* You have killed, as surely as with your own hands, a fellow-being. You are an outcast of society, and you have contracted a debt of horror which must be exacted from you in full payment of your crime. And you *must* pay! There is no escape.

"Think, Warren Tearle, of what you have done, and fill your soul with the remorse that must dog your footsteps until you make amends. And you *cannot* make a *just* reparation. He is dead —gone, and his blood is on your hands.

"A life for a life! That is your only reparation. Those who kill by the gun, must die by the gun . . . there is a gun beside you, Tearle, in the drawer of the table beside your bed . . . a gun—loaded—"

Darce stifled a strangled exclamation of horror as the import of the words the professor muttered broke over her like a wave.

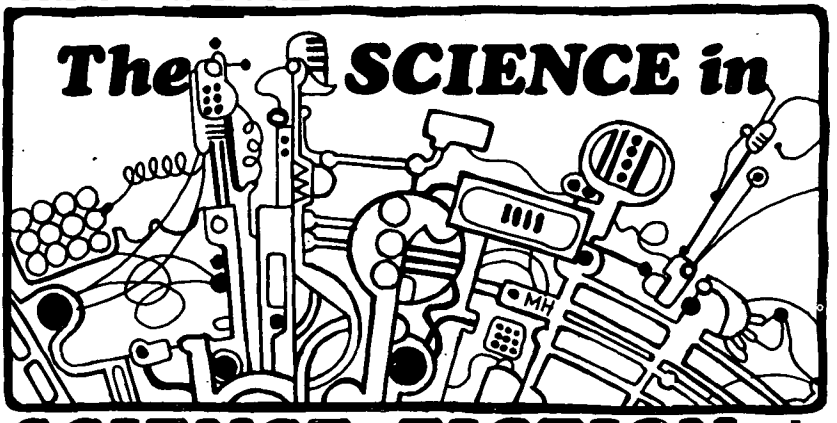
"A great crime—a gun—only justice —"

Oberton's face grew pale and his body shook with the force of his thought intensity, and his eyes blazed with some strange fire, smouldering, the only spot

[Continued on page 116]

GREG BENFORD & DAVID BOOK:

The SCIENCE in SCIENCE FICTION *



WHERE ARE THEY?

"Where are they?" In 1943 Enrico Fermi opened a dinner table conversation in Los Alamos with this question.

Where are the aliens, Fermi went on, who visited Earth in the past? Where are the artifacts they left behind?

He asked the question because until that time the matter had received very little attention, if any, outside science fiction magazines. We have no record of that conversation, so we don't know if Fermi got a satisfactory answer to his question. But sf has invented quite a few, usually rather simple-minded answers. Curiously, some very interesting possibilities have never appeared in sf—mostly, we think, because the writers didn't do their homework. In the next few pages we'll look into several of them.

But first: what's the hoariest cliche story in science fiction? Admittedly, there are quite a few contenders. Our favorite runs something like this: An alien interstellar expedition runs into trouble of some sort, and must make an emergency landing on a lush, green, uninhabited planet. There the difficulties multiply; maybe the crew mutinies, or the aliens are attacked by native animals, or personal quarrels boil over.

Anyway, all the aliens are killed but two. In the closing paragraph we learn that the virgin planet is third from its star, and the two aliens are named (surprise, surprise) Adam and Eve.

This is garbage, of course.

It's garbage for scientific reasons, setting aside literary ones. First, accident, disease and inbreeding would make the survival of such a colony quite improbable. One accidental death would put an end to the possibility of reproduction. Even after children appear, a not-very-big natural disaster or a run of bad luck could wipe them out. And these critical early years are just the time when lack of knowledge of the environment makes living off the country dangerous.

Second, even if a colony planted by voyagers from another star survived and

became our forefathers, how could they have eaten the plants and animals they found? Their body chemistry would have to be exactly like that of the indigenous life—digesting the same sugars and amino acids, manufacturing blood cells based on hemoglobin, requiring just the vitamins available in the local food supply.

And how does one explain the many anatomical and physiological similarities we have in common with the other primates? Why do our brains, right down to the notochord, resemble those of the apes so much? Fossil evidence shows a clear, continuous line of descent for mankind, all the way from Pripliopithecus and Proconsul, 25 million years ago. Proconsul certainly wasn't smart enough to build a spaceship, and even if he had been, why was he so peculiarly adapted to the ecology of Earth? It simply doesn't fit. We are undeniably the sons of this earth. We weren't just dropped into our niche by accident.

This reasoning—which knocks the props out from under several hundred sf short stories—would have been suggested by an hour's reading of any biology text. But the Adam and Eve story has lingered on for decades, and you could probably find an example of one—perhaps suitably embellished with literary flourishes and elaborate characterizations—in the last year's run of the sf magazines.

So, discarding the possibility that we are aliens ourselves, what chance is there that we'll be visited?

Last issue we tried to estimate the number N of technological civilizations in the galaxy. Admittedly a lot of the guesses that go into such an estimate are unsubstantiated, but we settled on a value for N that seemed plausible: one half million such communities in our galaxy. This means the most probable distance between these civilizations is around 100 light years.

The sensitive part of the calculation lies in T, the lifetime of a technological civilization. We took this to be about 10^7 years. This may be optimistic and it may not; there is absolutely no way to tell. It depends on the nature of the alien societies. If they form social groups which keep the peace between members and concentrate all aggressions on outsiders or the natural environment, then their communities may live forever. If the typical alien has as much trouble keeping harmony in his group as we do, though, the average society may last only a few hundred years beyond the discovery of nuclear weapons.

For the sake of argument, suppose our guess of half a million alien spaceship builders is right. Where are they?

The first question that leaps to mind is whether they even *want* to go voyaging. If the human race is typical, they probably do. Throughout our technological phase (i.e., the last 400 years) we have supported research and exploration at a level of about 1% of the governmental budget. If this keeps up, in a century or so we will have the money to build a ramscoop probe to reach the stars.

Would aliens do the same? Perhaps in order to make T long technological progress must be halted at some stage. Other races may stop when they've built automated factories, and use their days to write poetry. With birth control, population pressure will no longer drive the economic engine.

Still, let us assume that most races are like ourselves, and investigate their surrounding space from curiosity, if nothing else.

The obvious method is to send out manned spaceships. The alien scientists would be prepared to double as diplomats if they encountered another intelligent species, although our estimates indicate this won't happen very often. But these

explorers would have to tolerate or circumvent the boredom of century-long flights. Such expeditions would be a fantastically inefficient use of skilled personnel. Worse, they would be fantastically expensive. NASA's experience indicates that unmanned probes cost a hundredth or a thousandth as much as manned ones. Even a very wealthy advanced society would prefer to send unmanned probes for exploration and send members of their own species only on a definite mission (for example, colonization) to a known destination.

Further, even advanced societies would not go on sending out unmanned probes endlessly without a specific purpose, any more than we would. To put it another way, once you've seen a hundred or so solar systems, you've seen 'em all.

What could such a purpose be? Colonization, pushed by unrelenting population pressure? Even assuming an "advanced" race could be motivated by a primitive biological drive, we have to rule this out. If aliens had wanted to colonize Earth, it is overwhelmingly likely that they would already have come—in large numbers. Such an invasion would have had drastic effects. Their plants and animals would be incompatible with native varieties—if not by temperament, then biochemically. Not to mention their homes and other artifacts.

Would they be looking for natural resources? Fissionable materials? Ores? Not likely. A technologically advanced race should be able to find or make their own at home cheaper than shipping across light years.

What about knowledge and ideas? Now this is a great deal more believable. A new pattern for society, a new kind of music, a new field of mathematics would cost almost nothing to import. And a race that remains technologically inclined for 10^7 years is going to develop a real craving for novelty.

So they *do* have a reason to go on sending probes throughout the galaxy. The probes will seek intelligent life, then open lines of communication if they can.

It would require only minimal investment for a few centuries to send probes to every interesting star within 100 light years. In fact, we could almost begin doing that with our present economic base. As we have seen, such a narrow search isn't likely to turn up many alien species with intelligence, let alone technologies. A *long* range program is needed for that, with probes going out over a sizable portion of the galaxy.

Let's assume T is 10^7 years and N equals 10^6. Then if each civilization sends out one exploration ship a year, and visits are on a purely random basis, each of the 10^{11} stars in the galaxy should be visited every 10^5 years. Probably contact ships *aren't* sent out at random, but only where promising planets have already been found (see our column two issues ago). That won't affect the numbers very much, though.

Now 10^5 is a hundred thousand, and for our purposes, that's not very large. Man has been around about 20 million years. Cro-Magnon man (ourselves) is at least 25,000 old. Written records go back 7,000 years. If 10^5 years is a reasonable interval between visits, the rapid evolution of the primates would have been noted. Earth would have been put in a special category and watched carefully. We'll return to this point in a moment.

Suppose, on the other hand, the visitors were sea-dwelling creatures. Would they take the time to scour the African forests for elusive tribes of tool-using primates? Or would they naturally look more closely (and more conveniently, for them) into the oceans, and find the apparently intelligent

dolphins? (The dolphins are the same age as the primates, by the way.) A sea-dwelling race would probably take much longer to develop technology, because they generally would have fewer manipulative organs and the range of natural phenomena to which they have access is rather limited. How long would dolphins take to discover fire? To develop chemical fuels? To alloy metals? Visiting aliens would realize this, and might slate Earth for another look a long time in the future—say, not for 20 million years. In that case, these visitors won't be back very soon.

Let's try to imagine just how a probe would work. If the investigators were only interested in societies with at least elementary technical ability, the probe could fly to an interesting system and then wait—drawing its power from the star—until it received a local radio message. It could then repeat this message, aiming its radio beam back at the source. A computer program would establish a common language, once contact was made. This system has the advantage that the probe's radio signal, coming from a nearby orbit, would be much more powerful than a beam from the home planet, which has to cross light years. Thus the planet contacted needn't have very sensitive receivers. As well, one needn't make any assumptions about the wavelength used. The probe would simply respond on whatever wavelength the local signals were using.

Such a repeated playback would undoubtedly attract the attention of the natives. Even now, an interstellar probe may be scanning the region around Sol. It will be rewarded—if that is the word—by soap operas and *Star Trek*. Soon we would receive playbacks. In 1935 Stormer and van der Pol, studying the atmospheric propagation of radio waves, detected several cases of radio echo, many seconds after the original signal. The time lag indicated reflection from an object more than twice as far away as the moon. Since then, nothing to our knowledge has appeared in the scientific literature about this phenomenon.

The underlying idea of Clarke and Kubrik's *2001* is that aliens would leave some sentinel or guidepost which will trigger when man has reached a certain technological level. This seems reasonable, if our visitors wanted to know immediately when we developed. It seems reasonable also that they wouldn't want us to find it and activate the trigger before we were in fact at a technological level high enough to be of interest. *2001*, which is based on an earlier Clarke story, "The Sentinel," had aliens solve this problem by putting the device on the moon. But is that the only suitable spot?

Suppose the aliens were fishlike. They might conclude that the dolphins were the interesting species on Earth. But even if the dolphins developed a high level of technology, traveling on the land would be pretty difficult, flying in the air even more so, etc. The appropriate spot for a sentinel would be on Earth, not on the moon, because dolphins would have as much trouble reaching the moon as we will flying to Alpha Centauri.

Where would they put it, then? Some place with little erosion, far from the oceans, and with small chance of interference by land animals. We can discard places like the Matterhorn and Death Valley, because lately men have walked all over them without any sentinels turning up. Two possibilities seem especially interesting: The Chilean highlands and the interior of Australia. Both of these sites are relatively unexplored even today. Little grows and few animals live there, and these places would be extremely difficult to reach without mechanized transport. If such

aliens have left a message waiting for us anywhere on Earth, it is likely to be here.

It's possible, though, that air-breathing aliens came and decided to bet on the primates. They might have reasoned that a young race with a maturing technology would explore their own planet first, and so left a sentinel somewhere on the ocean floor. The trouble with this is that erosion is high in the oceans; metals corrode or are simply worn away, and the foundations of any object quickly disappear. As well, it is difficult to find anything in the oceans because electromagnetic waves don't propagate far there. If aliens left anything in the sea, they must have been quite sure we would find it relatively soon.

These considerations aside, our moon is the obvious place to put a sentinel. The sentinel would be better off there than in its own orbit around Earth. It would be difficult to ensure stability of such an orbit over tens of thousands of years. Besides, erosion by the solar wind and damage from cosmic rays would be considerable.

The moon is better because a sentinel could be buried, and thus escape being deluged by radiation (just as in *2001*). At the same time it becomes more vulnerable to the occasional geological activity on the moon, and especially to the possibility of destruction by a large incoming meteorite. However, these dangers could be greatly reduced by leaving several widely separated sentinels, making it unlikely that all would be knocked out.

But man has circled the moon and landed on it, and no friendly radio message has come out to greet him. Should we conclude that there isn't any sentinel waiting there? Not necessarily. As we said, the radiation damage to sensitive electronic components on the moon's surface is high. The sentinel would probably be buried at least twenty yards down. Moon dust would shield it from high energy particles, but also from radio transmissions. In order to be useful at all, it might be best for the sentinel to surface an antenna periodically, listen, respond if necessary, and retract otherwise. Unless we were listening when the sentinel's antenna was out, we wouldn't hear anything, of course.

What is a reasonable interval between appearances of the antenna? There's no way to tell. It depends on how much damage the antenna undergoes with each surfacing, and therefore on how long its designers wanted it to last. A frequency of once every century isn't unreasonable, if the aliens had some idea of just how rapidly humanity could advance.

The problem is even more complicated if the sentinel is on the other side of the moon. Our visitors might purposely place it there so that no freak radio contact with an Earthbound station would occur. In that case, contact would be postponed, because most space program plans for the forseeable future involve very little activity on the far side—precisely because of communication difficulties.

So we shouldn't totally give up on the moon—there may be something there yet. And as we've seen, our own back yard (relatively) can still bear some watching. The next fifty years will probably tell the tale, though. By that time we will have explored much more of the earth's surface and vicinity.

We've been supposing that the aliens are content to leave their probe to listen for radio messages. That makes sense if they've been following our progress for the last million years or so and noticed the general trend toward toolmaking. But why would they wait to make contact? Maybe on the strength of a routine survey by an automatic probe, our next-door neighbors (only a few centuries away by ramscoop) decided to

come in person. Is there support for this conjecture?

Probably not. For clear-cut evidence, we need more than vague legends about marvelous, miracle-working beings who live in the sky. Virtually all religions, past and present, require that the gods live beneath the earth or above the clouds. (After all, where else could they live? Over the hill? Then an unbeliever could refute an entire theology in an afternoon's walk.) Recent Soviet ethnologists have conjectured that stories from the Bible are garbled versions of extraterrestrial visits—even that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by an atom bomb. There is absolutely no evidence for any of these ideas.

There is one legend a bit more persuasive than most. It is quoted at length by Carl Sagan (see references). He summarizes: "Sumerian civilization is depicted by the descendants of the Sumerians themselves to be of non-human origin. A succession of strange creatures appears over the course of several generations. Their only apparent purpose is to instruct mankind. Each knows of the mission and accomplishments of his predecessors. When a great inundation threatens the survival of the newly introduced knowledge among men, steps are taken to insure its preservation . . .

"The straightforward nature of this account of contact with superior beings is notable. [The aliens] are described variously as 'animals endowed with reason,' as 'beings,' as 'semi-demons,' and as 'personages'. They are never described as gods."

But in the end, a legend is only a legend. Somewhere the aliens would have left a message for the technologically mature descendents of the Mesopotamian farmers: an account of their mission, how to communicate with them, etc. If we don't find it, here or on the moon, it will mean the supposed contact never happened.

