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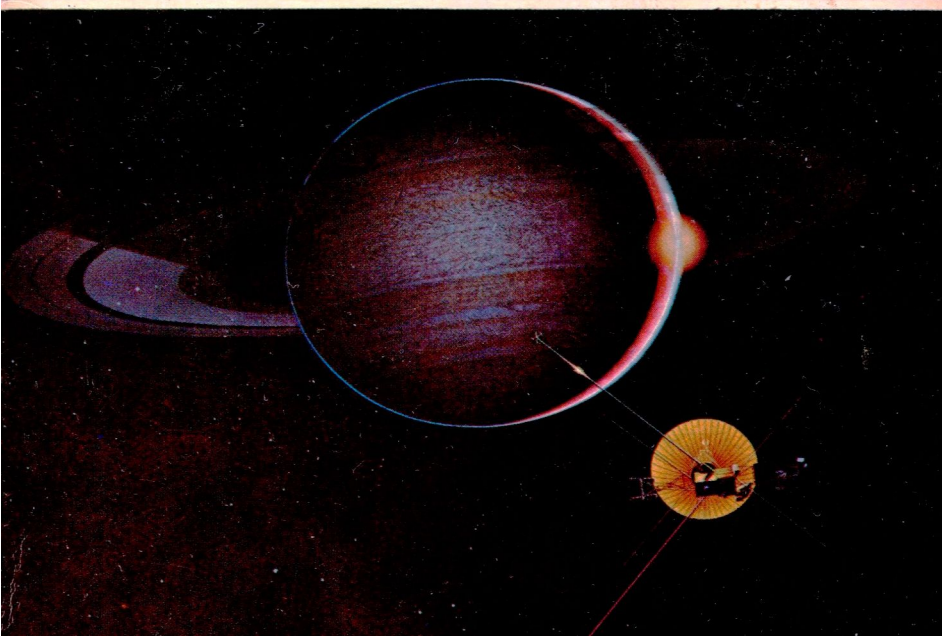
THE STONE THAT NEVER CAME DOWN

[conclusion]



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DECEMBER. 1973 *Vol. 47. No. 4*

GORDON EKLUND'S OUTSTANDING NEW NOVELET. MOBY, TOO **6**

new short stories

new serial

new features

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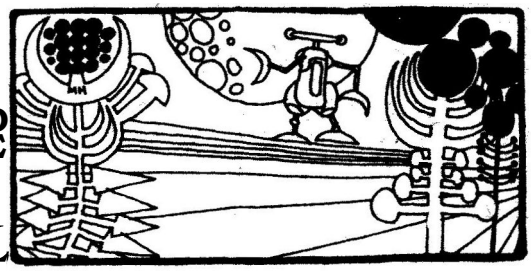
EDITORIAL



IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE? On the night of April 23, fifteen "poorly dressed" men who refused to identify themselves broke into the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Giglotto, handcuffed the couple and held them at gunpoint while wrecking their furnishings. Pottery was shattered, a television set was thrown on the floor, and Mrs. Giglotto (who was in bed for the night) was referred to by the invaders as a prostitute.

Half an hour later a similar group of men invaded the home of Donald Askew, across town from the Giglottos', in Collinsville, Illinois, and similar havoc was wreaked.

In both cases the invaders were agents of the Office For Dr^ig Abuse Law Enforcement, an "umbrella agency" established in January, 1972, by Richard M. Nixon.

In both cases the men had the wrong address.

In both cases they had no search or arrest warrants.

IN NORFOLK, VA., early in the morning of May 24, 1972, Mrs. Lillian Davidson, already a victim of a burglary, heard someone breaking into her house. Then someone began battering at her locked bedroom door.

She fired a .32-caliber revolver through the door, hitting and mortally wounding Patrolman Lewis W. Hurst, Jr.; the 22-year-old son of the head of Norfolk's police department narcotics squad.

The police—who had not identified themselves in the sudden raid—arrested Mrs. Davidson. They had been looking, they said, for 2,400 parcels of heroin which an unnamed informer had said would be on the premises. There was no heroin.

ON APRIL 24, 1972, local police and agents of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs surrounded the mountain retreat of Dirk Dickenson, a 24-year-old man whom they suspected of operating "a giant lab" to produce drugs.

The agents, out of uniform and unidentified, arrived on foot with dogs and in a borrowed helicopter, and assaulted the cabin in the mountains near Eureka, California, with rifles and hand guns. Dickenson, apparently terrified, ran for the woods.

An agent, Lloyd Clifton, shot Dickenson in the back, killing him. It is a violation of bureau rules to shoot at fleeing suspects. There was no "giant

(continued on page 127)

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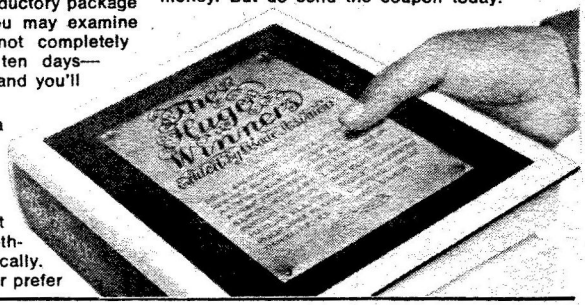

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MOBY, TOO

GORDEN EKLUND

Gordon Eklund, whose last appearance in these pages was with his novella, "The Ascending Aye" (January), tells this time the story of the last intelligent entity on earth, the first of his kind . . .

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

AND SO (I thought) it had come to be: me: the last intelligent entity on the planet earth.

Wait.

Excuse me. This is very embarrassing. I'm very sorry but—well, would you greatly object if I were to repeat myself just this once? Those words, that phrase, it delights me excessively. Like sweet cheering music, it rings through the cracks and crevices of my mind.

Would that be too much to ask of you?

No? You say that it wouldn't? Well—well, thank you. Truly, you are kind.

I was the last intelligent entity on the planet earth.

Yes—fine—splendid. 1 think that will have to suffice. I must take care not to overextend myself. Even now, after the passage of so many additional years, I still find that I cannot fully accustom myself to the loops and patterns of that particular phrase. Imagine, if you can, the intensity of my feelings when I could honestly utter those same words in the present tense. I *am* the last intelligent entity on the planet earth.

In a way, the truth never came as a total shock to me. My whole life—so it had often seemed—was already centered around the fact of rny lastness. Or my firstness. Or sometimes both. But not that—I can assure you—never that—not even in the course of my wildest, most effervescent dreams.

After all, hadn't I learned my place? Wasn't I fully aware of my limitations? Hadn't they shown me often enough exactly what I expected to be?

What was I? I knew what I was. Oh yes, oh yes:

I was a whale.

A mutant whale, I suppose. I believe that is the term they would have used to describe a creature

such as myself. Had they ever succeeded in capturing me, my existence would have so been recorded in their books: mutant whale. Mother Nature (they would have thought), the dear sweet compassionate lady, she is having another of her occasional little jokes at our expense. A mutant whale indeed! What possible use can this plump oversized fish—no, that is not accurate—a fish he is not—what will this fat chunky mammal ever do with a working self-conscious brain? What use can he possibly make of it? Swimming, as he does, year after year through the frigid depths of the oceans, feeding himself upon foul strands of stringy algae—worse stuff than spinach—a disgusting and inhuman beast. And, more awful than that, he does not appear to understand his position in nature's proper scheme of things. Has a mind! Demands a brain to claim as his own! In all candor, one must say—one must admit—that this entire brain episode is a trifle pretentious of him. One must wonder: what next? Will he demand entrance to our homes, our schools, our places of daily business? Will curiosity demand that he attempt to effect a mating of the species? No—one can see no possible alternative—the whale must perish. Let us wipe the stain of his foul presumption forever from the placid green face of our wondrous and glorious planet. The Earth. *Man's* Earth.

And so on.

For that is the manner in which they thought. The way they spoke. I can hear them yet, even as I am speaking to you now, but I no longer care. I thumb my nose at them. My middle finger lifts, strains, waggles freely. Gently, I murmur: Up yours, humanity. In truth, I possess neither finger nor nose, but the other necessary ingredients are mine: hate, disgust, bitterness and rage.

But why flog a dead species? Why indeed? Why continue to whip the raw bleeding flesh of that which can no longer offer even the mildest of resistence? Perhaps you are right. I shall attempt to control my feelings, to adopt a perspective which will allow me to relive the circumstances of my life with the unemotive coldness of one of their machines. I say: Rest in peace, human race. Sleep softly as now the story of your last brief days is here unfolded in my watery home.

My date of birth: June 21, 1963. Their calendar, my day. Do not, please, ask me to explain the significance of those numbers. Time was another of their obsessions. To them, it was ultimately important. Each one carried on his person a whirring mechanical device known as a watch. With this instrument, no man was ever in doubt of the correct and accurate time. As a matter of fact, at one time, I intended if ever captured by them to prove my intelligence by using my tail to slap out the digits of the hour upon the surface of my pool. I could not imagine a faster or simpler way of proving the

existence of my brain. Can a monkey tell time? A zebra? A shark? A normal whale? No, only a true and intelligent man can possess the keenness of mind necessary for an understanding of the complex workings of time. But this whale here. Listen to him. This whale knows what time it is. He must be one of us: a genius. Quick—send for a stenographer—these slappings must be preserved for the benefit of future generations.

Of course, this is a fantasy. In truth, the dear sweet man, shocked by my presumption, would surely have poisoned my pool on the spot. Or dismissed the entire episode as some fantastic coincidence. All men thought this way. Believe me. I know.

Oh, I knew all about them: their quirks, eccentricies, their petty obsessions. And what did they ever know of me? Nothing—absolutely nothing. A great void. But let me tell you: they had a folk tale which, as far as such tales go, was not a bad one. It told the story of a whale and a man. The man, who was obsessed by this whale, a white whale, sought to add purpose to his own meaningless existence by destroying this great and wonderful creature. A typically human obsession, I assure you. In the end, properly, the man died; the whale lived. A neat tale. Correct. And true. But within its boundaries lies almost the full extent of man's knowledge of my species. Only here is any real hint found of the true nature of the whale. In fact, so singular is the very existence of this story that I have often been disturbed by it. From where did it come? More importantly: From whom? Or what? I have often considered the possibility that I am not the first of my breed, that another intelligent whale preceded me upon this world and that it was he, in his blessed wisdom, who originated this tale, perhaps as a warning to mankind. Either that, I think, or this: At one time, in the distant clouded past, there lived upon the face of this earth a creature with the body of a man and the soul of a whale.

The brevity of my true infancy was an ordeal so awesomely horrible that I can barely bring myself to recall it. The key factor of my early years was the utter totality of my isolation. I was alone. Consciousness came to me early, for I can recall at a time when I still suckled at my mother's teat reaching out and searching the minds of my fellow whales (including my mother herself) in a vain attempt to discover therein the bright flickering flames which had arisen to illuminate my own existence. I found little but an overwhelming and impenetrable darkness. Briefly I glimpsed an occasional sporadic flame—the urge for food or sex or warmth—but that was all. Only once, in the mind of a passing porpoise, did I sense the presence of something greater, but that passed quickly, and the fullness of his awareness existed solely as a matter of comparison.

True intelligence was not present. Only an uncertain, unspecified, vague awareness.

And so, quite soon, I stopped searching and instead attempted to reconcile myself to the fact of my ultimate aloneness. 1 could not do it. I was still young enough to believe that everything must have its reason for being. And this included myself. Why had I been given a brain if I could not make use of it? So 1 soon deserted my mother's breast. Leaving the herd, I moved in a physical isolation that only duplicated the spiritual loneliness of all my days. There was no real change in my mode of life. 1 had always been, in truth, since the day of my birth, alone.

I knew nothing of geography, so my movements were strictly random. Somehow, they brought me close to land, a warm coast, and it was here that it happened. I saw. At first: only a glimpse. A peep. Only a tickling sensation at the edges of my mind. But I swam closer, and the closer I came, the stronger it was, and then I was certain. I knew. I was not alone. Here was another. A man. He called himself a man, and I wept, I cried, I shouted my joy. I had found a man.

The day this happened was July 26, 1966.

I remained where I was, unwilling to leave. I came dangerously close to shore, my belly often floating only a few inches above the bottom, and I listened to the man. For days I heard his every thought, seldom stopping even to feed, and I learned quickly of the ways of mankind. His name was Diego Rodriquez; he was a fisherman. One day, 1 discovered, while he had been floating upon the surface of the ocean in a wooden device known as a boat, a sudden storm had caught him far from shore. After many days, the boat had been wrecked; the tide had tossed Diego here.

Diego was not a man of great depth or firm substance. I know this now—having sampled in the interim the furious flaming thoughts of man's most splendid artists, scientists and philosophers—but Diego was my first; from him and through him I learned more things of real importance than I did from any of those who followed. I spent two weeks with him. During all this time, his mind burned constantly with inextinguishable thoughts of frustration and fear. At first I could not understand. Slipping past this hot burning outer layer, 1 sampled instead the more serene knowledge of his inner mind. I learned of his past life, the other men he had known, of mankind in general, but eventually I was forced to realize the truth of his outer mind: Diego Rodriquez was dying. This thought came to dominate everything else. Alone here on this isolated beach, he had no means of feeding himself. A trickle of water ran sporadically in a nearby creek. But he was starving to death.

As soon as I knew, I wanted to help him. Save him. But how? I

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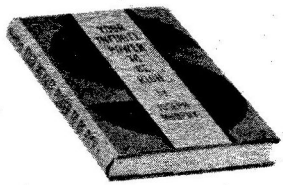

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could not provide him with food; I could not bring fresh water. But the longer I remained with him, the more deeply I probed into his mind, the more fully and truly I came to love this man. At last 1 made my decision. I knew what I would have to do. I would swim straight toward shore with the determination of an arrow in flight. I would throw my bulk at his feet. From my body, he would draw the necessary nourishment of life. He would live and I would die. It seemed proper. I loved him deeply. I would not hesitate.

I had just formed this decision and was in the process of turning it into action when—this is difficult to explain. First a question: Do you believe in God? Of course you don't, but Diego did, and often I overheard him speaking to God, appealing for salvation and continued life. He told God candidly that he was not worthy. But his wife (Maria), his children (Hector and Juanita), what of them, oh Lord, pray tell, what of them? For two weeks, these pleas continued, sometimes audibly, most often locked within his mind, but as his body grew weaker, his voice grew weaker, and then at last the answer came.

(Or so Diego believed.)

He no longer had the strength to walk. He crawled along the beach, weaving on his belly like a withered serpent. His thoughts were a confused maze of suffering and despair. Then he saw it. Why had he failed to see it before? It barely protruded from the sand. A plant. Barely that. A vine. But green—and moist. Diego pulled the vine loose from the sand which surrounded it. He ate. He forced the plant down his throat. I felt his immediate delight. It tasted good; his stomach held it well. For the moment, Diego was alive. He was saved.

My ecstasy seemed complete. I know that I wept, for not only had Diego been granted another chance at life, but so had I. I cried out: *God in heaven, listen to me, hear me Lord, I am merely a humble whale, vast in my physical bulk, meager in my spiritual whole, but I want You to know: I believe. In You. I do I do I do. I do believe in You. Oh yes—in Thou. Oh yes.*

And I did.

The next moment brought additional confirmation, if more were needed, for Diego, turning his head toward the blue sea, saw the white sail. A boat. Far from shore, but moving now, drawing closer. With the renewed energy granted him through the hand of a loving god, he leaped to his feet and waved both arms like furious windmills. The boat dipped. Swaying, the sail turned. And came toward him.

An hour later, the boat reached shore. But (alas) too late. For Diego was quite stone dead. The plant, you see, had been poisonous.

I swam gently away.

Only to discover, farther north, shores teeming and bustling with human life, a million minds possessed of knowledge so vast that

I felt certain I could never possibly learn to understand more than a tiny fraction of it.

In shock and fear, 1 swam backward, seeking my serenity in the depths of the ocean, away from the shores and the men they contained. At a safe distance, where only the most powerful minds could penetrate, I paused. Here, like a sportsman developing the use of his hunting eye, I perfected my talents. It took time, many years, but I learned how to aim my telepathic senses at a certain source, a particular human mind. That was all. Now I could learn without fear. And I did. The knowledge of the world was mine to obtain.

But this, as I said, took many years and occasionally during the course of those years I would leave the domains of mankind and return to the world of my fellow whales. Briefly, I would attempt to establish contact with them. When this failed, I would join them for a time, swimming with the herd, satisfying my basic needs. Then I would again return to my studies of mankind.

It was during the course of one of these visits that an extremely important first occurred in my life. As I told you, I have often felt that my existence has been a rubber ball endlessly bouncing between two paddles. The paddle of first; the paddle of last. (You must excuse the human orientation of my metaphors—learning to think from man, I am afraid that too often I think like a man. It is a problem, but I do think that I am improving. Soon my speech shall be properly decorated only by metaphors whose origins are currently seaworthy.) So far I have described a succession of firsts: my first moment of awareness, my first use of my talents, my first contact with a human being.

The lasts do not begin until later.

For now, I have another first to describe: the first time a man attempted to murder me.

It was in the arctic. I was five years old. Swimming with a fairly good-sized herd of sperm whales. At the moment I was greatly bored by the dullness of their company. Yawning, I intended soon to return to the shores of man.

But then man came to me. I felt his touch, his presence, and very near. Not in the overwhelming numbers I had come to expect. Only a few men. On boats. A huge ship accompanied by four smaller vessels.

Can I say that I was overjoyed? I had underestimated the supremecy of mankind. Unable to swim the seas with the freedom of a fish or whale, man had built vessels capable of carrying large numbers of men lightly across the surface of the ocean. Immediately, I thought: If I could somehow establish contact with man and convince him of my intelligent existence, then wouldn't he gladly send ships like these to swim with me, .to keep me company, to allow me the opportunity of continuing my studies in my natural environment?

I was young. Please remember. Barely five. My learning had only recently commenced.

1 swam close to one of the smaller boats. With some difficulty, largely occasioned by my youth and inexperience, I managed to narrow my telepathic sights to encompass a single man. This man was the captain. I sensed immediately that he was the most important of the men on this boat.

I peered into the captain's thoughts, and in so doing was surprised to discover my own reflection staring back at me. For a brief moment, I was joyous, for I had been recognized, and more than that, I sensed the captain's delight at finding me. He was happy. Why? Had he somehow realized that I was not an ordinary whale, that like him I was an intelligent and conscious being?

Without hesitation, I continued my streaking course toward the ship.

The harpoon pierced my side painlessly. That would not seem possible, I know. The explosion which followed also occurred without pain. It was as though a fist as huge and powerful as the sun had suddenly been sent crashing into my flesh. There was shock. But no pain.

I was alive. At the last moment I had seen enough of the captain's true thoughts to send me swerving desperately aside. The harpoon failed to penetrate my mortal tissue. The explosion tore a huge hole in my side, but I was alive.

I dived.

And kept going. Wriggling, I managed to free myself from the barbs of the harpoon. The waters of the deep washed over me darkly like a soothing bath. I felt the captain's bitter anger at my loss. Outwardly, as I continued to plummet toward the ocean floor, I was safe and alive, but inwardly I had died a different kind of death.

I remained beneath the surface as long as possible, forcing myself to watch. The smaller boats—attack ships, they were called—turned toward the herd, which had apparently—quite unknown to me—sensed something in my presence, had come to think of me as a leader. So, when I had suddenly turned toward the ships, they had obediently followed. Now the slaughter commenced without pause. Now, as each whale died in turn, I came to know him. The dead carcasses were towed toward the larger ship and drawn inside. There, with the absence of even a hint of mercy, they were slaughtered, torn apart, cut and sliced into bits and chunks of meat.

I waited until it was over, then I ran. North. To where the great white icecap provided a form of shelter from the hot raging winds of life. Slowly, I nursed myself back to health. Outwardly I healed, but inwardly I never forgot. I had lived; I had learned; now I hated.

My world became the ocean, my life was merely myself. I continued my dutiful studies of the human race; I worked to perfect my

talents. But my lessons were no longer conducted through a stifling veil of respect and awe. I had come to despise my teachers, to hate them.

Several times I allowed whaling ships to pass close to me so that I could learn more of the feelings of their crews. What I discovered was this: they had none. No feelings—not for me, not for any whale; barely even for themselves. To them, killing whales was—their word—a job. In return for performing this job, they were rewarded with a measure of material wealth. After a time, I found that 1 could bear their company no longer, not even for the purposes of expanding my knowledge. I limited my areas of study to those portions of the ocean close to land. There I could pick and choose among the entirety of the human race, finding the one man whose mind and memory could provide me with exactly the piece of information I wished to find. It was simple. I concentrated less on studying man for the bare knowledge with which he could provide me than for the insights I might learn concerning his motivations. What forced a man to act in the way that he did? I discovered that man himself was often as genuinely puzzled by this as I was. But I never discovered an answer. Hard as I looked. Not ever. Eventually I came to decide that perhaps there simply wasn't an answer.