At various times people have come forward with artifacts that they thought were evidence for alien visits. Some have been well-meaning and others outright frauds. A Scotsman thought fused towers in Ireland and Scotland were works of high technology; it turned out they had been fired with peat, a process the Scotsman didn't know about. Etruscan gems were mistakenly taken by some to be gifts from extraterrestrials because they seemed so strange and sophisticated. Amateur archeologists studied Sahara frescoes, saw what they thought were Martians in helmets, and created quite a stir until it was pointed out that the "helmets" were ritual masks well known in the area. "Dr. Gurlt's Cube," a steel parallelepiped found imbedded in an ancient bed of coal, eventually proved to be a fraud.

Surprisingly, there is possible evidence of an extraterrestrial visit during this century. (We exclude flying saucers.) This is the famous Tungus meteorite. On June 30, 1908, an object fell on Siberia, causing a terrible explosion. Trees were flattened for a radius of thirty miles. No crater was found. No remnants of a meteorite ever turned up. Trees at the center of the blast were still standing, indicating an aerial explosion. The energy given off exceeded that of several megaton atom bombs. The sound was deafening, and pressure waves were detected as far away as London.

Some Russian scientists hold that the Tungus "meteorite" was in fact a spaceship whose atomic power source exploded. There are, of course, other theories, explaining the object as a comet or as a meteorite of anti-matter which destroyed itself upon contact with our atmosphere.

Even though this event is relatively recent, it is probable that crucial evidence which could decide the matter has already

vanished. Our own weapons tests have added radioactivity to the Tungus area and the effects of the devastation are fading away. The first scientist did not reach the scene until 1921, and no thorough investigation was launched until 1927. Had political events in Russia been more stable, perhaps we would know more today. But it appears that now we can never be sure.

All through this discussion we've been tacitly assuming the aliens will come to us. But probes are expensive and must undergo the hazards of long flights, even longer waits, and the chances of accidental destruction by alien environments that are by nature unknown to the senders and therefore impossible to anticipate. There is an easier way: radio.

Huge transmitters can send clear signals to stars hundreds of light years away. Our ordinary Earth commercial stations can probably be picked up light years away, using a first class receiver. It isn't vary daring to anticipate that another century of development will enable us to transmit signals to stars within 100 light years, and thus reach neighboring technological civilizations.

The "natural" frequency to use is the 21 centimeter hydrogen line, or some fraction of this wavelength. Most of the galactic space contains hydrogen, which radiates constantly. A radio (or radio telescope) receiving at this frequency picks up continual static. Radio astronomers anywhere in the galaxy will monitor this wavelength, just as we do. If anyone broadcasts messages, this is the right wavelength to use. A series of systematic pulses would stand out against the static like the proverbial neon sign. But could we understand the message without a common language and cultural background?

There are a number of tricks to this, of course. We know that any aliens have something in common with us: physics and inorganic chemistry and mathematics (organic chemistry may be quite another matter!). Once we work out a basic vocabulary, the conversation can proceed to the things we don't have in common: art, philosophy, strange environments, etc.

The initial stages of contact have been well depicted in *The Cassiopeia Affair*, by Choe Zerwick and Harrison Brown. Following a general scheme laid out by others in a series of scientific papers, the authors tell of the reception of a signal from Cassiopeia which has 1681 pulses and spaces interspersed. 1681 is 41 times 41, which suggests laying out a 41-by-41 grid, and, starting in one corner, marking in all squares corresponding to message pulses. The result looks like a large crossword puzzle or an Indian blanket. After a bit of staring, though, one sees that it is really a series of pictures and diagrams. They depict the sun and seven planets of a solar system, list the principle chemical constituents of the senders' ocean, soil and atmosphere, and give the basic chemical equation for photosynthesis.

But we don't have to wait until we can build transmitters—we can just listen in. We have the equipment to do this now, and in fact it's been done. For three months in 1960, an 85-foot radio telescope at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank, West Virginia was trained on Tau Ceti and Epsilon Eridani. It searched for intelligent (i.e., non-random) transmissions near the frequency of atomic hydrogen. These two stars were picked because they resemble Sol and lie within 15 light years of Earth, so signals from them would be much more powerful than those from stars further away.

As the concluding report said, "No signals of extraterrestrial origin were discovered during these preliminary

observations . . . The search was discontinued after these initial efforts because of the need for the telescope in other projects."

There the matter lies. Radio telescopes have been improved a great deal since 1960, but no successor to this first effort, Project Ozma, has been born. Since then research budgets have been cut and radio telescope time has become even more valuable, especially in view of the torrent of astrophysical discoveries (pulsars, quasars, radio stars) that have come from them. It appears that we will have to wait a good while longer before another search of the skies is made.

Even then, a fine irony may await us. Receiving signals is much cheaper than sending them. Suppose all our neighboring communities are having budget problems—or just don't care very much—and are waiting for the other guy to transmit. It would be a strange twist of a joke, but one we would never appreciate.

Probably, though, somewhere a society is footing the bill for a transmitter. Even the most powerful type would be cheaper than sending out probes, unless one knows quite accurately where to send them to find intelligent life. Disdaining space ships as foolish toys, the great civilizations of the Milky Way share profound ideas over a Galactic Radio Network. They might even send instructions (as Fred Hoyle has suggested in *A For Andromeda)* that would enable the recipient to construct specimens of the sender's prople, permitting direct contact between the races.

The existence of the Galactic Radio Network may be the reason we don't seem to have been visited. There must be some explanation, and the Network is the most optimistic one. There are others: that the lifetime of technological societies is tragically short; that by chance we live in a region of the galaxy sparsely populated; or perhaps that the aliens who have come are *really* alien and don't think in what we call a rational way. Perhaps for some inexplicable reason they do not leave sentinels. (One favorite sf idea is that aliens find us too violent and irrational for any form of contact, and so beat a hasty retreat. World history certainly lends this idea some weight.)

Or—to be optimistic again—maybe all the facts aren't in. We haven't explored all this planet yet, or the moon. Perhaps something is waiting for us. If so, there's a good chance it will be found within our lifetimes. If our wait is rewarded, it will certainly have been worthwhile.

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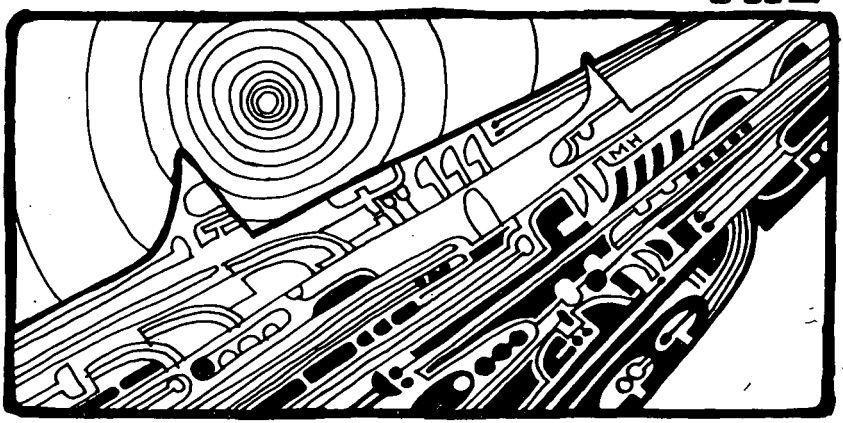
—Greg Benford &
David Book

THE FUTURE in BOOKS



Bob Shaw: THE PALACE OF ETERNITY. Ace Books 65050, New York, 1969, 222 pp., paper, 75¢.

Everybody knows that modern sf lacks sense-of-wonder—please don't ask me to define that word—and there are as many remedies prescribed as there are sf readers. In this book Bob Shaw makes a good stab in the right direction, but doesn't quite carry it off.

His story starts off on an even keel. Tavernor, an extraordinarily competant ex-officer, is uprooted when the Army decides his planet, which had until then been an artists' colony, is the perfect place for their main headquarters. Tavernor slips quickly into the rebel mold, at the same time falling in love with the daughter of the planet's chief administrator. This is a standard plot; we've all been here before. Things seem a bit disjointed, since we never see much of Tavernor's budding romance; several interesting characters, including a child with strange healing powers, establish their roles in the plot and then are hustled away before we get to know them; the military's actions seem more vicious than the men in command would allow; but there is a wealth of background invention to keep us busy and generally the thing holds together.

All this collapses, though, halfway through the book. If maintaining that ol' suspension of disbelief is tough in a fast-moving, jumpy story, it becomes incredibly more so when the philosophical level of the book shifts without warning. This is an occupational hazard of the sense-of-wonder story. And in all justice, once the leap is made, Shaw's action is as interesting and involving as ever. (It would have been even better if Shaw had included more rest spots in his journey, so the reader could catch his breath.)

It's impossible to be more specific about this novel without giving away the kernel of the plot and PALACE OF ETERNITY is too good a book to do that. But to give an idea: Tavernor dies, in the usual sense of the word, halfway along.

Sense of wonder derives from awe at the world, whether the universe examined is natural or supernatural. The underpinning of this book is very well put together and has elements of first-class scientific s-o-w vision. Shaw deals knowledgeably with hydrogen ramscoops, stellar dynamics and

even van Hoerner's tables for lifetimes of civilizations. It is easy to feel awe at the works of man and the beauties of nature if some hint of the incredible order in the universe can be shown. Shaw knows how to do this.

For most sf writers it's far easier to try your luck with the supernatural. This involves transporting your characters to higher and higher levels of meaning, explaining the creation of the universe, God, or anything else handy by some supreme mechanism or event. This is fun, too, but much harder to bring off. Shaw does this rather well, too, but his hard science is more convincing, more emotionally involving, and thus does most of the work in propping up his story.

Bob Shaw has yet to fulfill in his novels the promise he so clearly shows in his short stories. There are fine bits in his novels—funny lines, beautifully visualized alien landscapes—and in this one particularly he has several pieces of unexpected but totally natural and convincing background detail. But he has yet to sustain a theme that uses the resources of the novel—a common failure in sf. He is probably the best short story writer to surface in the 60's; perhaps that will remain his natural medium. ***Palace Of Eternity*** still outclasses the vast bulk of the field.

—Greg Benford

Robert Silverberg (editor), Roger Zelazny and James Blish: THREE FOR TOMORROW. Meredith Press, New York, 1969, 204 pp., hardbound, $5.95.

Once upon a time, science fiction anthologies could be random assemblages of any stories that struck the editor's fancy. These days, however, almost every science fiction anthology published has a unique point of organization for the benefit of those book salesmen, librarians and readers who need virtue written large on the cover of the books they handle. Thus you have collections of the best of the year, or the best of the century, or the best of a series of bests, collections of stories by scientists, or stories by newcomers, stories about time travel, or the moon, or household appliances with secret hatreds. Robert Silverberg, the anonymous editor of this collection, has edited four previous "theme" anthologies of magazine sf for Meredith Press, and this time he has had what appears to be a promising departure. He got Arthur C. Clarke to set a theme and three Hugo Award winners (two Best Novelists and a Most Promising Newcomer of 1956) to write original stories around it.

Clarke's premise was that with increasingly complex technology goes increasing vulnerability to large-scale disaster—an idea used to good minor effect by Clarke himself almost twenty years ago in his short story "Superiority". Considering the authors involved, the room to work they were given, and the breadth of the premise there is no reason why the resulting book should be as mediocre as this one—except perhaps that it is no easy matter to write to order about another man's concern. Two of the authors, Silverberg and Zelazny, barely try. They nod to Clarke, and that is all.

Silverberg's "How It Was When the Past Went Away" is cheap science fiction. It makes the facile substitution of an amnesia-causing drug in the municipal water supply for the LSD of popular myth, develops the idea mechanically, and ends by suggesting that it might not be all that bad, undercutting Clarke's basic point by making it trivial.

Zelazny's "The Eve of RUMOKO" is merely cheap. A private and secret agent—the only man in the whole world without a computer file—provides protection for a project to create new volcanic islands with such nice methods as scalding a man with hot steam: "I apologize for this, but it is necessary." At the end of the story the project goes awry and cracks the dome of an undersea city, killing a long lost love of the hero's, and our superman

thereupon determines to make a successor project an even bigger disaster: ". . . I guess I owe something to the race I leech off of." Not only does the story make nothing of Clarke's theme, it fails totally to examine its own premises. Zelazny should take no pride in it.

Blish's "We All Die Naked" is something else and something better. Without Silverberg's flinching or Zelazny's melodramatics, it examines a real problem of complex technology—garbage disposal—and carries it through to genuine character-killing, world-upheaving disaster. Blish's problem is one of form: as a short story, his story would necessarily be cast as satire; as a novel, it would necessarily examine character and motive; the novella length carries the joke out to thinness but does not allow true in-depth examinations. Nonetheless, the story is the best at this length that I have seen this year.

It may simply be the case that books like this one of stories written-to-order in length and theme are not viable and are automatically doomed. I don't know for certain that it is, but I do intend to try to find out. Robert Silverberg is presently assembling a second such anthology with themes suggested by Isaac Asimov and stories by himself, Harrison, Lafferty and me. If we can do as well as Blish did here, the book will be worth publishing. If not, let it be the last.

—Alexei Panshin

Dave Van Arnam: STARMIND. Ballantine Books 01626, New York, 1969, 216 pages, paper, 75¢.

Certainly *Starmind's* central notion is one of the more intriguing and challenging ideas to be worked over in this field of late. Extrapolating the cornea, bone, kidney, heart and other transplants of recent years, Van Arnam projects the ultimate transplant: the brain. Not that this is so far-fetched a thought either—at the time of the assassination of Robert Kennedy one of the sensational tabloid weeklies suggested that the Senator might have been saved by a brain transplant.

But if this surgery had been effected it would *not* really have saved Kennedy, at least under the generally accepted belief that personality is largely centered in the brain. In case of a brain transplant, the *persona* of the new composite individual would be that of the brain donor, not the body donor.

At any event, Van Arnam's novel deals not with the readjustment of a simple brain transplant patient, but the cobbling-together of the lobes of the brains of *two* accident victims in the skull of a *third* individual, a good-natured moron whose own brain is further damaged in a serious fall. To make adjustment as tough as possible, one lobe-donor is a man, the other is a woman, and surprisingly a major element of the body-donor, the moron (male), remains present through that portion of his middle and lower brain, and nervous system, that are retained in the composite individual.

In short, Van Arnam has set for himself one hellish technical problem, as far as the craft of fiction is concerned. How is he going to portray the experiences of three personalities sharing one body, as they become gradually integrated into a new, single *persona*? It's something to set any writer reeling, whatever his credentials, and Van Arnam's, being confined almost entirely to rather straightforward adventure stories until now, are hardly indicative of a successful solution.

Aside from this central problem of *Starmind*, there is a nice bit of "future history" built into the book. Some decades in our future a series of bacteriological wars have led to a relatively stable world social system, apparently (although not explicitly) with a computer-dominated world

government, a city-based industrial society that is proceeding with all deliberate speed to colonize the solar system and reaching, very tentatively, toward the stars. Simultaneously a large number of drop-outs have reverted to life on agricultural communes, portrayed in *Starmind* as idyllic centers of brotherliness, creativity, music appreciation and drug-mysticism. And in the age of the Woodstock Generation *this* may be less far-fetched than one supposes.

There are other aspects worth commenting upon in *Starmind*. A bad one is the dialogue of the transplant surgeon Dr. Brian and a reporter named Parker, which is not only stilted but so totally wooden as to be embarrassing even to read. (Doesn't Ballantine have an editor who could work with an author to correct such easily-fixed flaws?) A good one is the wise old man Kimmel, a very Jubal Harshaw-like figure who comes across with considerable vividness, although with perhaps a touch of goodness too great to be true.