I took time to study myself as well. I came to realize that, in certain respects, I was the superior of man. They had their arms and their legs; they were born to a size and shape compatible with intelligence. While I had the freedom of the sea, they had the greater mobility of land. But my mind—my pure intelligence—was greater than theirs. They communicated by talking, making crude growling, hissing, mewling sounds with their throats and tongues. I simply turned my mind this way or that way and all of another being's thoughts were mine to have. They lay openly and clearly exposed to my gaze like the pages of a book. I could thumb through them, flipping past what did not interest me; I could hold a particular page, studying and learning.

And—I eventually discovered—I could talk back to them if I wished. My mind could transmit thoughts as well as receive them. But I did not wish. What did I have to say to man? Nothing, I knew. Quite absolutely nothing. The speaking portion of my mind remained shrouded in silence while the listening part studied on.

Also, I could kill with my mind. Now that was a most intriguing discovery. In the dim years following my close brush with death, while the scar in my flesh still flashed deeply and clearly, I amused myself by perfecting this talent. It seemed an altogether fitting and proper thing. I thought of it as my own personal harpoon—a mental harpoon—complete with barbed explosive tip which could lightly be

plunged into the center of a man's mind and twisted firmly into place and then *plop,* the man fell over. *Ker-plop.* The man was dead.

What particularly amused me was killing men at embarrassing moments—embarrassing for them, that is. I learned that for most men the most vulnerable of times occurred during the act of physical love and while voiding the body of wastes. 1 took this into consideration. Man had devised an intricate mechanism known as the flush toilet, which he used solely as a receptacle for his own feces. I killed a considerable number of men while they were making use of this device, always killing them as slowly and painfully as possible, and each time the victim struggled to dress himself. Escaping from the vicinity of the toilet seemed more important than escaping from the shroud of death. These men were all bad men; other men thought of them as being bad. I did not try to contradict. Some were obviously horrible men whose innermost thoughts and feelings were as dark as the oil of a squid. I killed others at critical moments in their lives. Some I took at exceedingly public times. It was a sport. A game. But a dead man is only a dead man; he can no longer blush at his own predicament, being dead. Eventually I understood this fact. And I stopped. I let them live. Good men and bad alike. I saved my mental harpoons for use against more deserving enemies—against the squid and the shark.

Slowly, as the years passed, I found that I was drifting farther and farther from the domains of humanity. I began to spend more of my time in and around the polar icecaps. The longer I stayed away from man, the better I seemed to feel. It was almost as if a sudden dark cloud had been lifted from my brain. I could see again. It was only then—after the cloud had gone—that I became consciously aware of the passage of time.

The date, I discovered, was January 30, 1986. I was twenty-two years of age. And where, I wanted to know, had all those years gone? I did not know; I could not begin to guess; they were gone; that was all.

I could hardly believe the truth. I was shocked by the frivolous manner in which I had squandered so many of the precious years of my life. A whale can easily live to be a hundred. But still, I thought, what does that mean? It means one-quarter of my life. I have wasted a full quarter of my life. I was disgusted.

I was determined to begin anew. I had learned all that I needed to know from men. Now was the time, I decided, to pay some attention to my own species. For over twenty years, I had all but ignored my fellow whales. Now I was determined to search them out. I wanted to see another whale, to touch him with my mind, to sense his great bulk, his calm and serene stupidity. This was what I needed.

So I swam north and searched the arctic ice.

And found nothing.

Puzzled, I spent a year travelling carefully south, searching along the way.

I found nothing.

Desperately: the Antarctic.

And, nothing.

It took me another year to determine the certainty of what I had guessed. It was true: I was the last whale on the planet earth. (Remember how I promised you some lasts?—well, here at last is the first of my lasts.) Soon afterward—I think it was somewhere in the South Atlantic—a ship approached me. I knew it couldn't be a whaler. There was only a single vessel and there was no longer any reason left for hunting whales since there were no whales left to hunt. Except me. So I stood my ground. I refused to dive.

In the minds of the men on board this ship I discovered a final confirmation of the truth. I saw that, seeing me, they greeted this sight with a great outpouring of delight. They had been hunting for me. I was the last. They had come not to kill me but merely to find me. To see if I truly existed.

I did; I was the last whale.

And so they wanted to capture me alive.

I did not want to be captured—alive or dead. I did not care to be towed away to some distant island sanctuary, where I would be mapped and charted and studied and labeled by the gathered scientists of the human race. All right, it was true: I was the last whale. I admitted this. But it was not a sufficient reason for making me into the personal property of the human race. I was still myself—a free and equal being—and I intended to stay that way.

I almost told them. It was one of the few occasions when I was sorely tempted to use my powers of mind-speech. But I controlled myself. And said nothing. I knew that it would be useless.

I saw in their minds the concept of the whale as a grand and noble beast. A great and mighty and almost mythical creature. I even glimpsed brief traces of honest grief at his passing. But that was all. And it wasn't nearly enough. For what real difference was there? I wanted to know. How did these men differ from those others who, with their ships and harpoons, had come to slaughter and slaughter until my race was extinct and I was the last one left on the whole of the earth? Where had these men been with their island sanctuary and their charts and maps and scientists when these things had really been needed?

I could not bear it. I submerged. For a week I followed the ship, occasionally passing near enough so that they saw me and resumed the chase, but always I won.

At last this sport, like the others, grew tiring. I left the men and their ship and turned south. I swam to the edge of the ice and it was here that I was determined to stay. Men lived faraway. I erected a mental shield around my mind and tried to

hear their voices no more. I ate, I swam, I thought. I ignored the passage of time—but now I did so with a deliberate and conscious intention. I did not care to know the date or the year. I wanted to live like a whale, and, for the most part, I did. I refused to disown my mind—a pointless gesture—but neither did I ignore my body. Or my heritage. Because 1 was a mutant whale did not mean I was not a whale. I was. And now, for the first time in my life, I knew it and I acted like it.

It wasn't a bad time. It was peaceful. But I could not help it: I was lonely. I disliked admitting this fact, but it was true. I was far lonelier than I had ever been, even as a child. Then I had been afraid of my own loneliness and now I was largely reconciled to its fact, but it was not any better or easier this way. If anything, I think it was worse.

Then I found her.

There was nothing extraordinary about her. She was a common and quite typical female sperm whale. She was neither young nor beautiful. Twenty years before, I would have swept past her without so much as a backward twitch of my tail.

But now: I bounced, I cried, I snorted and I dived. I came to the surface and I dived again.

And she went with me. I circled her lovely bulk, my tail quivering with passion and joy. I had found her. Two. I was not the last whale on earth. Oh no, oh no. We were two. We were.

Peering into her mind, I found it dark and murky. I could learn nothing there. But what was the need? What was the use? Didn't my eyes tell me that she was she and she was here? She was real—I couldn't doubt that for a moment. So what more did I need beyond the bare and lovely fact of her physical presence?

In the months that followed, she and I swam together at the edge of the southern icecap. It was indeed a blissful time. My memory recalls it solely in terms of colors: soft pastel shades shimmering with grace and warmth and—dare I say it?—sprinkled with love. I see no need for details. As before, I swam and thought and fed. But with a difference, for now she swam at my side. We were never apart; I was never alone. The fullness of my serenity was spoiled only by the vastness of my regret. Why had I wasted so many years on mankind? First with my adolescent awe and then with the maturity of my hate? What had those years gained me? Now that I had her, my plump and stately sperm whale, I wanted to know why I hadn't always had her. I wept silent tears at the immensity of my folly.

She was cold. Although we could not communicate directly, she let me know of her discomfort. She wanted to leave the ice—and, truthfully, so did I. It was the coldest time of winter. I had spent previous winters in these same waters, but this one seemed immeasurably

worse than those others.

Finally, regretfully, I knew that we had to go. I tried to convince myself that I could handle any human danger we might face. I certainly hoped so. Now, unlike before, I had something for which to fight. She swam delicately at my side, her mass pushing aside the cold waters. Her teeth glistened sharp in the dark cavity of her mouth. Her snout—flat, blunt, yet rigidly beautiful. Seeing her always, I loved her always. I would protect her. Even at the price of my own life. I would.

So north we went.

The ocean remained cold. We swam much farther than I had originally intended us to go, and still the waters were cold. She let me know that she felt better, and I was glad of that, but I knew it wasn't enough. Tossing aside the last vestiges of my timidity, 1 determined that we would turn toward the constant warmth of the South Pacific. And so we did. We had not passed any ships. I made note of this fact. Not yet. Nor, so far, had I sensed the near presence of the enemy: of man.

1 suppose I should have guessed the truth from the very beginning. I should have known even before we left the sheltering whiteness of the icecap, but it had been so long since I had last made use of my telepathic senses that they seemed rusty and dull from neglect, but by the time we reached the warm flowing waters of the South Pacific, I knew the truth for certain: there was nothing. No thoughts. The voices of man had been stilled. Reaching out with my mind, extending my senses to their fullest, sweeping the world, I found nothing.

Why?

For a time, fear clutched at my heart like a scouting tenacle. I could not understand, and thus I was afraid. Sensing my fear, she was afraid with me, although she did not know why.

Finally, I found him. A man. And then, nearby, another: a woman. Within their minds, I read the truth towering like a mountain above the petty clouds of their memories: they were the last. Stranded alone on a tiny island, they had somehow escaped the sudden death which had come to sweep the world clean of the human race. A plague of some kind. A disease that struck and killed without mercy. A disease, I learned, which man himself had created.

Now, more than ever, I wanted to talk to her. Knowing that I had to leave, I was afraid that she would fail to understand. There was no way of explaining. So finally I just floated away. For a time, she tried to follow, but as I swam faster, she fell behind. Then she stopped, rising to the surface, watching me go. Did she understand? Would I ever find her again? I did not know. But this I did know: I had to go—the choice was not mine to make. Not this time.

I—one of the two last whales on earth—swam to find the two last men.

I did find them. And when I did, I waited. The situation brought back to me the similar time years before when I had dallied close to shore and studied the thoughts of my first and only human friend, Diego Rodriquez. Like Diego, these two were stranded far from the company of their fellow men, but unlike Diego, the possibility of salvation had been closed to them. There was fresh water on the island. They had some food, and a boat. It was broken now, but the man was busily engaged in trying to repair the damage. Also, on the island itself was an abundance of wild gamebirds mostly—and enough coconut trees to feed a small village of men for several generations. The man and woman were not in any immediate danger of dying, and for the moment, both were willing to live. But why? I read this question like a bright fire in both their minds. For what purpose? I could see that neither knew, and they kept on living for only one reason: because they had nothing else to do.

I remained close to the island shore, not attempting to conceal myself from them, though they never happened to see me. Days, passing, became weeks and I left them only when it became necessary for me to swim far in search of food. When I returned, they were always exactly where I had left them. Their situations and feelings remained as unchanging as the yellow light of the noonday sun.

Finally, what I knew must happen did happen. The man finished repairing the boat. It was a tiny vessel, propelled solely by the force of the wind striking a cloth sail. The woman helped the man draw the boat into the shallow waters. He alone got aboard. She remained behind.

He came toward me. Submerging, I lay with my bottom pressed against the ocean floor. The boat glided past directly above me. I felt the man strongly then. I sensed his physical hunger, his spiritual fear, his senseless need for continued life. And, more than that, I tasted his bitterness, his anger, his hate and rage, a rage that was not directed at the other members of his race who had brought this curse down upon him and the woman. No. He was mad at the ocean for failing to provide him with the fish he felt was his proper due. He was angry at the sky for bringing rain the night before and he was angry at the sun for shining bright this afternoon. He was enraged with the woman for her demands that he create a child within her, for she knew full well—as did he—that a child would only reduce their separate chances of survival.

I thought my mind was decided at last. I felt that I had no choice. Briefly, as once before, I wholly believed in the God of Man, and I knew it was His desire. I thought I had been allowed to glimpse, as few creatures before, the reason and purpose for my existence on earth: I was here in order to slay the last man. I was here on earth as the first of the new race, and to establish the

proper dominance of my sons and daughters. My course was clear: I would have to be the one who extinguished the last bare flickerings of the old race.

Slowly, I raised my awesome bulk from its resting place upon the ocean floor. Lifting myself, I ascended through the dark depths of the sea. My course carried me straight and true and firm and steady. Never once did I waver as the waters ran lighter and brighter around me, the fish smaller and fewer in numbers, and the black became green and then blue. I cracked the surface—first my snout, my head, then the whole of my body, and like a great bird I sailed free through the cool moist ocean air, and then, twisting, I fell.

I came down on top of the boat. As the fragile vessel splintered beneath the force of my thunderous assault, I sensed the man escaping, diving free. I felt him as he swam away, clearing a path through his own shock and fear. He fought for his life. For survival. For no reason.

The sea closed around my head, and as I descended, I searched for the man. I found him, alive and above, approaching the shoreline. For the last time, I forced myself to turn, then rise, more slowly than ever now. Lightly, my head poked past the surface. I found the man—swimming furiously now—but his task was hopeless. Almost casually, 1 moved to take him between my jaws. 1 intended to make short work of it, holding him only for a brief moment, providing him that much time in which to twist and shake and squirm. I wanted him to feel the truth of his own existence before it was forever ended. Then I would bring my teeth together. The last man on earth would die. That which remained of him—a few particles of torn meat—that I would spit into the sea.

But I did not do it. Not any of it. I could not.

1 stopped. Frozen. As solid and motionless as a statue. I had seen something. I had seen too much. I had seen that this man, as much as me, was a mutant whale. I wouldn't kill him; 1 couldn't. Whether God wanted it done or I wanted it done—none of that mattered. This man—this mutant whale- he was my brother. And 1 wouldn't kill him. I said that again and again.

The man crawled ashore. The woman dashed heedlessly into the shallows and pulled him to the beach. I lay still, the splinters of the boat circling my head like a wreath. I watched. Not with my eyes—with my mind.

In that final moment before it would have all been ended, I had glimpsed something which went far beyond such relatively petty matters as one's purpose in life.

I suppose it was this: In a way, we are all truly the same—man and beast—fish and fowl—plant and animal. We are all mutant whales. We are all the first and all the last—the first and last of ourselves—for we are all different and all separate and all prisoners. Prisoners held captive in our own

selves. Of all the creatures on the earth, only I had been granted the privilege of escaping this prison and seeing the truth of what lay beyond: seeing that everyone was a mutant whale. And what had 1 done with this ability? I had squandered it in ignorance and stupidity. Glimpsing the bare edge of the truth, I had stayed there, unwilling to continue my quest toward the true core. Words like humanity and mankind and human race had always come easily to me. I hated mankind and humanity; the human race I despised. When these things passed, I did not regret their passing.

As I lay in the still blue waters near the tiny green island, hearing as the man and woman gently talked, bodies touching gingerly, my feelings had not changed.

But these two—they were not the human race. They were simply William and Jane. As I was myself, they were themselves, and while I could have rightly destroyed the human race without the faintest regret, I could no more have killed these two than I could have taken my own life. They were prisoners too. Mutant whales. They were alone.

1 left them this way. Swimming, I searched for my mate, and when I found her at last, our reunion was even more wonderful than I had anticipated, for now she had something to tell me, and I understood at once, without the use of words. I understood about you.

And so, my son, now you know—you've heard my story from its first beginning (mine) to its last beginning (yours).

Why did 1 lie to you when I began? When 1 said that I was the last intelligent entity? Well—but don't you see?—I didn't lie. I was the last. To me, I was, and that is the only way that matters. You're going to understand that someday—I hope so. We're even now: man and whale. Two of us and two of them—though soon there will be more of both. Perhaps things will turn out differently this time around. Who knows? 1 certainly don't. We are all prisoners, ignorant as to the identity of our jailors and the substance of our crimes. Our similarities are so immense that our differences appear, in context, as tiny as a single minnow. (There is a suitably nautical simile for you.)

Sft, I can only say that I hope you understand, and if you do, then it's a beginning. It's a beginning for you, but for me, it's an end, because teaching you this, as far as I can see, is the only purpose I have left.

You say you understand. But you'd say that anyway. Will they understand? That I do not know.

We must give you a name. I'm glad you reminded me. When you are old and remembering back, the past often appears more clearly defined, more honestly substantial, than the present.

But—a name? Hmm, yes, let me think.

Why not mine?

Why not the same name as the one I chose for myself so many long

(continued on page 38)

WILLIAM ROTSLER

William Rotsler (whose "The Gods of Zar" appeared here last issue) attacks now the mind and morality of a man seeking—

THE IMMORTALITY OF LAZARUS

LATTIMORE LOOKED GLUMLY at his new body from the spacesuit-like enclosure of the mobile life-support system. *Well, it's not exactly a godlike piece of biological statuary,* he thought, *hut it's going to be home. Anything's better than this glorified wheel chair.*

A fingertip's pressure swung the mobile chair around, the only sound a faint hum and the whisper of the nylon tires on the sterile plastic floor of the Greater Los Angeles Transprothetics Institute.

"That's the best you can do?" he asked Doctor Tigner, the voice box's rasp filtering out most of the intended bitterness.

"Mr. Lattimore, your . . . agents . . , were unable to find anyone even this suitable." The doctor ran a pudgy hand over his pink face. If Lattimore hadn't been a heavy and steady donor to the Institute for over forty years he would have told him he was damned lucky to get even this pitiful wretch.

Lattimore's chair, which looked like the result of an illegitimate union between a space suit and a wheel chair and a top credit Afterlife coffin, swung slowly back to view the naked man standing across the room.

The man's idiocy was quite evident. Unfocused eyes, drooling mouth, slack muscles. Lattimore shivered inwardly. *Living in that?* He tried to imagine his own brain, after the four day, million-credit operation, controlling that scrawny, ill-formed body. *It would be like living in a pigsty.*

The thought amused Lattimore. *Pigsty. Have I ever really seen one, or do I just remember flats from my youth?* Certainly no holographs. Today's pigs are born, live, and die in sterile confines, mere bio-machines that provide something called pork meat.

The moment of faint humor died in the mind of the man called Giles Lattimore. He spun the machine

around swiftly, startling the doctor into jumping back.

"1 want something better!"

"Mr. Lattimore, I assure you there is nothing better at this time and . . ."

"I am perfectly aware that even this medical wonder can only do so much and that 1 shall presently die, doctor. This *body* will die, Doctor Tigner, but I shall not!"

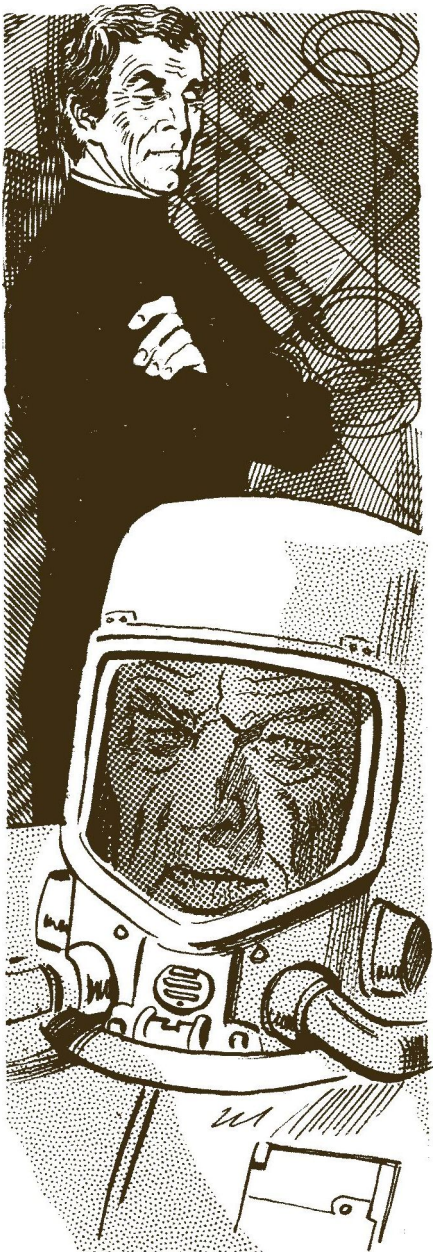
"He is the best available. You must know how difficult it is to get the proper legal clearances, even with buying off, I mean, reimbursing the family and—"

"Get him out of here!" He rolled the system forward and the doctor lunged to one side as Lattimore deftly drove the machine through the door and into the hall. Eleven years in the animated coffin had made him expert.