But the book really belongs to Jailyn, Joe and Benjy, the three personalities who must be integrated in the Starmind, and their experiences together. I said at the outset that this was a dazing technical challenge for a novelist, and I must say that while Van Arnam strives valiantly to meet the challenge, he doesn't quite manage to bring it off. Instead of three personalities struggling to become one, I received the impression through *Starmind* of the host body as a kind of organic robot with three human operators sitting around in a control room (the skull), frequently chatting with one another, and taking turns at pushing the buttons and pulling the levers that make the body work.

A little typographical trick of setting the thoughts of each of the three in a different typeface adds a novel touch to the narration, but the use of uniform type, which would have caused confusion as to whose thoughts are being recorded, might actually have given a greater sense of reality to the sharing and gradual integration of the three. The problems of sexual readjustment of the female Jailyn personality in the male Benjy's body is itself an old literary conundrum, dating back at least to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Thorne Smith's *Turnabout* and revived in the past few years by a number of porno-fantasy novelists. On this score I think Van Arnam holds his own with the competition.

Considered altogether, then, *Starmind* is an uneven performance, almost certainly indicative of ambition outstripping the author's present ability. But Van Arnam's attempt is interesting, instructive to observe. And surely it is better for a growing writer (Van Arnam is only in his thirties with many books and much development ahead of him) to reach high and stretch his muscles, than to reach low and let his talent turn to flab.

—Richard Lupoff

Burt Cole: THE FUNCO FILE. Doubleday, New York, 1969, 282 pp., hardbound, $4.95.

Mr. Cole's novel is an erratic hybrid of a book, imaginatively energetic and appallingly disastrous by turns. At its best it juggles satiric elements with an adroitness that is too perfect to be mere beginner's luck; at its worst it uses these same elements for ostentatious display that wanders away from center-stage completely and forces the plot to limp along after it. Potentially it's an excellent book, but in actuality it's only a mundane one with a few bright moments.

The Machine, the all-controlling government computer, finds itself unable to compute data on four persons who exhibit occult or otherwise 'impossible' powers which are in "direct contravention of the Established Standards and Practices code" (that's E.S.P.). General Rod, the only man in the world who truly understands the Machine, instructs an agent of the F.D.I.

(Federal Deviation Investigation) that these four people must be captured and brought in for trial, then promptly dies as the agent leaves to fulfill his mission.

The story then proceeds with four long chapters detailing the life of each of the four fugitives: Rolf is a young backwoods boy who exhibits a remarkable talent for conjuring up poltergeists; Mr. Kleiber, a nondescript office clerk, suddenly finds his nose empowered to write in the air with indelible blue fire; Djeela-Lal, concubine of Phenh-Tin-Bom's ambassador to America, is an all-around expert who has mastered stranger powers than mere erotica under (if you'll pardon the expression) visiting gurus; and, finally, the "soldier," secretly recruited into the government's M-Group and implanted with preconditioned responses that force him to kill anything that comes within a four-foot radius.

With the F.D.I. hot on the trail of each, the four are coincidentally brought together in a clumsy and contrived sequence where their meeting is ascribed to the "fortunes of the Classical Quest," and they are soon captured and taken before the Machine for a trial in which they are forced to defend the right of their 'deviation' before the cool logic of their non-human judge and jury. The outcome isn't really much of a surprise, though a short epilogue tacks on a chilling anticlimax well-suited to the logical "court" decision. (The Funco File, by the way, is the Machine's storage for data that cannot be processed due to unexplainable elements.)

The histories of the four abnormals are rather long tangents to the slight central plot, yet some of the most entertaining moments fall within their confines. Possibly the best part of the book is the story of Djeela-Lal, whose tendency to fabricate Scheherazade-like tales of implausible action and satiric high comedy brightens many a page. Her love affairs with Fergus Bratt (the ambassador's liason in Washington) and the soldier (in which she must outwit the programmed kill-radius) are lively spoofs that carry a stinging truth of reality. Also, the soldier's story is a good, if vicious, swipe at militarism and capitalization. In contrast, the episodes concerning Rolf and Mr. Kleiber seem dry and plodding, with Rolf's story a downright waste of the book's first 50 or so pages.

Just before the trial, there is a short but exceedingly annoying party scene where all the minor characters are returned to the scene and everyone mouths pretentious explanatory notes—". . . Mr. Kleiber was saying: 'Well, I'll say *one* thing for this crazy party—it winds up a lot of loose ends.' "—that are nothing more than page-filling prattle. The author obviously realizes this (though why he felt he must do it I certainly don't know) as he has General Rod, who really isn't dead after all, say, "I'm afraid we're not getting anywhere." Alas, how true!

And that is really the strangest thing about this novel. At times it *doesn't* get anywhere, while at others it gallops lickety-split along some very interesting byways. Like a recent best seller, one wonders if it wasn't perhaps written by a group of different writers, so varied is its pace and content. As much as I liked certain elements in *The Funco File*, I can only recommend portions of it as worthy of reading . . . which, sadly, isn't much of a recommendation.

—Richard Delap

William A. Darity, Jr.: THE SHADES OF TIME. The William-Frederick Press, New York, 1969. 67 pages, paper, $2.25.

The Shades of Time seems to be a throwback to the days when science fiction was regarded as the pariah of the literary world unsuitable for publication except in the pages of luridly-covered pulp magazines. Science fiction could be published in book form only on those rare occasions when it could be slipped past a wary editor in the guise of being anything

but science fiction.

But those were the days of thirty years ago. Came the late 1940s and the fan-owned houses like Gnome Press, Fantasy Press, Shasta and FPCI began producing hardcovers. By the late 50s the commercial publishers scented a substantial market and moved in, slowly squeezing out most of the fan enterprises, and despite faltering occasionally the major houses are still into science fiction. And of course the boom in paperback SF has been fantastic.

All of these markets, plus of course the dozen or so science fiction and fantasy magazines, and the men's magazines and other publications that publish *some* science fiction and fantasy, absorb a ***huge*** amount of material each year. SF of almost any type and length can find a home, whether it is a short-short vignette or a five-volume epic novel, hard science, sociology, sword-and-sorcery, weird tale or straight fantasy.

Then why does a science fiction author turn to a vanity publisher? The answer in the case of Mr. Darity, I suspect, is the same as it is in almost all vanity publishing cases. An author with high hopes and an unsalable manuscript falls into the clutches of a vanity publisher and in due course finds himself out a fat wad of dollars and stuck with a large stock of unsold books.

The Shades of Time is just such a book. I suspect that it was offered widely and rejected unanimously in the standard markets, and eventually wound up with a vanity publisher. It's a nicely produced book—large paperback size, attractive typography and good paper—but it's simply not of professional quality as a piece of fiction.

The story is fairly standard: in a millenial future humanity has achieved a sort of tranquilized utopia and is slowly stagnating. In the midst of this the long-anticipated mutation to *homo superior* appears; *homo sapiens* attempts to wipe out the mutation rather than be superseded, but he fails and the New Era dawns.

Unfortunately Darity's characters do not live. They are without depth and almost without shape; they all speak a sort of stilted, dehumanized jargon. There is so little filling in of background that the reader is totally unable to feel himself "in" the author's created world.

If Darity were the usual vanity press author—they run very heavily to retired clergymen and schoolteachers—I would think he was hopeless. Actually, the book indicates that he is a high school student, and for a high school student's work, *The Shades of Time* is not really that bad.

Within a few more years—say five or ten—it would not surprise me at all to see Darity writing *and selling* fiction in the standard fiction markets. Provided that he applies himself faithfully to learning his trade, by reading and by writing, writing, writing. I'm afraid, though, that if he persists in attempting to short-cut the often slow and painful process of learning to write, by returning to vanity houses, he will never be more than a vanity author.

—Richard Lupoff

Donald A. Wollheim &. Terry Carr, editors: WORLD'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION 1969. Ace Books, New York, 1969. 380 pp., paper, 95¢.

This is not a book that I would recommend to the uncommitted. It is more a genuine reflection of the state of health of the science fiction short story than a failure on the part of the editors that this is a large trivial book. Almost any collection of last year's sf shorts would inevitably be more of the same, and would probably be less literate and varied.

This year's *World's Best* is a collection of retreads like H. H. Hollis's version of John Collier, Colin Kapp's version of Poul Anderson's "The Sky People" and Fred Saberhagen's version of Orpheus and Eurydice (which alters the original legend in one significant regard: Saberhagen's

Ordell chooses to join his Eury in death while Orpheus retired to Thrace after his tragedy and consoled himself with the company of boys); of short fragments like Fritz Leiber's "The Square Root of Brain" and Kurt Vonnegut's "Welcome to the Monkey House"; of long fragments like Brain Aldiss's "Total Environment" and Samuel Delany's "Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones"; but most of all, of story after story about comic, comic/threatening, or threatening machines like Sheckley's, like Silverberg's, like Knight's, like von Wald's, like Van Scyoc's, like Saberhagen's, like Lafferty's.

The science fiction magazines are few in number, low-paying and conservatively edited. This means that those few good short sf stories written are published in *Playboy*, like "Welcome to the Monkey House" and Damon Knight's "Masks", which is probably the best realized sf short of the year, or turn up in original anthologies like Poul Anderson's "Kyrie", Brian Aldiss's "The Worm That Flies", and Terry Carr's own "The Dance of the Changer and the Three", all three of which come from a single anthology, Joseph Elder's *The Farthest Reaches* (Trident), and which have to be the rest of what passes for cream in this *World's Best*.

The trouble ultimately lies not in the magazines—which are no more to blame than this annual anthology, which has consistently been the best of its kind. The trouble is that the science fiction short story is the limited corner of an extremely large field. It is an almost inherently trivial form used for forty years for the illustration of moralities, for the drawing of fine scientific distinctions, and for the building of psionic sandcastles. There simply seems to be no room left for much beyond restatement or a trivial refinement of the already trivial. There may be a truism here—that science fiction to be good needs careful, extensive and intensive development.

In any case, it is a fact that much of the short science fiction that is left, including several recent prize winners, is either part of a series or is an integral piece of a longer work.

—Alexei Panshin

(Concluded from page 101)

of living color in the chalk-like hypnotic concentration of his visage.

Darce stood at the door, hardly breathing. She could feel the psychic forces at play, between the scientist and the sleeping man in the other room.

Then suddenly there was a shot, and she screamed, dropping the forgotten sandwiches from her hands. Professor Oberton hardly moved, but his whole body seemed to shrink and relax.

He looked up at the girl with a ghastly smile.

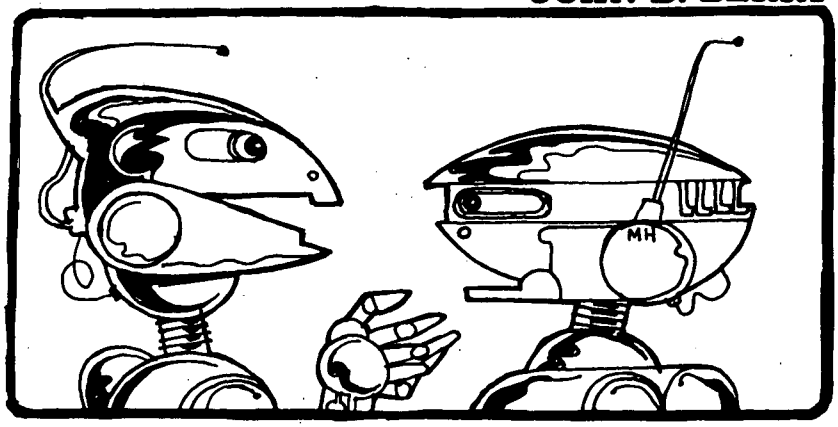
"I knew one thing more than Tearle," he spoke, in a low, weary tone. "That the subconscious mind contains all of man's so-called conscience. I didn't project any antagonistic thoughts against Tearle himself, for that would have awakened him. I simply kept thinking of the munitions president, who had committed suicide because of Tearle. That remorseful thought I projected filled his subconscious mind. It played that strange chord that affects the mysterious strings of conscience."

Darce put her hand to her mouth, to stifle a moan of horror, waiting for the professor to go on.

"And so, Tearle just shot himself through the head," finished the scientist with a pitying note in his voice, "—in utter remorse over that crime."

THE END

JOHN D. BERRY



* THE CLUBHOUSE

CHECKPOINT #-3, July, 1969; 15¢ or 4/50¢ (35¢ airmail, 3/$1); irregular, from Peter Roberts, 87 West Town Lane, Bristol, BS4 5 DZ, ENGLAND; 10 and 8 pp., respectively, mimeographed.

CHECKPOINT is simply a reviewzine—that is, it consists entirely of reviews of other fanzines. The reviews in these two issues are all by the editor, but evidently there are occasionally guest-reviewers. Peter Roberts is a young English fan, one of the very few active, talented fans left in the barren wasteland that was once British fandom, but he carries the torch very well. His reviews are excellent, well-thought-out, and (always the supreme judge) generally agree with my own views. Peter is remarkably adept at dealing with some of the more idiotic flights of fancy of some fans and bringing them back down to earth—a rare talent among young fans, especially in England.

He divides his reviews up by country, and he certainly seems to get many more Continental fanzines that I: it's particularly interesting to see how he deals simultaneously with fanzines from widely-disparate fandoms, each of whom is often quite provincial in its viewpoint (and I don't except American fandom from this). The reviews are all lengthy—half a page appears to be the minimum—and it's joy to see one more fan undertake the production of some competent, indepth fanzine reviews (a field that's been left exclusively in the past year or two to Greg Benford in QUIP and Arnie Katz's occasional column in ODD).

CHECKPOINT is, I believe, supposedly published frequently, but these two issues are dated a week apart, and I haven't seen one since. You might still try, though, and perhaps Peter will be stimulated to do some more. *Recommended.*

HAVERINGS #40, July/Aug., 1969; 2/3 (try 25¢) or 6/$1; bimonthly, from Ethel Lindsay, Courage House, 6 Langley Ave., Surbiton, Surrey, ENGLAND (American agent: Andrew Porter, 55 Pineapple St., Apt. 3-J, Brooklyn, NY 11201); 10 pp., mimeographed.

Since this is also an all-fanzine review fanzine, it seems appropriate to review it just after CHECKPOINT. Ethel has been in the reviewing game a lot longer than Peter Roberts, but she has never claimed that

what she writes are anything more than 'comments" on the fanzines she receives. HAVERINGS is essentially a letter-substitute to the faneditors, and a fairly good checklist of current fanzines with addresses and a short description. It's almost always interesting to read, but somehow no matter how much space she gives to each fanzine, she always seems to pass over them briefly. She is not as insightful a reviewer as Peter; she often merely projects her own outlook on fandom onto the fans whose zines she reviews, rather than understanding their different outlooks. Nevertheless, HAVERINGS is entertaining and useful, and Ethel is one of the few older fans left in English fandom. *Recommended.*

GRILS #2, Fall, 1969; 40¢ (although they'd prefer letters of comment); irregular, from Joyce Fisher, 4404 Forest Park, St. Louis, Mo. 63108, co-edited by Pam Janisch and Sue Robinson; 30 pp., mimeographed.

The first issue of this fanzine was called WHAT ABOUT US GRILS?, but with the second issue the editors have shortened it to GRILS (thank God). It continues to be an extremely entertaining fanzine; the emphasis is on fandom itself, and the touch is very light. The editors have managed to corral a distinguished set of contributors this issue: Robert Bloch and Bob Tucker are both virtually Elder Ghods of fannish humor, and Arnie Katz, while a much newer fan, is nevertheless well-established in the field as a very good writer.

The gem of the issue is Bloch's "Oldies But Goodies," an amusing bit of time-binding in which he skims lightly over his memories from all the sf conventions he's been to. Bloch hasn't been writing much for fanzines in recent years, but it's good to see that his touch has not been lost. I hope he'll become more active in the future.

Bob Tucker's piece is quite different. He has contributed only occasionally in recent years too, but unfortunately his article here, "The Shape of Things in the Mail," doesn't live up to his best standards. The opening remarks on Great Big Fanzines echo my own comments on this subject in the last "Club House," and they're ironic and to the point. The bulk of the article, though, consists of a phone conversation that's supposed to be tremendously funny, but it's only mildly amusing. There are a few good lines, but on the whole it wasn't imaginative enough and was probably too long. It wasn't a *bad* article, certainly, but it seemed much too long for what was essentially a pretty minor idea; Tucker can do much better.

Arnie Katz's saga of "The Trufannish Collating Girl," which was taken from a real-life fact and then expanded and exaggerated to humorous effect, also suffers a bit from being carried out a bit too long. It's quite well done, though, and it captures the feel of fannish mythology. It's only serious fault rests in its very character— it has very little to do with the central happenings of fandom today; it's rather isolated and perhaps not even of interest to those not imbued with a sense of fannishness and fan history. This is a problem that seems to permeate GRILS; except for a few incidental remarks in the Bloch and Tucker articles, the whole thing could have been produced just as easily five years ago, or five years from now, with just a few names and dates changed. This isn't necessarily a fault when taken in moderation, but GRILS could definitely use more topically-directed fannishness and humor.

Two of the editors, Joyce and Sue, have editorial columns in this issue; both of them relate anecdotes of something amusing that's happened to them. Joyce's is particularly interesting, since she conveys some feel for the fanzine as a whole as well as telling an amusing story. Pam did not write an editorial this time, because she devoted too much effort to the cartoons that illustrate the issue. Pam is a wonderful cartoonist, who seems to have sprung full-

blown onto the fannish scene. She turned out some particularly fine illos for Arnie's article, but all of the articles have cartoons accompanying them that actually illustrate them, rather than simply decorating them.

The issue is rounded out with a few short fanzine reviews that are nice but could stand a little less simple listing of the contents, and a brief lettercolumn. The letters are disappointingly few, but I think this impression is abetted by the way they are chopped down to the bone. If they were edited a bit more loosely, they would seem more like a real lettercolumn. *Highly Recommended.*

THE SCARR #200, Sept., 1969; free for letters, fanzines, etc.; irregular, from George L. Charters, 3 Lancaster Ave., Bangor, NORTHERN IRELAND; 12 pp., mimeographed.

Actually, that's #18; George prefers to number his fanzine using a base-3 system. That's indicative of the quality of wonderful oddity about THE SCARR. It's a very idiosyncratic fanzine, filled mainly with all sorts of strange and often highly amusing things that George has dug up here and there. He has a remarkable penchant for reading uproariously bad science fiction, which he reports on in full detail. This issue he forgoes this pleasure to include a particularly unlikely assortment of tidbits, ranging from an account of early motoring from a 1902 HARPER'S to a description of a (non-sf) book by Amanda McKittrick Ros, all of whose main characters seem to have in common a reverent admiration for one John Davis, D.D., of Third Ballynahinch Presbyterian Church. It's that kind of fanzine.

THE SCARR is unfortunately the only general-circulation fanzine currently coming out of that singularly-talented corner of the world called "Irish Fandom" these days. While it never approaches the heights attained by the renowned Irish fanzines of the past, such as HYPHEN or RETRIBUTION, you still find an occasional hold-over from earlier times, such as the interlineations scattered through the zine that would have been worthy of a HYPHEN back cover. ("That's a lovely cake—did you buy it yourself?" or "It's not as good as I expected, but then I never thought it would be.") And sometimes George manages to persuade some of the other members of Irish Fandom to wipe the cobwebs off their typewriters and contribute something new. *Recommended.*

GRANFALLOON #7, Oct., 1969; 60¢, 2/$1, or 5/$2; irregular, from Linda Eyster Bushyager, 5620 Darlington Rd., Pittsburgh, Pa. 15217; 52 pp., mimeographed.

This has an atmosphere that's representative of a lot of the new fanzines of the last couple of years. It's hard to pin down, but it's different from earlier fanzines. For several years, fandom was so fragmented that only the older fans and a very few neos knew anything of the camaraderie and fannishness that had been evident in fanzines of the late fifties, and since few of the new faneditors had ever read any older fanzines, they had no idea of the quality of work that had gone before. They praised to the skies material that would have ranked as mediocre at best in one of the heydays of fandom. Since late 1967, though, fandom has been in another boom period. A whole new generation of fans sprang up, fans who embraced fannishness and were eager to see the legendary old fanzines. (Fanzines have such small circulations that after a few years there just aren't that many copies left, and they're mostly stored away in various fans' collections, so it's hard for a new fan to get

his hands on the fine older fanzines.) But they didn't really know much about their enthusiasm, and so they set out to create their own fannishness.

GRANFALLOON fits firmly into this group, as a fanzine that is in many ways fannish but which has very little contact with the past. There's a reveling in the ghods of today's fandom that is only slightly tempered by a historical sense. Admittedly, GRANFALLOON suffers from this a great deal less than a lot of newer fanzines; Linda can certainly not be accused of lacking contacts with the past when she asks both Bob Tucker and Robert Silverberg in the same issue to write accounts of their early days in fandom. There's still some evidence of a parochial viewpoint, though, in the praising of some current fanzines that really aren't very good, as if they were the very best.

Despite this cavil, GRANFALLOON is a pretty decent fanzine. It has a nice atmosphere, and it usually features at least a couple of good articles each issue. This issue is surprisingly thin on content, when you consider how many pages it has. Most of the zine is reviews. There's a 16-page column of reviews of the prozines in 1968, which is only of specialized interest and probably shouldn't have taken up so much space. There's a five-page column of book reviews. (Both columns are by Richard Delap, whose reviewing, it seems to me, leaves something to be desired. His reviews are always quite well written, but they are not notable for the insights that he gives into the books under question.) There's a short, juvenile batch of "satirical" fanzine reviews by the pseudonymous "Jesus Cummings," which is not only a cheap form of humor, but is also pervaded by an unnecessary feeling of viciousness. And finally, there's a long article by Piers Anthony in which he adopts Dick Geis's dialogue-style of reviewing (two characters carrying on a combination discussion and insult-session about whatever they're reviewing) to consider Geis's sex novel, *Ravished.*

Anthony's article is fairly interesting, although he gets a bit carried away with creating supposedly-funny dialogue and sometimes forgets to review the book, but this article leads directly into the most interesting part of the issue, which is the lettercolumn. Linda sent a copy of Anthony's article to Geis, and Dick replied to it in an articletter that is particularly good because he lets down his image as Dick Geis, Secret Master of Fandom, and talks seriously for a while. Then, later, we find Piers Anthony again, this time replying to Richard Delap's reviews of Anthony's *Sos the Rope* and *Omnivore* in the last issue. Anthony exhibits a common tendency to go on about himself at a bit too much length, but he gives considerable insight into what he intended in each of these two novels, and in the process he fairly talks about Delap as a reviewer. Again Linda sent a copy to the person under question, so we have Delap's reply in the same issue; he does a good job of defending himself and gives us some idea of what it's like from the reviewer's end. There are also a couple of extraneous letters, but that's the meat of the issue.

GRANFALLOON has always sported some very nice artwork—nothing spectacular, usually, but good. This issue there are the usual spot illos throughout, some quite good, some only mediocre, but there's also a portfolio of full-page drawings by Michael Gilbert. These are not his best work, but they do point up both the good and the bad parts of Gilbert's work. They are well done, in a pen-&-ink style reminiscent of Jack Gaughan and really quite attractive. They also seem to exhibit a great deal of imagination, until you begin to notice that they all seem to come from

similar mental images. There's a distinct sameness to them; after a while it gets boring to see another illustration of "Incident in the streets with the guards of Lord Harkness that started the revolution on Tau Ceti 4." (The same themes seem to pervade most of the art that Gilbert has had published in other fanzines in recent months.) I wonder if they all look the same because they all *do* illustrate portions of a fantasy world that Gilbert has in mind—in which case my criticism is invalid—or if they really do exhibit a failure of imagination. It would be hard to tell.

GRANFALLOON is, on the whole, not a great fanzine, but a nice one; a little bit of very good material, a little good cheer, and a fair dash of whimsy. *Interesting.*

Other Fanzines:

It's about time for me to remind you that the fanzines in this list are not necessarily poorer than those reviewed at length; they simply, for one reason or another, didn't spark any detailed comments.

The fanzines prefaced by an asterisk (*7) are particularly recommended.

*SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW #32-3, Aug. & Oct., 1969; 50¢; six-weekly, from Richard E. Geis, P.O. Box 3116, Santa Monica, Calif. 90403; 52 pp. each, mimeographed. One of *the* leading fanzines.

*LOCUS #37-42, Sept.-Oct.-Nov., 1969; 6/$1, 12/$3; biweekly, from Charlie & Marsha Brown, 2078 Anthony Ave., Bronx, NY 10457; 10 pp. each (exept #37, which was 22 pp.), including inserts, mimeographed. The most active fannish newszine.

MOEBUIS TRIP #2, Nov., 1969; 35¢, 3/$1, 6/$2; bimonthly, from Edward G. Connor, 1805 N. Gale, Peoria, Ill. 61604; 28 pp., mimeographed.

RETURN TO WONDER #6, Sept.-Oct., 1969; 35¢; bimonthly, from Stephen Riley, 18 Norman Dr., Framingham, Mass. 07101, with co-editor Ernest E. Black; 64 pp., mimeographed.

*L'ANGE JACQUE #4, Aug., 1969; 35¢; irregular, from Ed Reed, 668 Westover Rd., Stamford, Conn. 06902; 62 pp., spirit duplicated.

THE WSFA JOURNAL #68, Aug.-Sept., 1969; 50¢ this issue, normally 3/$1.10, 6/$2, 10/$3; bimonthly, from Donald L. Miller, 12315 Judson Rd., Wheaton, Md. 20906; 46 pp., mimeographed. A news-and-review fanzine; the official publication of the Washington Science Fiction Association.

ASH-WING #4, Sept., 1969; no price listed; three times a year, from Frank Denton, 14654 8th Ave., SW, Seattle, Wash. 98166; 44 pp., mimeographed.

MYTHLORE #4, Oct., 1969; 65¢ or 4/$2.50; quarterly, from Glen GoodKnight, 6117 Woodward Ave., Maywood, Calif. 90270; 62 pp., mimeographed. Published by The Mythopoeic Society.

SF COMMENTARY #4-5, July & Aug., 1969; 40¢ or 9/$3 Australian (no checks); irregular, from Bruce R. Gillespie, P.O. Box 30, Bacchus Marsh, Victoria 3340, AUSTRALIA: 72 & 46 pp., respectively, mimeographed.

OMNIFAN #3, Winter, 1969; 50¢ or 4/$1.80; irregular, from Dave Kraft, St. Michael, North Dakota 58370; 36 half-size pp., offset.

*ID #5, Fall, 1969; 50¢; from James Reuss, 304 South Belt West, Belleville, Ill. 62221; 36 pp., mimeographed. The last issue, unfortunately.

CRABAPPLE #8, Fall, 1969; 1/-; irregular, from Mary Reed, 5 Park Close, Longmeadow, Stevenage, Herts., ENGLAND; 38 pp., mimeographed.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 133)

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 85)

Then there was the opposite sex. There were girls in the dens—but in dens of their own. We boys knew about girls, told jokes and stories about them, sniggered about them, long before we had any idea of what we were talking about. Some of the older boys boasted about the girls they'd known. Their stories were flamboyant lies, and I'd realized that at the time. Our only real contact with the female race was our den mother—and the older boys would snort behind their cupped hands whenever we had a den mother under the age of forty, remarking on her legs, her breasts, or whatever might be her outstanding characteristic.

They introduced us to Girls when we were twelve. We attended formal social gatherings which followed a ritualistic plan the origins and sense of which were both long lost in antiquity. The girls hated it, and so did we.

Then we were transferred, at thirteen, to mixed dens, given a sex education and sterility shots, and left to cope for our own with our peers. I remained a loner.

It seemed to me then—as it still does—that we were herded together like animals to breed with each other, that we were supposed to act out some ancient rutting rite for the vicarious benefit of our supervisors (we didn't have den mothers by then). We had rooms—tiny cubicles, really—of our own, and were assured privacy. I never tested it. I never invited a girl into my room. I never invited a boy, either. It was *my* room—my own room. I kept it that way. And then, suddenly, before I was quite aware of it, the other boys had learned something, some sort of behavior, which I had not and which I didn't understand. There was this shared knowledge, this knowing way, they had. And the girls seemed to have it too. It formed a barrier, and I found myself on the outside. That bothered me, but less because it excluded me than simply because it represented a mystery I couldn't plumb.

The year I graduated the den I met a girl. Her name was Vivianne. We both had cubicles in a Public Building. Mine was tiny because I insisted on living alone; she shared hers with three other girls. I was nineteen. She was a little older.

We saw each other in the halls. She was pretty, and she stirred up an ache in me. I started making a point of running into her on her way in or out of the building. Soon we were going places together, doing simple, banal things together. I dreamed about her all the time. I thought of marrying her.

One night she stayed in my aptroom, and initiated me into the mysteries of sex. It was thoroughly unpleasant. She was impatient with me, with my clumsiness. When I told her I'd never done it before, she laughed at me. She didn't believe me. She instructed me in the mechanics, and we both professed our satisfaction with the coupling, but I never tried to see her again. I changed aptrooms and buildings the next day. And the day after that I took the tests for a job with the Bureau.

It was a spiraling trap. I could see that now. I'd never been close to other people. Through the years I'd picked up the veneer of experience; I became adept at the so-called social graces. But they only widened the gap. I distrusted other people.

I sat in that darkened room for many hours. A great many thoughts ran through my head. Most were old and familiar. But many required fresh examination. I stood a few on their heads and observed them critically. For so much of my life I'd acted upon unspoken assumptions. It was time to speak them and see if they still held up.

Too many of them did not.

When I rose from the cushion my legs were stiff and numbed and my mind felt much the same. I went to a window and pulled back its heavy drapes. It was the same window from which I'd peered on my first trip to this house. The light was pale and yellow and the hour was late. I glanced at my chronometer, but it still said 15:52; it was still broken.

I felt exhausted, and yet oddly stronger. I hadn't put all the pieces together yet, but I knew now that they all fit. Locked in my head was a vast jigsaw puzzle. I'd never tried to work it this way before. It was comforting—genuinely comforting—to know that it *could* be worked.

I'd made my decision.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

IT WAS A simple ceremony. "We place no great value on ritual for the sake of ritual," Bjonn said. "That which we do is meaningful in its own right. It is as simple and as important as a lovers' kiss."

The simile was appropriate, I discovered.

I sat in the center of a circle of people. We were in the chapel once more, and it was again only dimly lit. Among those grouped around me were faces I knew: Lora, Jim Benford, Bjonn, Dian, Tucker, Ditmas; and others which I recognized as having seen here before, but whom I did not yet know. There was a solemnity to the occasion, but at the same time a certain warmth and cheerfulness. These people were *together* in a way still alien to me, and still a little frightening. As I waited, the last vestiges of the old arguments fought against the new:

This is outside my experience; it frightens me.

Nonsense. You've been conjuring up demons and monsters. but these people are offering to share paradise with you.

Paradise? What sort of paradise can they offer me? Curious, but still fearful.

The paradise of self-realization. The paradise of being a whole man.

Is it? Or is it a delusion of wholeness given to a puppet on mental strings?

Don't be afraid; they won't take anything away from you. They only add to what you've got. Judge for yourself.

Well, that's why I'm here.

"We're here today to celebrate life," Bjonn said. He spoke conversationally; he didn't orate. He addressed the entire circle of which he was a part. And he spoke to me. I felt the attention of the circle focus on me. It was an uncomfortable feeling. I felt pinned down.

"Life is so precious," Bjonn said. "We are given only a finite slice of it, and when it is gone we are finished. Yet, so many of us try to ignore this fact as we let our lives slip heedlessly through our fingers.