Eleven years. Eleven years of searching. Two dying on the table even before they sawed off the top of Lattimore's head. Brain transplant. Medical miracle. Lattimore glared through the faceplate at the people in the wide hall.

Medical miracle. A million-plus credits for the operation, another million for post-op. How much for the idiot? Five? Ten? Families became so loving when they started talking to Lattimore's agents. "Oh, we couldn't *think* of permitting dear Johnny to . . . it's so hard to . . . dear brother . . . loving father . , .beloved son. . ."

Then came the hard bargaining. "Only five million credits for a man's *brother?* Impossible!"



And that was after months of searching through wards of dying men, through the funny farms and the death rows of nine countries.

Eleven years. Eleven years in a coffin.

Disappointments. Frustration. Anger.

Lattimore had long gone past the point where he was grateful for the extra eleven years the complex mobile life support system had given him. He had grown impatient with the medical miracles of organ transplant and the ultimate miracle of brain transplant. *What good was it if he couldn't switch bodies?*

Lattimore swiveled his exoskeleton into the elevator, noting that Amos and Consuela had smoothly joined him. They said nothing, he said nothing. They dropped fifteen floors and stopped. Another MLSS wheeled into the elevator. A familar face looked at Lattimore through the faceplate.

"Hello, Giles," he said.

"MacKensie."

"Looking at your new body?" The envy was obvious, even through the voice box.

How the hell did he know? Security must be slipping. Lattimore didn't answer. To avoid conversation he flicked in the radio circuit that had been blinking at him for some time.

"Mr. Lattimore? Oh, thank God. This is Angus, sir, Consolidated Algae Farms? There's been . . . or maybe it's there's going to be . . . a stock takeover, sir. American Algae has been buying up—"

"Angus." The voice stopped. "Call Fitzmaurice. Tell him. I can't be bothered now."

"But, sir, I . . . yes, sir." The line went dead. The second circuit was also blinking but Lattimore keyed the Privacy response and after a few moments it stopped.

Algae. Metals. Plastics. Biogrand Limited. To hell with them. Lattimore felt the cushioned stop of the express elevator. The door hissed open and without looking at MacKensie he shot forward, Amos and Consuela half-running behind him.

The old man triggered the home circuit and almost at once Miyoshi answered. "Yes, sir?" he said.

"Helo, Institute Parking Pad Three, in five minutes."

"Yes, sir."

"And Miyoshi—"

"Yes, sir?"

"Full meeting, privacy one, in three hours. Costain. Bennington. Cirellan. Wehvila. Guitterez. Doctor Kegan. Frawley. Marcia. And Garrick."

"Yes, sir." There was no surprise in his bland voice at all. All the top men. And Garrick, the hard one.

By the time Lattimore was at the pad the helo had dropped down from the holding pattern, its yellow sleekness fancied with the black piping and the big Lattimore logo, the L with the star in the elbow.

The electric hatch hummed, the ramp swept down, and in seconds he was aboard. Consuela busied herself checking the gauges as they rose smoothly into the sky.

Below them the sprawl of the

megalopolis sparkled and glittered, billions of glass rectangles flashing back the sun. Far out on the horizon the great humps of arcology structures were like shining mountains. But the old man in the rigid spacesuit wasn't looking.

The old ways aren't working. I have nothing to lose. If I took that moron's body every time I looked into a mirror I'd see the mindless drooling face.

The time has come, he thought with a certain zest, *for the ways of Garrick.*

As the helo passed into the 60,000 foot lanes and became a jet Lattimore reviewed Garrick's file. Not the file the police had, or even the one that Lattimore Enterprises, the "mother company," had. There were some things too secret to be in a "secret" file.

Basil Garrick, 36, born in East St. Louis. A bastard, legally, and a bastard in reality. Tough. Killed a hard-juice dealer at fourteen; questioned but never arrested. Killed a Mafioso who was "buying in" to his prostitution and gambling business. Killed seven of the eight men sent to get him. The eighth "killed" him and died from his wounds. Discarding the business he had built since he was sixteen, Garrick, at 20, built himself a new life, based upon the blackened corpse of a tramp with his ident.

Another name, another life. Amazonia Corporation, "buying in" to a big farm there, selling out two years later. Another name, another life. Baton Rouge, Gulf Farms, undersea harvesting, until he thought his new face might be recognized. Balearic Islands and Majorca, the Valencia Seafarm Corporation, trying to "buy in" to one of Lattimore's companies. Almost worked, and so well organized that he almost got away with it.

So Lattimore hired him. Garrick did the "dirty work" when everything else failed. A new name: Basil Garrick. A new life: Executive Vice-President, Lattimore Security Services.

Garrick would find him a good new body. Even if he had to steal it.

The law was very strict, which accounted for a lot of the frustration. That spaceball player that had put a bullet in his brain. A perfect specimen, a perfect life ruined by redtape until it was too late. Lattimore had sent the *Emily* all the way to Space Station One just for that single cargo and couldn't get it released.

The Puerto Rican soccer player. The Italian lover with a husband's bullet lodged in his left hemisphere. The basketcase with the blank mind and the good body. The morons and their families. The three men on death row, all willing, all delayed until the electricity burned out their brains and the autopsy's knife killed them.

Eleven years.

The child, blonde and sweet-smiling, even on the cold slab. The busty young whore from Guadalajara. The Hungarian dancer from Moravsky. Not even a sex switch slowed Lattimore's drive

to escape the shiny metal coffin.

Maybe they'll just pull the batteries and bury me in it. Untouched by human hands. Dig a ramp into the grave and let me drive down into it and switch off.

No!

Survive! To hell with the rest. Survive! Survive as a woman, as a child, as a drooling moron. But survive.

For a second Lattimore was tempted to signal the Institute that he was coming back. *No! Survive, yes, but survive in something good!*

He'd tried all the legal, obvious ways. He'd pressured families, he'd outmaneuvered other millionaires, he'd all but killed for it. But the law . . . the law . . . those dedicated bastards who were determined that no rich man was going to get something that *they* couldn't afford. And the public backed them up.

Now he'd use Garrick.

The Shoshone Mountains of Nevada were below. Desolate, except for The Ranch. Lattimore Land they called it.

Home.

The connected, fortified cluster of buildings grew larger as the helo dropped out of the cloudless sky. No roads, nothing marked the hillsides. Nothing but the Lattimore "castle," the mountaintop citadel.

Lattimore signaled the control tower and the big doors were opening even as the ramp swung down. Lattimore rolled out into the sunlight, wishing he could breathe the air without the filters and the adjusting tanks.

Maybe someday soon.

He rolled through the steel doors, trailing attendents.

THEY WERE around the table, serious-faced and alert. There hadn't been a full conference in a year, not since the Molybedenum crisis.

Garrick sprawled in a big Lifestyle lounger against the wall, watching faces, calculating odds. Lattimore almost smiled. He was getting to like Garrick better all the time. What a team they would have made fifty years before.

Except, of course, they couldn't have trusted each other.

"Gentlemen, I will have a new body." The faces didn't change. These weren't like the others, quick to congratulate, quick to please. That's why they were his top men. "I have rejected the drooling idiot I was offered. His body would not have lasted twenty years and the state of the art today is that there is only one transplant to a customer."

They were listening. Soon they might want the same thing. They had the money. They listened.

"Thirty, fifty years from now they may . . . repeat, may . . . be able to do it twice, or a dozen times. But now . . ." The rasp of the voice box stopped. The machine that housed the withered body of Giles Lattimore, that kept him in the tank of nutrient, that plugged him into the world, the machine turned to look at Garrick even

more fully.

"Gentlemen, Mr. Garrick will obtain for me a suitable body. He has full call upon any and all of you for any services, advice or action he requires. I have called you here personally to emphasize the importance I place upon this directive."

Bennington, who had come from Oildome 18, under the sea off Caracas, nodded. Frawley was still in his coveralls, dusty from the Great Sandy Desert Filtration plant on the Indian Ocean corner of Australia.

Lattimore waited a moment but Garrick said nothing, just looked at him. It might as well have been a request for a new helo or a vintage Jaguar.

"Male, preferably. Between puberty and 40. Good health. Basic structure must be good but don't worry about anything else. I'll have the plastic surgeons work him over before I step in." *Let the poor bastard suffer instead of me.*

"And . . ." Lattimore let the word hang in the air. No one spoke. "I don't care how you get him."

Garrick stirred and spoke. "You've ruled out women then?"

"Only if I have to. But in a world bulging with nearly ten billion people there should be *one* candidate!"

Garrick shrugged. "Just making certain."

Lattimore turned to face the rest. "Everyone out." They heaved themselves erect and started to leave.

"Sir," Wehvila began, "about the Beaufort Sea fields—"

"Not now. Alaska is about out of oil anyway. See Cirellan."

Marcia, trim and grey, seemed about to speak but Lattimore stopped her. "Later, Marcia. After Garrick." She nodded and left.

"Get yourself a drink," Lattimore said when they were alone.

"No, thanks."

"I know what you're thinking, Garrick. The lawyers will shoot it down. No use endangering the multi-billion credit empire. To hell with them. They can find their own immortality."

"It's not immortality, just an extension." Garrick seemed faintly amused, an attitude that had always puzzled Lattimore.

"It *might* be immortality if they improve the state of the art in time."

Garrick got to his feet, six feet two of toughness, sheathed in a black Bioform, plain and expensive. "You gave me quite a mandate."

Lattimore didn't answer for a long time, then he swung the bulky shell he inhabited around to the big window. He looked out over the Shoshones through two layers of plastic glass.

"Use it," he said at last.

"Okay," Garrick said and he turned to go.

"Garrick," Lattimore said. The big man in black stopped. "Be quick."

"Sure," he said. He waited patiently and Lattimore knew he waited. That was one of the reasons

(continued on page 38)

It looked like an impossible murder—until an "impossible" camera revealed the secret from a—

DIFFERENT ANGLE

H.H. HOLLIS

44V

lou WOULD THINK, **WOUldn** t you, that a man firing a forty-five into another man's back in the middle of a room with a hundred and twenty seven police officers in it, would have been *seen,* even if he wasn't caught?"