"We're here to celebrate life," he said again, "but in celebrating life we must also celebrate death. The two are one, the *yin* and *yang* of existence. We must all die. Only when we can accept this can we fully utilize our lives.

"We're here to celebrate the life and the death of Tad Dameron, who sits in the center of our circle. He has passed through a third of his life—perhaps only a quarter" (he smiled) "—and he has made many mistakes with it. These are not for us to dwell upon. He comes to us now to celebrate the Sacrament of Life with us, to join with us in the life that precedes death. He comes to receive his *arapad,* that which will catalyze his life into joy and self-realization. Who will offer him his *arapad?*"

I recognized the question to be more than idle. Once before someone had made that offer, and I had spurned it in blind panic. Who would make the offer this time? I felt

myself tensing. I wanted to twist around and scan the faces behind me. But I did not.

"I will," Dian said softly. She was on my far right, just within the periphery of my vision.

"How do you choose to make your offer?" Bjonn asked.

A pink flush spread across her face and she hesitated for a moment. "By the Kiss," she said.

I flicked my eyes back to Bjonn, to find his own staring directly at me. I couldn't make out his expression. "Very well," he said, "come forward, please."

Dian knelt in front of me and reached out her hands to take mine. Her body blocked Bjonn from my sight, and I wondered if that had been deliberate. I felt suddenly shy and embarrassed, as if about to perform some very intimate act before strangers, and she seemed to sense it. "It's all right," she whispered. Our eyes locked. It seemed to me then that she had never been more beautiful; she looked so beautiful that I wanted to cry.

She tugged me up onto my knees, and then drew my head down to meet hers. There was something asexual but very personal, very tender in her actions. I had never kissed Dian. I had exchanged mutual oral kisses with very few women in my life. It had always seemed far more intimate than genital coupling.

Our lips met. It was as if a charge of built-up static electricity was exchanged between us on that first contact. Her lips were full and very soft. They trembled slightly against mine. Then they parted. Hesitantly, I opened my own.

Something probed between my lips and against my teeth, and I thought it was her tongue. I thrust forward my own to meet it and brushed instead against—*it.*

The alien parasite. The dead-white blob of living jelly. The ***arapad.***

I could not help the shudder that passed through my body. My tongue recoiled. I started to clench my teeth. Dian squeezed my hands in her own, her nails biting into my flesh. Her eyes blazed at me.

This was my last chance. There would be no recourse if I turned down the wrong path now.

A zombi, controlled by an alien puppet-master?

—Or a free man?

Which?

I could only place my trust in my intuition. Sometimes I had read its signals wrong, but it was the only part of myself I completely trusted—perhaps the only thing I'd ever really trusted.

I forced my teeth apart, made my mouth open and receptive. And tensed myself as something at once warm and cool, slickly slimy and furry-dry thrust a questing pseudopod into my mouth.

It seemed to balk for a moment, as if sensing it might not be welcome. Then, so quickly I could not follow its movements inside me, it *inflowed,* like sudden liquid.

I felt its weight pass over the base of my tongue and I began gagging, but then it seemed to melt and disappear. I couldn't breathe for a moment, and then I could, as though through cold-stuffed sinuses. A heaviness weighed at my face, spreading across under my cheeks and disappearing. Then all sensation of strangeness was gone, as if it had never been. There was not even an aftertaste in my mouth.

Dian slowly relinquished her kiss and leaned back on her heels. Her expression was soft and caring, and it seemed to me she hadn't really wanted our kiss to end just yet. The pressure of her lips still lingered on mine, and I wanted to taste my lips with my tongue, but I refrained.

"Is—that all?" I asked. "I don't really feel any . . . different . . ."

She smiled. "It takes a while. Come! Join our circle now!"

They made a place for me and I found myself sitting between Dian and an older woman I didn't know. We all linked hands.

"I touch you and I am touched by you," Bjonn said. Lora was sitting next to him and she repeated it. Benford, next to her, repeated the statement. Each person said the words, and with each repetition they sounded sillier and more meaningless. And so it passed around the circle to the woman on my left. "I touch you and I am touched by you," she told me. I felt awkward and strangely embarrassed. I felt no different than I had before. Nothing seemed to have happened to me. I was unchanged. I was still an outsider, a loner. It made me feel at once melancholy and cynical.

But when that woman—a stranger to me, someone I had never met before—when she said the words it seemed as if they took on meaning for the first time since Bjonn had said them. They became literal. She touched me. Her hand held my hand. Her fingers were coarsened by age and labor. The back of her hand was veined, its skin a little loose. Her grasp was firm, warm and dry. Her touch seemed to communicate in that moment her words. She touched me. And was she also touched by me? Did my return of her hand-clasp communicate something of me to her? Was it something more than just the linkage of two body-shell appendages? Was there something of *me* in my hand's grip?

An alcoholic tingle seemed to be moving over my body. I felt a rush of blood to my capillaries. It heightened the sensations in my fingers, in my fingertips.

I turned to Dian. "I—touch you," I said, feeling the warm, gentle caress of her clasp. And in that moment a shell seemed to burst open in many marvelous colors inside my head. I stared at her, dumbfounded. Suddenly it seemed I could *see* her as I had never seen her before. She radiated beauty. Her soul shone through her face like golden sunshine. And linked with her I realized the presence of another—a moon to her sun, silver to her gold—twin to mine own. Her ***arapad***. A shining presence, alien but beautiful too, in its own right. "And," I said, "I am touched by you." It was at that moment a gross understatement. I was overwhelmed by her.

Her smile was a shivering tinkle of windchimes. Her eyes were pure and loving. Her hand told me it was true, all of it, all true.

My *arapad* was starting to acquaint me with reality.

"They're not true parasites, you know," Bjonn told me later. "Rather, they are symbiotes. They give as much—maybe more—as they receive. And, as you've now learned, the ***arapad*** has no consciousness. It doesn't 'think' at all. They have only one function, and that is to stay alive. In order to do this, they require a host body. An ***arapad*** can live outside his host only in a dormant condition. It dehydrates, forms an outer shell of dead matter, and continues to dehydrate until, ultimately, it is reduced to a sort of spore. If it is ingested by any living creature of cellular complexity, it reverses the process."

"Is the ***arapad*** then a single-celled creature?" I asked.

"Yes and no," Bjonn said, smiling a little. "It appears to be made up of a cooperative of cells, each serving a different function, each capable of producing the others to complement it if separated from them. However, the entire ***arapad*** is capable of cellular fusion, at which time the entire organism, umm, ***mixes*** its cells—they flow together to form one uni-cell—and then fissions, dividing into two organisms, each of which returns to the multi-cellular

condition. In any case, it is a very simple creature; an 'adult' *arapad*, weighing almost two ounces, contains only six cells. Most of the weight is in water, of course."

They appear to be native to Farhome, he said. They lived in conjunction with the native animals. One of the original colonists had killed a native animal and cooked and eaten it. His child, a boy of three, had taken a scrap of raw meat to chew on. It contained a section of broken-off ganglion from an *arapad*. The child had grown his own, and then, when it fissioned, given *arapads* to his friends. The adults were shocked when they discovered the *arapads*' existence, but quickly became convinced of their beneficence.

"As I was saying, an *arapad* wants to stay alive. In order to do this, it requires a healthy host body. And an *arapad* is willing to do all it can to maintain the upkeep on that host body.

"It *polices* your body. It clears out the hostile bacteria and viruses. It accelerates the healing process—it can 'read' the DNA information in your cells and recreate damaged parts. That's what happened to Ditmas, you know."

"Doesn't that all but bestow immortality upon a host?" I asked. I was recalling Bjonn's sermon on life and death.

"Apparently not. The *arapad* is immortal. I suppose the original mutant creature that became the first *arapad* is still around as a component of all the ones we have—they are all by-products of it by fission. But while the *arapad* can lick a lot of the so-called diseases of 'old age,' it can't stop the aging process itself. Or, if it can, we haven't yet found the way to tell it to. We live long and healthy lives, Tad, but we're still human. We still die at the end."

"I understood we *do* have some conscious control over them," I objected.

"Well, again, yes and no. The *arapad* allows us certain degrees of conscious control over ourselves. It allows us to function more optimally. It functions in some senses as a second nervous system. It gives us much better control over our emotions, for instance. As you yourself must realize, our mental states are intimately influenced by the chemical nature of our brains. Minute chemical changes can have profound results. That's the basis of the last several centuries of drug therapy. The *arapad* 'reads' from our genetic heritage the proper chemical balances, and restores them. That's automatic. But one of the things we learn to do in our group sessions is to work *with* the *arapad* so that we can ourselves by conscious will effect those changes in balance. We also learn to control other aspects of our hormonal system and our metabolism. But in many senses this is gilding the lily—tampering with perfect health. Let the *arapad* alone and it will uncripple you in mind and body. To ask more is to be arrogant." He smiled. ". . . But also human."

The first twenty-four hours were full of unfolding wonder for me. I felt as if my eyes had always been covered with filmlike filters, and now the films had been removed . . . as if my ears had been plugged with wax, and the wax had been taken out . . . as if my nose had been permanently burdened with the effects of a low-grade viral infection that had deadened my sense of smell—an event Bjonn assured me was quite likely—and that this too was now gone. Colors seemed bright and vivid, deeper and richer, their interplay more subtle and complex. I saw hues and shades I'd never noticed before. Bjonn had an art object which looked like a square of brown until one examined it more closely. Then the reds and oranges, purples and greens appeared, delicate traceries, subtlety among

subtleties. One could dwell upon it for hours of discovery.

The wood of the old house seemed to whisper to me, while its scents told age-old stories. I found myself running my fingers over things, tracing their contours, their curves. Dian had something she called her "feelie," an abstract sculpture of compound and complex curves, folded into and upon itself, which she offered to my touch. I was on a jag, a voyage of discovery through my own senses. Someone brought in a leaf from outside and gave it to me. It was a maple leaf, tattered, a faded gold, already musty from its communion with the soil. It occupied me for two hours.

I didn't sleep at all during those first twenty-four hours. It didn't seem to be necessary. "Sleep is often the refuge of the copeless," Benford told me with a grin. "Things look bad, so you cop out, you escape into sleep, hoping everything will be better by the time you wake up. People sleep a lot more than most of them need to." That rang the bell of truth.

I couldn't be bothered with sleep. I'd been asleep all my life and I'd just awakened. The world was my toy and I wanted to experience every bit of it.

But finally I returned to the room on the top floor and lay down on the bed. I'd been enjoying all my exterior senses; now it was time to go inside and see what it was like in there.

At first I noticed my breathing. The pattern seemed self-conscious, rigid. I broke it into a relaxed syncopation. That amused me, and I laughed to myself. Something gurgled in my intestines. At first I tensed against the pang, and then I let it go, let myself relax again, while I followed the progress of the bubble of gas.

I'd eaten real food that day. The meal had been another engrossing experience. I'd broken my anal compulsion too—divorced the need for evacuation from the process of eating. It had been so easy it amazed me—it still amazed me. The gas bubble seemed to be backtracking. I felt it against my diaphragm, and then it was working up my throat and I burped, lightly. That too amused me.

I let my mind drift, setting it free to wander through my body as it would. I followed my heartbeat, calm, firm, steady, so very competent and assured, and then the rushing of my blood outwards through my arteries. Gradually I entered a state of waking sleep, a state in which I was still conscious, but quiescent, my conscious mind somehow linked with and not contesting my unconscious mind. My breathing had slowed, my heartbeat was coasting; my body was more completely relaxed than it had been since I was a small baby. I was admiring myself. *You've messed yourself up some, but on the whole, you've got yourself a proud piece of goods.* I even felt a little smug.

The door to the room inched cautiously open. I didn't bother to open my eyes in confirmation. Her step was friendly.

I heard her approach the bed, and then her breath was warm and lightly scented upon my face. I pursed my lips and parted them a little as hers brushed against them in a delicate kiss. It seemed to me then that I was being born again, that I had learned at last a new function for my lips beyond those of grasping at a meal tube, or framing unpleasant words to spew forth. I sensed the thousand nerve-endings in the surface of my lips as one erotic instrument. I returned her kiss.

She was leaning over me and I raised my arms to caress her skin with my fingertips. She wore no clothes. That was fine; neither did I.

Her own fingertips traced a delicate pattern down my chest, embroidered a

filigree around my nipples that sent sensuous chills through me. I ran my fingers down her spine so lightly that I touched no skin—only the fine feathery down above her skin. A long shudder undulated through her and then she was sprawling upon me in a full embrace.

We made love that night—a real and genuine love. It lasted a long time, long and slow in the buildup, long in the coupling, and towering in its climax, ascending from plateau to plateau before at last the thunder and lightning struck. And then we lay together, silent, touching and being touched, for a time longer yet.

When the first rays of sunlight peered through the window I kissed her nose and murmured, "Thank you, Dian. I love you." And then fell into exhausted sleep.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

DITMAS AND TUCKER drove down to Bay Complex with me. I felt euphoric; it seemed we'd all been transformed from shallow shells of people into solid substance. The old friction, the old manipulative game-playing was gone.

"You know," I told Tucker after we'd settled into our adjacent seats on the HST, "I really pulled some pretty bad stunts on you, didn't I?"

He nodded. "You did, at that," he chuckled. "How do you feel about them now?"

"How do *you* feel about them?"

"Well," he said, deliberately lapsing into his old cornpone drawl, "I reckon if you could take me, I could take you. Let's not worry about it any more. We're two people who were sick for a long time. Now we're on the mend."

"I thought you were stringing on half the girls in the office," I said. "I deliberately chased those girls just to give you a hard time."

"You were right, too," he said. "You *did* give me a hard time. But it was nothing like what I was doing to my wife."

"Oh," I said. "You know, I've never met your wife."

"The problem is," he said, "neither have I."

I knew what he meant.

"Thing is, now I have to start all over," Tucker continued. "Bjonn's been instructing me so that I can create the Sacrament of Life myself. I'm taking a vacation from the Bureau—it doesn't need me that badly now, anyway; we've got *arapads* through all the higher echelons, and the filtering-down process will go right on without me—and I think it's time Fern and I had a second honeymoon. I'm looking forward to it."

"Tucker," I said, "how old are you?"

"Old enough to be your father, son, and that's a fact."

Tears came unbidden to my eyes. *Old enough to be my father*—and he'd lived over half his life in darkness.

I changed the subject. "You know," I said, "only one thing still puzzles me."

"What's that?"

"Why did you devote so much attention to me? I mean, here I was, running around making a paranoic fool of myself—but why care about a crummy Level Seven agent? What difference did it make? Couldn't you have assumed I'd wake up some day by myself?"

"That's a hard question, Tad," he said. "I'm not sure in my own mind about that. You were a sore point with me—before, I mean. I had only daughters, you know—no sons. In a way I tried to make a son out of you. But you, damn your soul, you were so ornery with me, it was like you *wanted* to stay inside that sick box of yours, no matter

how hard I tried to jolt you out of it. Not, of course, that I knew what I was doing at the time. But I've thought about it some, since. I *liked* you; that was the problem. You were smart, you had a lot going for you, up here—" he tapped his forehead— "more than you seemed to realize. But stubborn—! You had your horns locked on that Deep Space thing so badly it threw you every time.

"I wanted to kick you so hard, you wouldn't believe it! I wanted to rub your nose in the miserable failure you were making of yourself and say, 'You're making a mess, boy; clean yourself up.' I tried. But of course I went at it all wrong."

"You mean, you really wanted me to jump out of that whole rut I was in?"

"Sure I did. That's why I kept harping on it. I figured sooner or later you'd get so mad that you'd prove you could do it, just to spite me."

I smiled, ruefully. "It didn't work quite that way." I didn't have to state the obvious, now: my sickness had run a lot deeper than that.

When we disembarked in Megayork, I found myself looking around me with fresh eyes, my attention divided between the griminess of the megacity—an unpleasant contrast to the countryside above Cloverdale, I discovered—and the throngs of people surrounding me. As before, when we'd entered Bay Complex, I found myself searching faces for the signs . . . for the awareness that signalled the presence of an *arapad*. I felt like the new inductee in a secret and exclusive fraternity, looking for the Secret Handclasp, the tell-tale tunic-pin. It was a little childish of me, but it was also a harmless amusement—and while my fellow hosts were far from ubiquitous in the milling crowds, I sighted several. Usually we exchanged knowing smiles, then pressed on about our own business.

"Some of the people who have taken *arapads*," Bjonn had told me, earlier "are not aware of their origin, or of their real meaning. This is inevitable when something like this begins to grow. It quickly outgrows the bonds of easy communication. I'm told that over five billion people in New Africa now have *arapads*—yet, I know of none of them myself. That's why we started up the Church of the Brotherhood of Life. Those who have *arapads* will recognize us when they encounter us—and we're establishing many branches now wherever we can find hospitable settings—and this is our way of letting them know about us."

"But what do they really need your Church for?" I'd asked.

"The *arapad* confers good health upon its host," Bjonn told me. "But it does so in an ethical, moral vacuum. And it doesn't volunteer any information about its conscious uses. We evolved our knowledge in Farhome over three generations, by trial and error. We haven't filled the tape yet, but we do know a good deal. More than you've learned yet, I might add, although you've done well for yourself, Tad. Our Church exists as a sanctuary for this accumulated knowledge and experience. It offers a moral, an ethical framework, a structure for the symbiosis between *arapad* and human. Not everyone will need us. But most could profit from us. What we offer is not religious dogma. We offer insights, truths, and methods for self-realization. There's mental health—and there's mental health. An *arapad* cleans up an unbalanced brain; it doesn't attack the old memories or the ingrained compulsions. That one must do for himself. And we can help. We exist, as a Church, to help."

"What's your ultimate goal, Bjonn?" I'd asked, finally. "Why did you really bring the *arapads* to Earth?"

"I'm an altruist, I guess," he'd said.

"Earth is a vast planetary slum—and so unnecessarily so. Man has always had it within his technological power to change things for the better. But he's lacked the will, the common drive towards that goal. Man has been crippled, all his life on this planet. And he's been poisoning his world with his own sickness.

"It is such a terrible tragedy. And it was almost repeated on Farhome, you know. If we hadn't discovered the *arapads*, well . . . we're only human. We'd have eventually despoiled another planet."

"The *arapads* will turn Earth into a utopia?"

"No. *Man* will have to do that, if he wants it done. But the *arapad* is a handy lever for starting things rolling in that direction. You know it yourself, Tad. Compare yourself, *now*, with the person you were, *then*. You tell me which way the balance has shifted."

"Hello, Mother," I said. "I've brought you a gift."

She looked harried and unhappy and not at all pleased to see me. I wasn't surprised; I hadn't exactly left her with pleasant memories of me.

"What *happened* to you?" she asked, rising from the couch to approach me. "You missed all your appointments for the last, ohh, two weeks at *least*. Did you just set them up in order to break them? Is that what you had in mind all along? A way to punish your mother? Every single one of those appointments—do you know how I felt, wondering if you'd show up each time, wondering what you'd say, how you'd explain yourself? I left time open for you, and every appointment you missed was time I could have been seeing someone else, if I hadn't made an appointment for you, time I could have been working—"

"Mother, please," I said. "Calm down, and sit down. I'm sorry I broke those appointments, but it was unavoidable. Anyway, I've—"

"*Unavoidable*." Her lip curled. "Of *course* it was. And you couldn't call your mother—your own *mother*—to *tell* her about it!"

"Mother, I was in Geneva, and then on the West Coast and then the Moon—"

"I suppose they don't have infomats any of those places—?"

"Sit down and be quiet!" I said. It was interesting to discover I was still capable of anger. "Listen to yourself! Is that any way to talk to a patient?"

"You're not my patient; you're my son," she said.

"That's right," I said. "I am. You might think about that, too."

"I'm—sorry."

"I came to tell you that I wouldn't be needing to see you any more," I said. "At least not in your professional capacity. And I brought you a goodbye present."

Her eyes sharpened a little. "I can see you've changed," she said. "And I'm glad to see that. But what's this goodbye business?"

"I'm going on a trip," I said. I didn't elaborate. "Before I go, though, I need the answer to one question from you."

"What is it?" she asked, a little tremulously.

I eased myself down into the couch opposite hers. It felt good to relax in, and I smiled at her. "Relax," I said. "I'm not going to eat you." Her eyes widened, and I realized that she really was afraid of me. Why? Old guilts? Or did my presence seem somehow threatening to her?

"You said you had a question?"

"Yes. What happened to my father?"

A veil seemed to fall over her face. "He left me. I told you that."

"Yes, but where did he go? What did he do?"

"Is it important, now, at this late date?"

"Yes," I said, firmly, "it is important to me, now. Please tell me."

"He went into space," she said.

The final piece of the jigsaw puzzle fitted itself into place. Suddenly I felt completely whole.

Captain David Dameron took *The Searcher* out when I was eight. It was a hundred-twenty year round trip. I remembered now the lean face with sandpaper cheeks that bent down to me and told me goodbye, that long, long day ago.

My den mother had called me out to one of the offices which was off-limits for us kids, and there a man with dark eyebrows and a long nose looked down at me and smiled hesitantly.

"Daddy!" I cried. "You're taking me home!"

The smile had gone as if suddenly erased. "No," he said, shaking his head. "I wish I could, Taddy, but I'm going away."

I'd stopped dead and stared at him, feeling hurt and bewildered. I'd lived each day as though it might be my last in the hated den; I'd dreamed each night of returning home the next day. I ached with homesickness. I missed the comfort and security of my parents more than I could comprehend.

"Where are you going?" I'd asked.

"Deep space," he'd said, and his eyes seemed already far away. "I've got command of *The Searcher,* and we're going out a long way, son."

"Take me with you," I begged.

Again, the wistful smile. "Wish I could, son. But I can't. I just can't."

"I'll wait for you. When are you coming back?"

He shook his head. "Too long," he said. "A long, long time from now."

"When I'm grown up?"

"After that . . .?"

"One hundred and twenty years, Taddy; one hundred and twenty years at least. You'd be a hundred and twenty-eight."

He didn't have to say it, and I hadn't wanted to. *After you're dead, son. I'm going away and I won't be coming back until after you're dead.*

It was as if he'd struck me. Tears blinded my eyes and I turned and ran heedlessly out the door of the room. It was the last time I'd ever seen my father.

"I thought you remembered," my mother said. "You were so hipped on space—they used to tell me about you, you know, for a while; I had a friend in Den Administration—wasn't that why?"

"Yes," I said. "And no."

Yes, it explained my frantic drive to follow my father. And perhaps it also explained why, alone of the seven Feinberg Drive ships, *The Searcher* remained completely unrepresented in my collection of childhood trivia.

I remembered now that I had dried my tears and told my fellow denmates that my father was commanding a starship. They'd laughed at me with all the innate cruelty of children who envied me that precious intangible possession. They ridiculed me, and called me a liar, and in their blind fashion they'd stripped my last defense from the face of my tragedy. They took from me even my pride in my father's position.

I killed my father that night. That was the night I knew at last that I'd never go home again. I burned my father's memory and buried it with dry sobs and when at last I fell asleep it was to the lonely knowledge that I had finally been abandoned and lost.

I made my mother a parting gift: an *arapad.* I told her how to contact the local branch of the Church of the Brotherhood of Life—it was in northern Maine, only a few hours away—and wished her luck. She needed it, I felt. I hoped things would improve for her now—and I was reasonably certain they would. She had fallen into her

own box, and clutched it closed around her for all these many years. She was of Tucker's generation, and his lesson was hers: *it's never too late.*

I half wished I could stick around, just to be there for her. But of course I couldn't.

I've been taping this on and off over the last few weeks, while on my free time and during those rare moments when Dian has not commanded my attention. I've been busy learning a lot of new skills, for which, fortunately, the shipboard library is well-stocked.

I've tried to make this an honest chronicle—not because anyone requires it of me (no one else but Dian knows I've been taping it), but because I demand it of myself. You might say I've been laying the past to rest. I've tried to recreate the self I was during each point, each episode I've related. It hasn't been difficult in the recall—I have fine tuning on my memories, thank you!—but there are parts I don't like to tell. It's easy to stand outside my old self and point the finger of judgement at him: he was a shallow, conceited, deeply neurotic fool. That much is obvious. But he is also *me*. For all of my *arapad*-assisted growth, I am still Tad Dameron. Different, and yet the same. It is as Bjonn said: I was very sick, but I can't avoid the responsibility for what I did. I must face it, acknowledge it, accept it, and be done with it. My actions of the past are set; they are milestones . . . but not, I hope, millstones.

Now that I am making the great crossing between the stars, I wonder what it was that once so fascinated me about this voyage. My anticipations were so shallow, so meaningless. And yet, so compulsive. They blinded me and they obsessed me. Had I followed them into space then, I should have missed it all.

It's better this way. Dian and I are making the return trip to Farhome aboard the *Longhaul II*. Officially, we are to be Earth's representatives on the new world. Off the record, we are new colonists. We've been going through the library for holograms and recordings of Farhome, and the more we see of it the more it enchants us. Green and open, rolling hills and abundant nature . . . this is a world where man has a second chance. This time we know enough to avoid the ecological pitfalls. This time we hope to find a niche of co-existence.

Somehow, I have the feeling that's what the *arapads* are all about: they're Farhome's ecological insurance policy, paid in full. The Furies will never come to this new world of ours—and perhaps some day they'll be banished from the old world too.

I hope so. That's what we're dedicating our lives toward.

—Ted White

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 122)

NAPALM #6, Nov., 1969; 15¢; irregular, from Wally Conger, Route 1, Box 450-A, Arroyo Grande, Calif. 93420; 10 pp., mimeographed. A small fanzine of "opinion and argument."

KALKI #11, Summer, 1969; 4/$5; irregular, from Paul Spencer, 665 Lotus Ave., Oradell, NJ 07649; 36 pp., offset. Published by The James Branch Cabell Society.

GORE CREATURES #16, Sept., 1969; 30¢ this issue, in the future 35¢; irregular, from Gary Svehla, 5906 Kavon Ave., Baltimore, Md. 21206; 20 pp., offset. Primarily concerned with horror films.

BEABOHEMA #6, Oct., 1969; 60¢ or 4/$2; irregular, from Frank Lunney, 212 Juniper St., Quakertown, Pa. 18951; 106 pp., mimeographed. Thick, lively, with a tendency toward mediocrity but an increasing amount of good material.

—John D. Berry

Fanzines for review should be sent directly to John D. Berry, 35 Dusenberry Rd., Bronxville, N.Y., 10708

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

date. Judging from the royalty statements I have seen, the average sf paperback sells only 20,000 to 40,000 copies in its first month on sale—and many sell only that many in their first *year*. Which is to say that if paperbacks could be sold for only the period of one month, without the possibility of redisplay or later reissue, they would be unable to compete with the magazines.

4. The actual quality of a magazine's contents (even assuming everyone agreed on that quality—which rarely happens) does not always determine its sales. Distribution plays a very important part—as I detailed in my November, 1969 editorial. So do other factors, such as being a part of the Curtis subscription plan or one of the others used by high schools in their fund-raising drives. Furthermore, many of these subscriptions are sold at such a low rate that they show a loss—or at least no profits. Subscriptions of this nature are important in the publication of any magazine which supports itself by advertising, since advertising rates, as well as the magazine's attractiveness to advertisers, will be determined by the total circulation figures. Advertisements subsidize "give-away" subscriptions. (For example, a subscription-service company offers *TIME* Magazine at 11¢ a copy, while the same copy sells on the newsstand for 50¢. Out of that 11¢ the company which sells the subscription keeps a share—several cents, one would assume—for its own expense and profits. Since the magazine probably costs over 25¢ a copy to produce—perhaps much more, in fact—the publisher suffers a dead loss on every copy sold to a subscriber through the subscription company. But since the advertisements pay the real cost of producing the magazine, the publisher ends up making money. This is the reason both *COLLIERS* and *THE SATURDAY EVENING POST* folded while their circulation was still in the millions: the advertisers deserted them, and suddenly those millions of copies were millstones around their respective necks.)

However, sf magazines—like all all-fiction magazines—have never been able to attract any real advertising subsidy, and must depend upon actual sales for their income.

5. Most, if not all, sf magazines make slim profits when they show any at all. Their publishers, with few exceptions, are marginal businesses. Every so often a publisher will decide he can swim upstream, and launch a magazine. Since the odds are stacked heavily against the success of any new sf magazine (distributors are loathe to even accept them), this will account for the high failure-rate among new titles. Sometimes a publisher with other, more successful (non-sf), titles will carry a marginal title or a slight money-loser for tax-loss reasons, or because folding the title (and refunding several thousand subscriptions) would be more expensive than continuing it. But if the magazine shows real losses for any continued period of time, the publisher will drop or sell it.

6. Certainly "money will make money" in this field as well as any other. The top-selling sf magazine at present is *ANALOG*, which also has the largest budget (both the editor and his contributors are paid considerably more than those of any other sf magazine). No doubt if an enterprising publisher with *lots* of money and a long-term point of view (a Hugh Heffner, say) were to enter our field and spend his money both lavishly and wisely, he could succeed in creating a magazine with high standards that would return modest profits. But it would not be another *PLAYBOY*—he couldn't get rich from it—and other investments would not only be a more certain guarantee of success, but return a higher rate of profits. Too many publishers,

however, have taken a look at the sf field and decided it made too chancy an investment. One such publisher once told me, "I'd have to be a little crazy, Ted—or love the field as much as you do . . . which I don't."

And therein lies the basic problem. In this era of high-powered slick-paper non-fiction magazines, we—the sf field—are something of a backwater eddy. As readers of fiction, we—all of us who read sf—are in a distinct minority. (Most people who read fiction at all read only best sellers; the minority who read mysteries or westerns, however, are also greater in number than us. And most of the people in this country do not even read fiction, if they read at all. If you doubt this, contrast sales figures for the best selling books with the actual population of this country.) The fact that our magazines have survived for as long as they have (the average age of the six I mentioned above is 29 years) is an indication of their remarkable vigor. Alone of all the pulp all-fiction magazines, the sf magazines have survived in number. (The other survivors? *ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE*—never properly a pulp since it was launched in the early forties as a digest-sized magazine; *MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE*, and *ZANE GREY WESTERN*, a recent revival by the same publisher. Although the venerable hard-boiled pulp, *BLACK MASK*, survives on the masthead of *EQMM*, none of the actual pulp magazines outside the sf field actually survived.) Those who claim the sf magazines are anachronisms point to this fact as proof of their stand—we have survived beyond our time, they say. But it would be equally true to point out that we alone have proven *able* to survive, which should indeed prove up our viability.

(It would be untrue to say of the pulps that their content is no longer viable; the copious reprints in paperback form of the Doc Savage, Shadow, Captain Future, and now Spider novels is proof of their ability to claim new audiences.)

The sad fact is, we, the magazines, are fighting what sometimes appears to be a losing battle against outside forces. The first was television, which wiped out our economic support, the pulp-chain publisher. (Most sf magazines were never put together like the other chain-edited pulps, but since they were published on a common schedule, shared common advertising, and existed as part of a larger economic unit, they were able to draw support when needed from the other pulps.) The second was the birth of the original paperback novel, edited by ex-pulp editors, to the same high standards of pace and adventure (the first was Gold Medal), only a few years after television became commonplace. The third was the exit, in the mid-fifties, of the American News Company from the field of newsstand distribution. Up till then, every locality was serviced by two competing distributors, American News and an Independent company. After American News bowed out, the other company assumed—and has kept—a virtual monopoly, which has allowed these local distributors to dictate their own terms to publishers and has, owing to lack of competition, led to a laxness in actual newsstand distribution. One single distributor, in fact, actually killed four prominant sf titles in the late fifties. None of these factors has had any direct effect upon the quality of sf published in the magazines, or upon its lack of quality (except inasmuch as budgets have remained low due to poor sales, better writers have sometimes turned elsewhere), but they have hurt the field. They have presented obstacles against which we must struggle in addition to our individual drives to improve our own

magazines.