"Yes, Chief," said Detective Juan Hermanoso. "And if a hundred and twenty seven cops couldn't make the arrest, I don't see how you expect me to. I wasn't even there."

"Hermanoso," said Chief Lorimer, passing his hand wearily over his face, "In Houston, we do not call police officers 'cops.' I wonder if you can guess why I want you in charge of this investigation."

"Need somebody to blame, I suppose."

"Hermanoso, raise your sights, will you? I hope a fresh eye will pick up what fooled the rest of us."

"Yes, 1 understand. Who was there?"

"The graduating class of police rookies, fifty seven young men and women. Seventy police officers who had taught the class, or had relatives in the class, or were there for the department. About two hundred friends and relatives. Charlie Corano has the list."

"Was the auditorium set up as usual for a graduating class?"

"Yes. The chairs for the graduates were lined up on the platform behind the lectern, and the curtains were drawn behind the chairs."

"Where was everybody?"

"I was directly in front of the lectern, talking to Father Braun, who was going to give the invocation. I was looking straight over his shoulder at poor Tom, who was on the platform adjusting the microphone. In another minute he would have said something to test the p.a. system, the graduates would have filed up on the stage, and the ceremony would have begun."

"You saw Inspector Porton shot, then?"

"I *heard* the gun go off, and I saw that slug tear his chest open. He was shot from behind. Somebody held the curtains open and shot him."

"What happened then?"

"Some high ranking police officers lost their heads. About twenty shots were fired into those curtains. It's a wonder somebody besides Tom Porton wasn't killed."

"And there was nobody there?"

"Oscar Benning got back there and pulled the curtain. Nothing and nobody . . . just a bunch of bullet holes in the plasterboard at the back, and the gun on the floor. It was clean."

"Where was the mayor?"

"He had just come in the door when the shot was fired that killed Tom. Of course, we all thought it was an attempt to assassinate the mayor."

"Well, Chief, I got the solution."

"What!"

"Sure. Announce it as unsolved and forget it. That's as near a solution as you're ever going to get."

"Tom Porton was one of our own, Hermanoso. Go to work. I want that killer."

"Who's filling in for Inspector Porton?"

"Oscar Benning. He knows the routine."

"Yeah. He was temporary inspector for a while under the old administration. I'll go talk to Captain Benning."

Temporary Inspector Benning had no small talk for Detective Juan Hermanoso. "You see anybody, Inspector? Anything?"

Benning shook his head, graying red hair cut close to the scalp, freckles visible against a white face that was a little heavier each year. "Some cop who's gone bad shot Tom Porton and got back into the crowd. We'll never find him."

"But if I don't, I might be back wearing a uniform. I got to find him."

"What do you want me to do, cry for you? The department made you a detective, act like one."

Charlie Corano had the only information of value. The list of persons who were there included checks beside five names.

"What's these marks, Charlie?"

"Those are the people who had cameras. These two made pictures of Inspector Porton. We have the developed prints from one camera. One shows Porton adjusting the mike. The next one shows his chest blowing open."

"Either one show the curtains behind him?"

"No, the pix were made from straight in front, about three or four rows up the slope of the seats in the auditorium. The join of the curtains looks like it's coming right out of Tom Porton's head."

"What about the other camera? Why don't we have the pictures from it?"

"That's a real interesting political problem. The kid who took the pictures denied he had taken any, and he was allowed to go home. It was the next day before Brownie Charlton reported that he

had seen the boy pointing the camera. It's a movie camera. Brownie's sure it was running, and the kid's father has as good as admitted it; but he says it was an experimental camera, the pictures don't show anything, they're not properly developed . . . any reason will do when you don't want to do something. They won't give the pix up, if they have any."

"So? How does this get to be a political problem?"

"The mayor himself says lay off the boy."

"So now I got to go see the mayor."

The mayor was cordial. "Officer Hermanoso, aren't you the man who broke the theft ring at Long-Reach last year?"

"Yes sir."

"And the thieves turned out to be Mexicans too, right?"

"We call ourselves persons with Spanish surnames now, Mr. Mayor."

"A-hem, yes of course. Well, and Chief Lorimer has put you in charge of the investigation of poor Tom Porton's death."

"Yes sir. The Chief could just have fired me and saved a lot of time."

"What does that mean, Officer?"

"Just what it sounds like, Mr. Mayor. You were there. Chief was there. Hundred and twenty six other police officers. Did *you* see who did it?"

"No, of course not. I was just walking in the door when it happened."

"Well, nobody else seen it either. What can I do? That room is in use all the time. There's grime and footprints all over where the killer stood, but they may be his or anybody else's. Chances are every footprint there is some policeman's. Chief expects me to fail, and you do too. You *want* me to."

The mayor was exasperated at this. "Now, wait a minute, Johnny. Don't give me any of your Latin temperament. What makes you think I want this investigation to fail?"

"Charlie Corano told me you said to lay off this kid with the pictures."

"Did he tell you who the kid is?"

"No, some relation of yours?"

"He's that Negro high school boy with the I.Q. of 179, and his father is a big man in insurance. Now, they'll cooperate, but that cooperation is going to have to be voluntary, and it's going to have to be bought with tact. I don't want anybody saying that no Negro is safe from the police in this town. That's why Lorimer put you on this. You have a reputation for doing things without rocking the boat."

"And I'm almost colored myself."

"Now Johnny, cut that out!"

"My name is Juan, Mr. Mayor. Now I got to go see this kid."

The boy's father was polite, but no more. "I have spoken to the Chief and to the mayor about this matter, Officer. To how many more people do I have to speak?"

Juan spread his hands. "I'm the last, I hope. Listen, I'm in trouble. If you can't help me, that's an end to it. If you can, why shouldn't you?"

"Officer, my son is a brilliant student. In many fields, he is more than a student. One of those fields is optics. He has been inspired by the work of Dr. Land to think that despite all the mechanical description of optics which has taken place, there are still major advances to be made. He believes that he has made one of those major advances. If he is right, it is patentable, and the patent will be immensely valuable. If he reveals the mechanics of his invention . . . and that is what you are really asking . . . he cannot secure a patent. The developmental work is far from done. One of my nephews was in that police graduating class. The camera my son took to the ceremony that night is a crude, experimental model, the first, in fact, ever to function outside a fully controlled laboratory environment. I assure you that the hardly distinguishable pictures it took will be of no use whatever to you in your investigation."

"May I see them anyhow? I got to say something when I go back downtown."

"No, sir, you may not see them."

"I can get a court order."

"That will destroy the value of a patentable invention? I doubt that very much. My lawyers have assured me that it is a remote possibility at best. By the time the court proceedings are over, you will already have solved the crime in some other way. Of course, you are free to try." He stood up.

Juan stood up too. "Listen, Mr. Blanton, could I just talk to your son for a few minutes? Here in this room, with you here too? I promise I won't ask him to let me see the pictures."

When the young man came in, his level gaze made the detective feel stupid. "Bradford," he said, "I understand from the mayor that you are five times as smart as I am; and now that I see you, I believe it. Are you so smart you don't think we're the same kind of people?"

Bradford smiled in a cold way. Behind it, Juan Hermanoso could see the boy in him peeping out. "Human intelligence doesn't work like that. I guess I know and can do a lot more things than you can. You know some things I don't, yet."

"Well, at least we speak the same language. I promised your dad I wouldn't ask to see those pictures. I didn't promise I wouldn't ask what makes them so different. What is it?"

"I have to have my lawyer here for that."

"You're kidding, aren't you? You didn't kill Inspector Porton with your camera, did you?"

The father broke in. "No, no, he means he needs his attorney to advise him how much he can tell you without making a patent unobtainable. I'll just answer the problem by asking you to go. Come back when you have a court order,

Mr. Hermanuco."

"Hermanoso, Mr. Blanton. Hermanuco is a kind of term of contempt. Bradford, would you tell me about your invention if your lawyer said it was okay?"

"Call him and let's ask him. You'll be surprised if he says it's all right."

The lawyer was absolutely noncommital. The most he would agree to do was to come out and confer. Mr. Blanton and Bradford and Juan Hermanoso talked about the weather, the phenomenal growth of the city, and other bland matters while waiting for the lawyer. It was not until they hit baseball that Bradford's eyes lighted up. It turned out one of his earliest experiments had been to repeat the work done by various other investigators into the nature of the curve ball; and photographing balls in flight had given him an expert interest in optics and photography. Hermanoso had been a semi-pro pitcher, and although he could contribute some anecdotes about curves he had thrown when he shouldn't have, he knew only *how* to throw a curve. When Bradford had finished explaining to him *why* the ball curves, and why some pitchers are better able to control the curve ball than others, Juan was not sure he would be able to follow the explanation of the pictures of Porton's death even if the lawyer okayed the teaching session.

"Well," he said at last, "if I'd had you catching me, I might be in the big leagues today."

The patent attorney, who seemed faintly annoyed at having his specialty broken into by the blood and stink of a criminal investigation, took Bradford and his father off for a conference. In about fifteen minutes they were back.

"Mr. Hermanoso," the lawyer said, "our problem is complicated by the fact that you cannot very well agree in advance not to reveal what you have been told."

"Hundred percent right, attorney."

"But you could agree that the process described to you is the invention of Bradford Blanton, so far as you know; that you never heard of it before he described it to you; and if we can give you a piece of evidence that does not reveal the process, you can agree to be satisfied with that."

"Yeah, I can. That don't mean Harry Lorimer is going to be satisfied."

"I don't care about the Chief. I care about preserving the secrecy of Bradford's process until I can produce an ironbound patent application. I'll need only about a week to do that. If you agree as I have asked, and then Chief Lorimer wants to try to get the film itself by court order, we'll deal with that when we get to it. Do you agree?"

"You'll give me a print of the pictures?"

Bradford spoke up. It was obvious he was eager to see his process put to practical use. "No, no, it doesn't produce prints; but I'll give you something. When the

case is tried, you'll have to have me to testify and show you what it shows."

Juan smiled and nodded. "It's up to the D.A. who testifies; but I'll put in your bid. Now tell me how your camera works."

"It's a holographic camera. The big breakthrough is that it makes hologrammatic movies."

"That's just what I was afraid of, that even when you explained it to me, I wouldn't understand it."

"Come on back to my workroom, and I'll show you."

They walked into the back yard to a small concrete block building with a single door and no windows. It was lit inside with fluorescents.