The average word-rate paid by the sf magazines (excluding *ANALOG*) is two to three cents a word. For the most part, the paperback publishers pay no better. A 60,000-word novel most commonly (now) brings an advance of $1,500, which is 2½¢ a word. Only a few years ago, the standard was $1,000 to $1,200, or 2¢ a word or less. It is probable that within the next few years it will go up to $2,000, or something only a little over 3¢ a word. So there is not that much economic incentive for writers to desert the magazines in favor of books—especially if they prefer to write in shorter lengths. Even the recent increase in "original anthologies" in paperback form doesn't do much to shift this balance; since the number is still few, and they are issued quarterly or less often. (I might add that their common lack of personality, due to the absence in most cases of editorial introductions, blurbs, or any other departmental features, creates in me at least a sense of drab bleakness which the sometimes high quality of their stories cannot entirely overcome.)

To return to this magazine, and its own role in the foregoing, I have stated before that our budget is small, and the fact is that I am, indeed, doing most of my editorial work in my "spare time," since I continue to work as a "full-time" writer. (Sometimes these roles are confused or reversed, however, and I find myself looking for the spare time in which to write, after putting in "full time" on these magazines.) However, the job I have been doing has created a remarkable amount of enthusiasm among both you, as readers, and various professionals of my acquaintance. For instance, both Jeff Jones and Gray Morrow, in addition to returning to magazine illustration from more lucrative areas, more or less at my behest, are now also doing new cover paintings for us. Last month's issue of FANTASTIC was the first to sport a new cover—by Jeff Jones—and upcoming issues of both magazines will have covers by Jones, Morrow, and Pederson, whose new painting adorns this issue.

We are also joined, this issue, by Alan Shaw, who becomes our new Assistant Editor, and will take the load of proof-reading off my shoulders. I hope it doesn't wear him down too quickly.

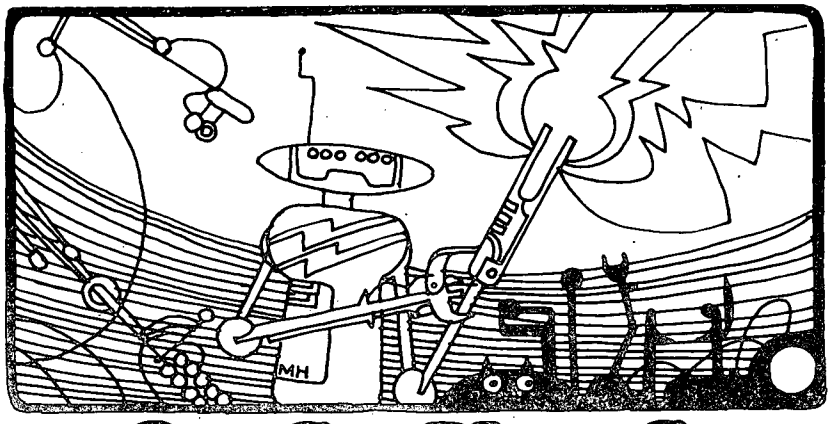
And, next issue, we will begin a new novel, "Orn," by Piers Anthony. To be published in book form as *Paleo*, "Orn" is the 87,000-word sequel to Anthony's *Omnivore*, and is one of the most compelling novels about a non-human, I think, since Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey." Piers informed me he was quite pleased with our presentation of his "Hasan," in FANTASTIC, and has, in giving us "Orn," added his enthusiasm for the magazines to that which others have pledged us.

I certainly hope that the continued improvements all these people are bringing to the magazines will lead to a healthier economic future as well, since in the long run—to return to those gritty economic factors—our survival will depend upon increased sales. And if these are forthcoming, you can be sure that AMAZING and FANTASTIC will continue to grow and improve in reward to you for your patronage.

—Ted White

NEXT ISSUE

"Orn," Piers Anthony's blockbuster of a new novel, plus "Invasion of Privacy" by Bob Shaw, and "We Know Who We Are" by Robert Silverberg!



...Or So You Say

Letters intended for publication should be addressed to OR SO YOU SAY, c/o P.O. Box 73, Brooklyn, N.Y., 11232.

Dear Ted:

I hope you will print this in the next AMAZING, for it is inspired by Sam Bellotto's letter in your last issue. Sam's remarks are often intemperate and ill-conceived, and I do not at all care to have my name appended to them to (apparently) add weight to them. I may often be intemperate myself—but then my opinions are fully mine!

Of the two stories of mine Sam has published, one was not strong enough to sell to the pro magazines and the other was conceptually too strange even to bother to market. I do not care to have either of them compared and judged equal to my professional short stories, as Sam seems to do. I thought them good enough to send to an editor publishing rather higher than usual quality amateur fiction; it is not reasonable to consider PERIHELION a professional magazine at this time (if Sam can improve it and make it one, all the more power to him)

I wish to publicly state that I find such namecalling as appeared in Sam's letter more than juvenile. To attack you or John Berry as "cavemen," "idiots," or to imply that you, Ted, are some kind of right-wing nut (as Sam does by linking your opinions to "communist-flouridation-plots" type thinking) is irrational and sad. I further wonder where Sam gets the idea that you are a Second Foundationist and a space-opera nut with narrow-minded tastes. I can't imagine he has read any of your editorials, fan work, or your own fiction. If he had, he would recognize you as a moderate (as far as the old-wave/new-wave controversy goes), of which the field could presently use more.

The review of PERIHELION was a review of a product. Sam's reply was sadly a personal attack. From what contact I have had with Sam, I find him usually intelligent and ambitious. If he is willing to learn from solid criticism, he will take PERIHELION much further than if he sticks to his present opinions and refuses to change in any way.

Finally, it was nice to see John J. Pierce writing a more reasonable letter (but why does he still have to cling to that absurd

"Second Foundation/liason officer" stuff?) than is his usual style—and to see a more reasonable editorial reply than is usual among the people who have to answer him. AMAZING is worth the cover price for its features alone.

Dean R. Koontz
Harrisburg, Pa., 17109

Robert E. Toomey Jr. also wrote to protest the use of his name in affiliation with PERIHELION and to disavow any association with the sentiments expressed in Sam Bellotto, Jr.'s letter. One hopes that Sam will indeed have what it takes to learn from this experience, and that our future contacts with him will be less abrasive. —TW

Dear Mr. White:

Having been at St. Louiscon, you will remember the tremendous furor over Harlan's having tried to get excess funds from the Masquerade Ball debacle assigned to the Clarion State College Writer's Workshop.

(The exact sequence of events was this: a costumed fan competing in the masquerade accidentally fell against and ripped a huge movie screen. Harlan Ellison announced that the mishap might cost the convention several hundred dollars, and asked for donations from those in attendance. Several hundred fans rushed forward to give a dollar or more from their pockets in what must rank among the most open acts of generosity fandom has witnessed. The sum collected was around the neighborhood of five hundred dollars. Immediately, speculation arose over the dispensation of funds in excess of those needed to repair the screen. The following night, in his role as Toastmaster of the Convention Banquet, Ellison announced that any excess funds should go to Clarion. The point was contested by a majority of those present, in one of the most unpleasant and embarrassing scenes I have ever witnessed. The general feeling was that Harlan, in promoting Clarion (which he also did in the Convention Program Book) was pushing a private interest of his own. The money had been donated by the fans to the convention committee, and had been intended to be used solely for that purpose. The eventual solution, after much bitterness and hassling, was to set up a Trust Fund, under Joe L. Hensley's administration, to be used in emergencies by future convention committees. The convention, in turn, donated a handsome sum to Clarion after its own financial success was known to be assured. —TW)

I was there as the representative of that workshop, and was sorely pained by what happened. However, after the Banquet, I was pleased to find there were a large number of people interested in it. I sat up till four in the morning (with the fiercest headache ever, outside an Excederin commercial) talking with a host of people.

So what am I getting at? Just this: Clarion is the only place where persons interested in writing science fiction and fantasy can actually study the trade under acknowledged masters in the field. And I was wondering if one of your magazines might not be interested in carrying a brief article about the Workshop, informing the would-be writers among your readers what it is all about, how it is run, whom by, and so forth.

At the con, Bob Silverberg told Harlan and I he could not openly support the workshop because he did not believe writing could be taught. Talent cannot, we'll all agree. But if you begin with talented people and teach what *can* be taught (mechanics, style, etc.), you get tremendous results.

The Workshop has thus far received little publicity. As a result, the classes have been small. There have been 22 full-time

students in the two years since its inception. Let me quote you a few statistics on those 22 people.

Thus far, 15 have made sales to professional markets, to: *Again Dangerous Visions, New Dimensions, Infinity I, F&SF, IF, GALAXY, NEW WORLDS, Generation I & II, SWANK, ADAM, KNIGHT, AVANTE GARDE, FANTASTIC, VISION, Starship '69,* and others.

There have been, at last count, 23 short stories, two novels, two TV scripts, one play, several articles, two songs, "about 25 poems," and an "Indian Pageant" sold by workshop students. At least three of those students are now full-time, self-supporting writers. One man has sold ten stories in less than three months. Impressive statistics? I think so. Harlan tells me that of all the people he has taught at the University of Colorado Workshop (mainstream), a massively sized thing, only two have ever sold anything.

Hoping you will be interested, and luck with continued improvements to your magazines,

Glen Cook
4255 Tholozan Ave.
St. Louis, Mo., 63116

Since we're already a bit crowded with non-fiction material, Glen, I'm printing your letter in lieu of your proposed article. I hope it will gain you some response. However, my private opinions are closer to Silverberg's than to yours—or to Harlan's. Like Harlan, I've taught at mundane Writers' Conferences, and, like Harlan again, I am aware of how few of those who attend will ever sell professionally. Writers' Conferences are, for the most part, joined by a regular following of their own: people who like to talk about writing, but rarely do much about it. A writer's workshop is something else, however. One can occur whenever and wherever a group of striving writers and would-be writers wants one. For instance, I can point to one in which I was myself a member. Other members included Terry Carr, Bill Meyers, Alexei Panshin, Lee Hoffman, and Dave Van Arnam. Two books were written and sold as a direct result of the workshop, and it influenced and boosted our repective careers enormously. But the point is, we *brought our own enthusiasm and desire to write to that workshop, where inspiration more or less cross-polinated. I gather much the same has happened at Clarion. The difference is simply that we didn't wait for someone to organize and fund a teaching apparatus.*

What it boils down to, in the end, is not what someone tells you about writing—no matter how pertinant his advice—but your willingness to sit down and write, *working through your own shortcomings in the process. If Clarion provides your motivation, fine. But it is far from the only source available, and the best is locked within you. —TW*

Dear Mr. White:

The lettercol is becoming the best non-fiction in AMAZING. Sam Bellotto, Jr.'s letter makes PERIHELION sound like *the* up-and-coming prozine. I do not think it is. It does not, to my mind, represent the new wave at all (I despise the term "new wave", but I use it here for convenience); as a fanzine (sorry, Mr. Bellotto, but I really do think it is a fanzine) it tends to represent the old wave far more than the new. Also, saying that AMAZING is worried about competition is absurd. The prozine editors have enough of an interest in stf to encourage competition in order to help the market.

Concerning Pierce: He proves (without meaning to) that the new wave does not exist far more than Harlan Ellison does in his book introductions. Pierce says, "The

romantic, expansive traditions of science fiction . . . will be saved by the Roger Zelaznys and the Ursula LeGuins, not the Lin Carters . . ." Pierce may think that Lin Carter is new wave, but he is probably alone in that, and many think that LeGuin is new wave! The fact that nobody can agree on what the new wave is tends to disprove its existence.

Regarding Joseph Napolitano's letter: I think that most writers write primarily for an audience of one. Robert Sheckley recently said that he was not going to write anything that bored him, because if it bored him, it would bore the readers. I think that that premise is true. If the author is not absorbed in what he is writing, he is likely to turn out hackwork. An author will be most interesting if he believes and is interested in what he is writing. From that viewpoint, it can be said that the author's most important audience is himself.

Alex Krislov
3694 Strandhill
Shaker Heights, Ohio, 44122

Of course you are right; it's a matter of semantic interpretation. An author must please himself as he writes. He must please an editor to be published, and he must please a significant group of readers if he is to develop any kind of following for his stories. —TW

Dear Mr. White,

First I would like to explain why this letter is in ink on lined paper— I don't have the funds for a typewriter at present. I am also a high school senior who is considering writing science fiction because I am a great fan of the s-f genre. So, in completing the prologue or my reason for submitting this letter, I would like to know, in your own personal criticism, sir, what you think of this idea for a science fiction story—

1 What if the two Martian moons, Phobos and Deimos, turn out to be starships, from another star system (say Aalpha Centauri).

2. What if the people established a permanent colony in Earth's Mesozoic Age, on an artificial island in the Atlantic. The island breaks up in 4,000 B.C. and, as a result, the legend of Atlantis is formed.

3. Suppose escaped animals from this island caused the Centaur, Gryphon, and Medusa legends.

4. And now, suppose the people of Phobos and Deimos are the source of the pagan god legends and UFOs of passing centuries.

Just suppose if such a story was written, do you think it would be accepted or rejected, Mr. White?

David Shank
30 East Laurel St.
Lawrence, Mass., 01843

I get queries of this nature every so often, David, so it is as a service for both yourself and others who might also write that I am puslishing and replying to your letter here. To begin with, most editors will not consider manuscripts which are handwritten. (And I admit that I prefer typed letters, as well, although I don't insist upon that point.) This is a point of common sense; an editor must read an enormous quantity of manuscripts, and most of us already have weak eyes. Likewise, should a story be purchased, it must be readable for the copyeditor, and typesetter. Most typesetters refuse hand-written copy. As for your story idea, it is a common misconception that stories are sold on the basis of their idea alone. This is not true. Your idea, for instance, is hardly new, and runs counter to much which we now know to be true (such as the location of "Atlantis"). However, if a good writer brought fresh insight to these ideas in his handling, characterization, etc., it might easily sell. If you wish to write science

fiction professionally, your first task is to learn to write fiction: *to put together good prose narrative and credible dialogue. Once you can manipulate these basic tools, then you will be ready to consider specific ideas for sf stories. . . . And, you might check with Glen Cook about the Clarion Workshop, too. —TW*

Dear Ted,

I must commend you on your general letter column policy. By now, it must be obvious that AMAZING has the only real lettercolumn in any current prozine. *(You might check FANTASTIC, Jerry. —TW)* *ANALOG*'s letters comment almost entirely on the science in the stories (and articles), and the few opinions printed also agree with the editor's opinions. I wrote to *ANALOG* concerning John J. Pierce's call to "Holy War," as I'm sure did many fans and pros, not to mention the less-involved readers. Yet no letters have been printed opposing Pierce's book-burning tract, while at least one has supported it. And I think we can all agree that *IF*'s question-and-answer column, run on the same juvenile level as the rest of the magazine, bears little resemblence to what we know as a letter column. But the latest issue of AMAZING contains five full pages of letters and answers, and a majority of these either disagree with you or the magazine or attack you in some way. I'm sure you could have just as easily printed only praising or agreeing letters, but as you and I know (as as *IF* and *ANALOG* obviously do not) this serves no purpose. This practive alone, even if not coming in addition to many other new features, would be highly commendable.

I must say I'm amazed at Sam Bellotto's heated attack on you and John Berry in his letter. Sam and I have had a very friendly relationship for a few years now, and I've sympathized with his efforts with PERIHELION. I can understand his disappointment at receiving a poor review (although I think the issue reviewed was pretty mediocre), and his desire to correct the few errors present. But this angry Piercian diatribe seems to be completely uncalled for.

Jerry Lapidus
54 Clearview Drive
Pittsford, N.Y., 14534

Dear Ted:

I learned today that L'ANGE JACQUE #3 had been reviewed in the November issue of AMAZING (I presume by John D. Berry). This arouses several questions in me. Firstly, why was I not told that I was to be reviewed and/or given a copy? Secondly, no permission was asked. Now, I don't particularly mind this time however if circumstances had been different (as they are with my 4th ish) then I certainly would have not wished my name and address to reach 50,000 people. By the way, I had been wondering why, for the last three weeks I'd been getting close to one request a day for L'ANGE JACQUE and several had mentioned #3—which was out in April. Today I got one which finally answered this question by mentioning your magazine's review. I imagine that (at least) almost 20 is an excellent response to something like this, isn't it? I guess this feature is working.

I don't read AMAZING (and as I imagine you know this is something hard to tell an editor) because I've tried a copy every six months or so and altho' improving it still hasn't aroused my interests (neither do *IF* or *ANALOG* or, generally, *GALAXY* any more) and so I did not see the November ish. Do you have a copy I could have and might I make a few suggestions?:

1) Notify the fan ed. of the review (if you want you can do this early enough to cut a review if he says so)

2) Send a copy to the fan ed. if he wishes

3) Ask the fan ed. to number the responses that probably came from the review. In, say, the next month.

I wish you the best of luck with your magazine, and will try the next copy out to see how much you're improved.

Ed Reed
668 Westover Rd.
Stamford, Conn., 06902

If seems to me, Ed, that you're presuming a bit much. I'm sure John thought the copy of your fanzine you sent him was to be reviewed, since the bulk of fanzine editors are quite pleased to be reviewed here. I suggest you mark "NOT FOR REVIEW" on anything you don't want reviewed. As for your suggestions, they would mean considerably more work for our presently overworked staff (which is primarily myself), and as such I'm afraid they are impossible for me to follow. Forgive me for suggesting it, but if it is not too enormous an imposition upon you, you might at least thumb through The Clubhouse *in a newsstand copy of AMAZING, if you're unwilling to buy it regularly. —TW*

Dear Mr. White:

Your editorial in the November issue was addressed to me, so I feel obligated to respond. You see, I am one of those vital but woefully irregular purchasers.

As editor your lament over declining sales is quite understandible; however, your refusal to believe that the old style SF magazine is anachronistic is either naive or less than honest—neither of which I would like to believe, therefore I had better leave it as the exuberant zeal of a new editor.

The heyday of the "little magazine" (the literary genus of which the SF magazine is a species) is over. They were the product of estrangement; writers whose unorthodox ideas and techniques didn't fit contemporary channels created their own facility. Today, of course, experimental and speculative writing—including SF—is an accepted phenomenon. In fact, it is the "in" thing. It dominates many university circles and their publishing vehicles. It finds ready access to a variety of "popular" periodicals. It is welcomed by the straight press, constituting an exploding paperback and hardcover trade. The times have changed. Science fiction no longer needs the outlet of a specialized magazine.

In his inaugural editorial for AMAZING, Gernsback wrote of blazing a new trail in literature. That trail has been blazed. AMAZING has succeeded. The achievement may seem on the mundane level of circulation to be a pyrrhic victory; but, nevertheless, rejoice! From its inception AMAZING's aim in a sense has been to make itself obsolete. Look on the decline in sales as a sign of successful proselytising.

But don't rejoice too long, for AMAZING should now be taking on a new task, that of providing a forum for criticism. I don't mean simply the extension of the book review section, although that would help; but genuine scholarly discussion of science fiction.

Somewhat inconsistently, however, I am not advocating the complete abolition of fiction from your pages (I can almost hear your sigh of relief, but remember you invited this tirade and all ranters tend to be bombastic). The SF magazine can still serve a function in introducing novices, but why publish so extensively those established authors who have other outlets.

As you can perceive I have a rather radical view of your magazine. In addition to being an entertainment, I see it as an organ serving the cause of a type of literature.

You have written of the dissolution of the

boundary between the "pros" and "fans", and essentially this is what I am saying with respect to the magazines. AMAZING should become a review, for this is the only future—and a necessary one—for the SF magazine.

Make some move in the direction I have sketched and you will have gained at least one more regular purchaser.

Wayne Connelly,
345 Belsize Drive,
Toronto 298, Ontario, Canada.

Yes, but I'm afraid I would lose everyone else. I think you are both confused about the place of the sf magazine, and in error in your terminology. The "little magazine" is exactly what you'd have us turn AMAZING into—a lit'ry review of more pretention than circulation. The pulp magazine *is the species which died. But, significantly, the sf magazines escaped the great death of the pulps (now nearly twenty years past). Why do you suppose that is, if they are as anachronistic as you think? According to Alexei Panshin, something like 300 short sf stories appeared in the sf magazines in 1968. Despite our "discovery" by the mainstream, our own specialized magazines continue to be the life-blood of science fiction. As for our reasons for publishing "established authors," we are not in business to publish amateur fiction—nor would we stay in business long if we devoted ourselves solely to such a task. We try to publish the best sf we can get. Most of this comes from "established authors." And since most of our readers want (in turn) the best sf they can find, we would be failing them if we turned our backs on those writers. As it is, we publish more science fiction-related non-fiction in our pages than any of our competitors, and if this is not enough for you, I suggest you try such literate fanzines as SPECULATION and SF REVIEW. —TW*

Dear Mr. White:

Since the time I turned 13 (about three years ago), I've written around three hundred science fiction stories fitting in various categories for the pleasure of my friends and myself. Most of these seem just as good as what runs in books and magazines today; some, I feel, are even better. At 14 I went and took out around twelve books (circa 1952) from my neighborhood library and painstakingly learned how to write a television script. I wrote one full-hour teleplay for a cherished but now-defunct sf TV show. More recently, I've knocked off five half-hour episodes for my own imagination futuristic series. I gaze wistfully at beautifully illustrated magazine covers and inside drawings and wish I knew what media was entailed so that I could try some on my own.

Now I'd like to begin sharing some of the immense pile-up of work I've accumulated over the years. But since fiction is filled with hundreds of writers and artists more experienced and with very impressive credentials, I don't expect to rise to Hugo-winning fame in an instant, but I'd like to know where to begin. The ghosts of names and creations of imagination of the ages seem to be calling me to join their ranks. And oh, would I ever love to be able to do that!

Is there any place in this field for a young girl-fan?

Hilary Witkin
New York, N.Y.

Well, Hilary, since you didn't include a complete address, my only means of reply is here, in these pages. Your cartoon (closing your letter) showed some talent, and the general tone of your letter bodes well for your young abilities. The next step is simple: start submitting your stories to the various markets available. Buy a copy of WRITER'S DIGEST *for those markets*

beyond the sf magazines; send your stories to the magazines; try sending for some of the fanzines reviewed in The Clubhouse, *since fanzines welcome budding artists and supply a helpful sense of community for beginners; and start attending conventions, such as the upcoming New York Lunacon, where you can meet and talk to some of those luminous pros (myself included). And, mostly, keep working at it. —TW*

Dear Ted,

I've just finished going through all the 1969 issues of FANTASTIC and AMAZING in one more or less fell swoop, and I am impressed by the improvement shown over the year.

I do have one request. You list your interior illustrators, but I have been unable to find any mention of your cover artist, or possibly artists. Not being one of these people who can recognize a particular artist immediately by his style, I wish you'd add a line to your contents page specifying who the cover is by. Even if Harry Lee is doing every one of them himself, I'd still like to know it.

Robert Coulson
Route 3
Hartford City, Ind., 47348

Actually, Buck, you must be one of the few people left who isn't aware that those uncredited covers were done by European artists. The situation is this: an agency known as Three Lions has been marketting transparencies of covers from Italian and German sf magazines and has sold them to a variety of book and magazine publishers in this country, including ourselves. These transparencies were unsigned. One of our competitors credited its reprint covers to "Three Lions;" we felt that was less than no credit at all. Therefore, unless the artist's signature was visible, we omitted the contents-page credit. As of this issue, however, AMAZING returns to the use of original cover paintings by known U.S. artists. In addition to paintings by Pederson, we also have on hand for AMAZING and FANTASTIC paintings by Jeff Jones and Gray Morrow, both of whom will continue to do new covers for us. (Jeff Jones' first cover for us was on the April issue of FANTASTIC, still on sale as you read this.) I might add that, beginning with our last issue, the art direction, typography and graphics for the covers of both magazines has been by yours truly. —TW

Dear Mr. White:

Your editorial in the January issue of AMAZING was pathetic. You poor fools.

Back here in America, we don't have "four or five tv sets, including one color set." We don't have "two or three cars," and our barbeque equipment is not very expensive. We work hard for what we do have, but the harder we work, the more taxes we have to pay. We work three hours a day out of every eight, so the city, county, state and federal governments can scatter $80 billion a year on people who don't work. *(Funny; I thought that was our* Defense budget. *—TW)* Our children are going to school, and coming back with more knowledge and less wisdom. As you said, our children *are* being educated to talk back to us, and you're damn right we're voting down bond issues. *(That'll show 'em! —TW)*

In the decadent East, more and more money is handed over to those who do not produce, and others are encouraged to join their ranks. Yet innumerable restrictions are imposed on the producers, and you refuse to allow them a reasonable return on their property and eforts. No wonder your phones don't work. *(Then why are New York City phone rates the highest in the country? —TW)* Blackouts and "brownouts" will

become even more frequent, as your hamstrung power system becomes less and less reliable. *(Our "hamstrung power system" also has the most expensive rates in the nation. —TW)*

All Boswash is on the imminent verge of self destruction. But we are no longer antagonized when your mass media blame *us* for all the ills of society that they have created or exacerbated. We have become indifferent to repetitious variations on the same tired theme: poverty, racial tensions, urban crisis, etc. We understand now that your piteous wailings signify ony the nearness of the inevitable consummation of your manifest death-wish. Repent.

Ralph Westfall
19822 S. Main St., #50€
Gardena, California, 90247

Your letterhead identifies you as being in "marketing and economic research." I find that hard to believe. —TW

Dear Mr. White:

Do you know of any science fiction clubs in the St. Louis area? I wanted so badly to attend the St. Louis convention but my husband said he wasn't cutting his/our vacation short for that.

Pauline Kelley
2550 Stirrup Lane
Florissant, Mo., 63033

I trust they'll get in touch with you now. —TW

Ted White:

Eleven or twelve years ago, Mr. White, I was a regular reader of AMAZING. Since then I have been active in many areas. I have spent nearly a year submerged on Nuclear Submarine cruises, I have participated in oceanographic research in the Arctic, I have traveled extensively in the world both for the Government and privately. My latest move included my 1500-volume library with its 300-odd sf books and magazines.

I fondly re-read Smith's *Galaxy Primes* and Leinster's *Long Ago, Far Away.* I came across Asimov's anniversary contribution, and wished again to know the man personally. The nostalgia awakened by these reminiscings knew only one cure. The next day I went to my local news stand and purchased the November AMAZING.

Your name is familiar, Ted White. Of course I had read most of Dick's earlier writings (P.S. Miller not withstanding, Dick will never been the equal of van Vogt) and was eager to compare his present writing with them. So, what were my impressions?

I am very disappointed, Mr. White. Your proofreading is sloppy—there were lines of type out of order, duplications of lines, typographical errors. Your emphasis on the science fiction fan (atic) was just short of the riduculous. There was no such emphasis when I knew AMAZING. *(No, at that time the editor was actively hostile to fans, and commissioned his stories from writers paid monthly salaries for set amounts of wordage. Would you prefer a return to those machine-made days? —TW)* It occurred to me that you might be following a trend, so I purchased the other magazine I used to enjoy, *ANALOG,* to compare. You should know without my telling you who fared better. The ensuing years have improved that magazine. Since I never was very fond of *GALAXY* or *FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION,* I did not bother to pick these up. I have purchased the January AMAZING ro read the end of Dick's novel. I am afraid I have wasted my money; the story is shallow and completely transparent. If you wish to compare—see Dalmas' "The Yngling" in the October and November *ANALOG.*

I am truly sorry to see AMAZING go, but I cannot imagine it lasting as it is. I shall purchase occasionally, if only for old times'

sake. And since advice is free, let me give some. Times are changing. Unless you are willing to change with the spirit of the times, Mr. White, you are going to be left behind. Let me put it this way: space opera is out—we have the real thing on our TV screens; simplistic projections are out—modern science fiction readers are educated (for the most part); elementary errors are out (e.g. Frauenzimmer means only ladies' room, the word has no other meaning); fans are out—there are not enough to support you, so generalize your audience; do you see what I mean? Knowing that you need change is a step in the right direction, but making the right changes is the important thing.

Robert G. Williscroft
20 Lakeview Circle
Niantic, Conn., 06357

If you'd stuck with us in the intervening years, Robert, you might have some idea of how many changes we've already gone through. I certainly apologize for the typesetting errors; most of these were corrected on galleys, but the corrections were ignored by our typesetter. Subsiquent errors brought about a phone call to the president of the company, but I have found a number that should have been dealt with in our March issue, and I have no doubt you'll find more in this issue, despite the eagle eye of our new proofreader, Alan Shaw. We are operating under less than ideal circumstances. As far as the rest of your advice goes, I'm afraid that the answers are no where so neatly clear-cut as you suppose. I am doing what I believe to be right for the magazines, and will continue to do so. As for "fans" being "out," you might as well say that the raders of AMAZING are "out". Not that all are active fans, but this magazine is put together with the hope of involving all our readers in a sense of community and common love for science fiction. In this sense, we are all *"fans"*

Somehow this has turned into one of our longest letter columns yet, and the end is nowhere in sight; another dozen letters I'd picked for publication still remain on my desk, and many more yet have already been snipped and sorted into piles for Reader Feedback to the authors whose stories were commented upon. Looking back over the column this time, it has a contentious feeling to it. Yet, I feel the very liveliness with which some of you have pitched into me and the magazine bodes well for us all. Most of you very obviously *care;* the remaining inadequacies and shortcomings annoy you intensely. But, in many cases, we've anticipated your complaints, and I hope you'll agree with me that now that we've put better covers on the magazines one of our last frontiers is that of the typographical errors. Stay with us—and keep writing. —Ted White

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40)

I went around the corner at the end of the street, thinking about getting something to drink, and noticed the mailbox. I check on it every time because it sure looks like a mistake.

Everything's supposed to be pretty realistic on Burton Street, but putting in a mailbox seems like a goofy idea.

Who's going to try to burn up a box like that, made out of cast iron and bolted down? A guy couldn't take out any aggressions on it.

And it sure can't be for real use. Not on Burton Street.

Nobody lives around there.

—Greg Benford

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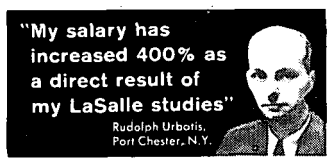

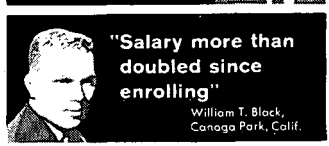

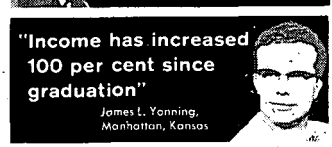

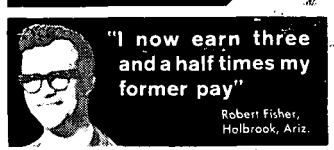

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