"Now," said Bradford, "this is a laser. It's a rod of artificial ruby with the molecules lined up in such a way that when a current of electricity is passed in a spiral around the rod, a beam of pure light, all the same wavelength, is excited and streams out the end of the rod. Okay?"

"Yeah, that's what the villain went after James Bond's family jewels with, right?"

"Right. It'll cut metal, and it'll hold together in a tight beam almost forever. It'll also take pictures."

"Snapshots?"

"Yes, but also holograms." Bradford held up a flat glass plate. "This is an ordinary hologram."

"There's no picture on there."

"No, it's *in* the glass. You can't see it at all without looking through the plate with light of the same kind that was used to take the picture." He inserted the plate in a machine, and cut on a couple of switches. There was a hum, and then a bright image sprang into being in front of the machine. It was a two wheeled nineteenth century cannon about a foot long.

"What's it projected on?"

Bradford chuckled. "That's the beauty of it. It isn't projected *on* anything. It's just projected. That's *a real* image."

"Real? Solid, you mean?"

"No, it isn't solid; but it is three dimensional. You can walk around it and see all the way around the object."

Hermanoso tried it, and his thick black hair rose as he did so. There was something eerie about seeing the wheels and trail of the cannon shift as he moved, and hidden details of the object become visible as he circled the image. He whistled. "How you do *thatT*

"It's easy. Well, not easy. This glass plate process is clumsy and time consuming and the photographed object has to be absolutely still. But the *idea* is easy. You interrupt the laser beam with a half silvered mirror, so that part of the light goes directly onto the object, and part is reflected to one side to another mirror and then back onto the object. Your photographic plate records both reflections, and then when you reverse the light process, the three dimensional image appears in the air."

"Now I guess you're going to tell me your camera does all this in the

lens and makes three dimensional movies."

Bradford shook his head. "I had three friends there with me. They had the reflectors. That's why we were careful to get there so early. We had to be positioned just so."

"You might have fried somebody's ear with that laser beam bouncing around in there."

"Oh no. My film has a flexible, transparent backing, and the photographic element is silicon chips, well not silicon chips, but *like* silicon chips impregnated with silver ions, and I use light that's only partly rectified. So my light isn't going to bore a hole in the wall or in anybody's head."

After Juan had looked at the film, he said, "Now, listen, let's not kid anybody. You know I got to do something about this, don't you? How can you guarantee me that if I wait a week while your lawyer does his work, that film will still be here?"

Bradford said, "I'll scrape some of the silicon chips off each of the key frames, and you can take those away with you."

"A fat lot of good that's going to do me."

"You don't understand, Mr. Hermanoso. *Each* of those silicon chips has the image in it. You just need one. Put it in the viewer, and the image will come up."

"Prove *that* to me."

A few minutes later, Juan left with several small envelopes in his pocket. Each contained a tiny scraping of the sensitized silicon chips from Bradford's film.

For the next week, he went through the motions of a busy police officer energetically investigating a murder. He talked to a hundred of the people who had been in the room. Nobody had seen anything of use. Most of them did not know what they had seen. Their stories were confused, and confusing. Detective Hermanoso was hoping against hope that someone had seen the vital piece of evidence, and that he would be able to demonstrate it without using Bradford's silicon chips. Juan looked at the envelopes from time to time and shook his head unbelievingly.

It became apparent that he was concentrating on people who had been at the left side of the room, stage right. The little raised platform and proscenium had a curtained door at each end by which one could gain the small backstage and the area which had been curtained off at the time of the murder.

Chief Lorimer called him in. "What are you after? Got some idea?"

"I'm just doing police work. I may not be doing it for much longer, but I'm doing it the way I was taught."

"Will you get over the idea somebody's trying to break you! Come back when you've got enough for an arrest."

"If I don't see you again, it was nice working for you, right up to the last assignment."

So the week went by. At last there was nothing the detective

could do. He went to the Chiefs office and laid his little envelopes on the blotter.

"What the hell is this, Juanito?"

"I don't think I could explain it. Call that Blanton kid's house and ask him if he's ready to show us some pictures."

The Chief threw him the phone, and he made the appointment with the boy inventor. On the way out, he stirred gloomily in the car. "You ain't going to like this, Chief."

"You just get me a killer, and stop worrying if I'm going to like it or not."

They went back to the boy's lab. "Will your lawyer let you show us the whole moving picture?"

"Yes, I signed the patent application this morning, and it's in the mail already. I'm as protected as I can be."

Juan turned to the Chief. "I'm glad. I was afraid I wouldn't believe it myself, if I didn't get to see it again in the movie."

Bradford ran the movie for them. There it all was, in an image that made about a two foot cube. People were small, but recognizable. The quality of the image was grainy, and sometimes there were swarms of light spots through it that made it almost invisible, but it was possible to follow the action. The film began just before Tom Porton came through the curtains onstage. He carefully closed them behind him, then seemed to come directly toward the Chief, who was sitting immediately in front of the image. He twirled the locking device on the microphone, raised the head, lowered it, and leaned forward as if about to speak. The curtain behind him fluttered just the least little bit, and a great hole opened up in his chest. His left hand covered it and his right gripped the microphone standard. Blood burst through his left fingers, and his right hand unclasped as he fell. The film ended as police officers with drawn guns converged on the stage. The curtains fluttered as the bullets fired from in front struck.

"So what the hell have we got? Tom's in front of the killer just the same as when he was killed."

"Chief. You don't remember what Bradford said. This is a three dimensional image. You can walk around it."

"All the way around?"

"No, Chief," the boy said. "The back wall of the room is in the way of this film. You can change your position, though. Try it. Come over to the left and you can see what Mr. Hermanoso wants you to see."

"That's right, Bradford," Juan murmured, "do the whole job for me."

Chief Lorimer walked seventy five or eighty degrees to the left and said, "All right, let's see it again."

Again the grainy, gray and white image jerked its way through its short life. It *was* eerie to see details that previously had been covered and now were revealed as if the solid objects themselves were in one's view. This time, as Porton leaned forward to speak, a hand suddenly appeared through the slit

in the curtains. It held a forty five caliber revolver which fired once, directly into Porton's back. Then the film ran down again.

Chief Lorimer sat quietly for a moment. "I see why you didn't want us to see that, son," he said. "That was a black hand that fired the gun. But, boy, you're a credit to your people. You did the right thing to show us that. Nobody is entitled to be protected in a killing, no matter what his color is."

"I'm glad you said that, Chief," said Juan. "I told Bradford that would be the department's attitude. Now, Bradford, put some of these chips in the magnifying viewer and let's see what else we can find out."

The boy fiddled with a second viewer for a moment. Another image sprang to life before them. As he manipulated the wheels, the image became larger.

"By God," said Chief Lorimer, "maybe we can recognize the black . . . . black-hearted booger now." He winked at Juan Hermanoso, who looked away.

The image swam to larger life. This was projected from a single chip, so it was still. By standing to the side, they could see the black hand growing in size. When it was two feet long, there was no possibility of failing to see that it was a hand wearing a black cotton glove. The glove had slipped a little away from the sleeve of the blue uniform, so there was visible on the white wrist part of a tattoo in dark ink. An American eagle was half seen, clutching the arrows of war in one clawed fist. There were words in a circle, of which only two could be read: "BEFORE DISHONOR."

"I wonder who has a tattoo like that," said the Chief.

"I expect you see it every morning when he lays his division report on your desk," said Juan Hermanoso. "Did Captain Benning get that done while he was in the Marine Corps?"

"I'll never believe it's Benning. We can't found a charge on a piece of a tattoo. I'll bet there are five thousand like it in Houston."

"On policemen?"

"I still don't believe it was Benning."

"Bradford, show us the last few frames of the film, will you?"

As Porton fell, Hermanoso's finger directed his Chief's attention away from the tragic figure to the curtained door at stage right. There the bulky figure of Captain Benning could be seen. He fired a shot into the curtains onstage, then disappeared and reappeared when he had pulled the stage curtains.

"Well?" said the Chief. "He was the first man to get backstage. I told you that the first day I gave you this assignment. Everybody saw him run backstage. So how could he have *been* backstage?"

"I told you you weren't going to like this. You really don't want to see it, do you? Bradford, run it again. Now, watch, Chief. Bradford. slow it down when I signal. Look, Chief. Here's Porton, getting it. The hand drops the gun. Look over here at the curtained door."

Even watching it, the fact was hard to believe. Benning appeared

as if by magic at the curtains; but he *appcared backward.* Looking at it in slow motion, it was possible to see that he had leaped backward through the side door curtain, drawn and fired at the stage, and then charged through the door, to be seen next when the stage curtains were open.

"All right," said Lorimer. "I'll make the arrest myself. No examining trial. We'll bind him over directly to the Grand Jury." He walked out without another word to Bradford and Hermanoso.

"What did that man gain by shooting Mr. Porton?" asked the young inventor.

"Thought he was going to get the job. He had it on a temporary basis once before, and Porton edged him out of it when a new administration came in."

That night the bartender at the Club Pan-America handed Detective Hermanoso his second beer, and spoke. "Well, Juanito, what have you got going on that's interesting?"

Juan looked at him darkly and grunted. "Nothing. Police work is just asking dull questions of a lot of people who didn't want to meet you in the first place."

—H. H. HOLLIS

Moby, too (continued from page 22)

years ago?

I haven't any objections, if you don't.

All right, then. That's fine. It's settled. You shall be Moby, too.

—GORDON EKLUND

The Immortality (continued from page 28)

Lattimore liked him . . . and feared him. He could sense the unspoken.

"If you can," Lattimore said, "get one for yourself. I'll pay."

Garrick let a grin come faintly to his lips. He had planned to do that anyway, but now he had the Lattimore lawyers to smooth the way for the two new personas.

Oh, he would find a new body for Giles Lattimore and a new one for himself. But he wouldn't use his yet. Get some kid, put him in training, get that body up to peak, let the surgeons make it perfect, let the trainers bring the reflexes to the epitome.

Twenty years from now. That was the time. Build a new home for yourself, watch it grow, make adjustments, then take ownership.

Then pick another one or two or three to put into training.

The state of the art was bound to improve.

"Thank you," Garrick said. It was the first time he had ever said those words.

—WILLIAM ROTSLER

Before he was murdered, Maurice Post—the first human being to undergo treatment with vc—*foresaw the end of civilization in World War III. Could a handful of men—whose only common bond was their shared infection with ihe mysterious* vc—*use this new substance to avert that cataclysm?*

THE STONE THAT NEVER CAME DOWN

JOHN BRUNNER

(CONCLUSION)

Illustrated by MIKE KALUTA

SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE

THE TIME IS the near future—the 1980's. The scene is London—a London ravaged by sweeping inflation, ever-increasing unemployment, and THE GODHEADS—Jesus Freaks turned vicious, beating up those who refuse to give alms and trashing the homes of those they regard as "unGodly," "perverted," or otherwise offensive to their narrowly defined morality.

MAURICE POST heads up one of two research departments at the Gull-Grant Research Institute—the Organochemical. Gull-Grant occupies the top floor of a four-storey block on the eastern edge of Soho. He works with ARTHUR RANDOLPH, who heads the Biological department, and for PROFESSOR WILFRED KNELLER, who is Director of Gull-Grant. Gull-Grant has been, since it was set up eight years earlier, attempting to create a replicating molecule not derived from pre-existent living material. As it turned out, someone else came in first on that one—but by means sufficiently different that Post and Gull-Grant are encouraged to continue their own researches—which lead, eventually, to vc. "Vc" stands for "viral coefficient"—vc is a synthetic replicant which although not a virus has one viral attribute, the ability to multiply in a proper environment, like living animal tissue.

Vc has unique properties. It works upon the nervous system. Crudely put, it amplifies intelligence. More exactly, it makes selective inattention more difficult. In practical terms it seems to make anyone infected with it much more sensitive to his senses, and his memory becomes totally recallable.

Post has been using the stuff on laboratory animals, with uniformly positive effects. He has also inhaled a subthreshold dose himself, and decides to follow that up with a full dosage.

The effects upon him are remarkable, but he never has an opportunity to explore them all. Instead, while he is in a local pub he meets MALCOLM FRY, takes a liking to him and decides to give him a capsule of vc. He is observed by professional drug-dealers who use the pub as a headquarters, and is murdered soon thereafter and left in an alleyway.

Malcolm Fry lives at 25 Chater Street in London's Kentish Town. He owns the house but has been reduced to letting most of it to roomers, since he lost his job as a teacher after expressing opposition to the Campaign Against Moral Pollution, a popular repressive movement which is another symptom of the religious frenzy that has swept the western world. Now, at thirty-five. Fry is head over heels in debt, unemployable (in his own profession, at any rate—publicity has made him notorious, in fact) and abandoned by his wife who left six months ago with the children and the car.

On the morning after he was given the capsule of vc by "Morris" (as Fry knows him), Fry wakes beside RUTH to find his senses sharpened to the extent that he can tell the number of godheads coming down the snowy street, purely by the sounds he hears. And Ruth tells him that his lovemaking that night had been unbelievably good—"It was as though you'd climbed inside my head and knew what I wanted done next before I'd thought of it myself." (Ruth has a job in the Civil Service, is five years older than Malcolm, single, and attractive; her body is that of a girl twenty years younger. They are growing serious about each other.)

The godheads—four of them, bullies who regularly hit Fry for a five-pound note under the threat of smashing his windows or otherwise vandalizing his house—stop outside, but are greeted first by BILLY COHEN, one of his lodgers, an American living in London. Cohen, a Jew, is annoyed by the bullying tactics of the godheads, and taunts them, then shoves one down the front steps. They retaliate with their wooden crosses—which make good clubs.

Fry takes Cohen to the North-West London General Clinic, where Billy is treated by DR. HECTOR CAMPBELL, and Fry notices that the Clinic is now advertising for blood at five pounds a pint—something that has not been done before. He needs the money and gives a pint.

This sets in motion a number of simultaneous events, for unknown to him the vc in his body has been thriving and now "infects" the blood he has given, vc is now, as yet unknown by anyone, loose in the world at large.

As it happens, Dr. Campbell is a friend of Dr. Post's, and Randolph and Kneller of Gull-Grant come to him, hoping he might know what has become of Post, who has disappeared. When Post's body is found, Dr. Campbell makes the first identification, and goes with Randolph and Kneller to Post's home, where they meet CHIEF INSPECTOR SAWYER, to whom they reveal the existence of vc and the nature of Post's work.

IN THE MEANTIME, we must meet some of the others involved in this story. There is AMELIA, LADY WASHGRAVE. She is Executive Chairman of the Campaign Against Moral Pollution. Her concern rests largely on the New Year's Crusade, a mammoth rally she is planning. She is assisted by her personal secretary, TARQUIN DREW. Their preoccupation of the moment is the attendance at their rally of BROTHER BOB BRADSHAW. Bradshaw is an evangelical preacher, cum TV star. He lives in Los Angeles in a fashionable home acquired before his conversion, and he is not eager to go to London to join (and lend his weight to) the CAMP rally. However, it is the politic thing to do, and he does it—only to be accosted at the airport, while posing for the cameras with Lady Washgrave and the Right Honourable HENRY CHARKALL-PHELPS (Home Secretary of Great Britain, and a moving force in CAMP), by a girl waving a straight razor. She manages only to cut up his forearm—thrown up to ward off her attack—and tells the TV cameras that eight years earlier (when she was thirteen) Bradshaw seduced her and got her pregnant, forcing upon her an abortion. "I swore I'd get him, somehow. I'm only sorry there were too many people in the way for me to slash his face instead of his arm."

Bradshaw's arm is badly cut up, but while he is still in the hospital the incident, with its ugly publicity, is turned to good advantage: Bradshaw, after all, had been an actor eight years ago—a Sinner. He is a Prodigal Son returned to the Fold. That his past had its, ah, racy moments only adds to his popularity among the currently devout (some of whom have had equally checkered pasts). He was given a blood transfusion—and unknowingly infected with vc. When the long awaited New Year's Crusade is commenced—in Albert Hall before some seven thousand of the faithful—Brother Bradshaw listens with increasing annoyance to a bishop's prayer of invocation, and then interrupts to charge the man with dishonesty and hypocrisy. Taking the

microphone, Bradshaw confesses that he has been a hypocrite himself and "There isn't a sinner in the hall with more on his conscience than I have, unless it's this bunch of bastards up here on the platform with me!" And so saying, he sweeps the microphone to the floor with a swing of his unbandaged arm and leaps down from the rostrum to run pell-mell for the exit. No one has the chance to stop him before he is gone.

DETECTIVE CHIEF Inspector David Sawyer and his Sergeant, BRIAN EPTON, are plotting in the meantime the capture of an old, but wily adversary, HARRY BOTT.

They track Bott down and catch him red-handed, but, startled, Bott comes crashing down with a lot of broken glass from a warehouse skylight onto Sawyer, sending them both to the hospital . . . where their blood transfusions are contaminated with vc . . .

And then there's VALENTINE CRAWFORD, a black, who teaches classes in black history and black consciousness to his neighbors. Crawford is a trained TV repairman who can no longer find work—white women objected to his boss about a black man entering their homes. He is a bitter man, and with much justification. He had married an English girl who deserted him because, in the worsening climate of race relations, she could no longer take the social ostracism. She left behind a six-year-old son, TOUSSAINT, who is malnourished and sick. Crawford is helped in his care for his son by CISSY JONES, a sixteen-year-old who comes to his classes and who has adopted Toussaint as a younger brother.

Coming home from Christmas shopping, his arms full of packages, Crawford is an easy mark for a pack of white toughs, who carve his belly. He goes to the hospital and receives blood . . .

LANCE-CORPORAL DENNIS STEVENS joined the army when he found it impossible to get a job elsewhere. Dispatched to Glasgow to help put down the striking workers, he is hit by a fragmenting bomb, and is literally castrated. He is approached in the hospital by a man from Anglo-Caledonian Television who regards him as a hero—"the first soldier actually to be injured in the Glasgow disturbances—you made the papers in a rather big way. And the point is that now the strikers in Glasgow are turning to terrorism like their opposite numbers out there in Italy . . . You've heard about the things that are going on in Turin and Milan? Yes? Shocking, isn't it? Well, we think it's high time to provide a proper balance by interviewing someone who's suffered at their hands."

Stevens agrees, but when he is on live television he excoriates the army: "Soon as I can walk I'm going to quit the army, and let's see 'em court-martial this phoney hero for desertion—won't that be a giggle, hm? Hero be damned! I'm just a poor bugger who couldn't get a proper job! Gang of fucking tearaways, that's all the army is, only in it you get paid for bashing people about while my mates back home who done the same on a private-enterprise basis got flung in jail 'cause they did it without waiting till they were ordered to!"

IN THE MEANTIME, Fry contacts Kneller and Randolph, who are pleased to find in him the first human who has survived any length of time after infection with vc. Fry tells them that after a day or

two he went into a coma—a deep sleep which lasted nearly three days. It appears that the mind and body required this period to adjust fully to the effects of vc. For the mind the period was like an extended dream-period, during which all the data in Fry's memories have been re-examined and re-integrated. He has emerged from this long sleep an advanced human being. It appears obvious that vc is capable of doing great good.

Unfortunately, the laboratories at Gull-Grant have been taken over by the government under the personal direction of Home Secretary Charkall-Phelps, to whom vc obviously means a different kind of bonanza. It would seem that he envisions the creation of two races of man—a superior elite to whom vc has been administered, and ordinary mankind, who would become undermen, in effect. All mention of vc has been kept from the news under Britain's Official Secrets Act, and reports of Dr. Post's murder make no mention of the substance.

And while all this is going on, Italy is undergoing social convulsions . . .

XIII

"SO WHO EXACTLY is this helpful friend I'm taking you to see?" Kneller demanded as he inched his car through the dense traffic of the West End. The New Year's bargain-sales were under way and the streets were crowded with both vehicles and pedestrians, but the stores themselves were nearly empty; most people were simply gazing with awful envy at the window-displays. It was a grey, cold evening, though not actually snowing or raining at the moment.

"Habib Nasir," Hector said, and checked his watch. "If I'd known it was going to take so long I wouldn't have asked you to call on him with me . . . He's not exactly a friend. He married Eileen, a girl I was in medical school with. And he works for the Epidemic Early Warning Unit."

"The people who run a computer watch on notifiable diseases, try and catch an outbreak before it spreads?"

"That's them. Except they don't only monitor diseases, they keep their eye on all aspects of hospital practice, including drug abuse. They're overworked and understaffed, but they're always willing to help out a GP like myself, and if people do start falling asleep for two or three days after receiving a transfusion it may very well show up on their graphs."

"How did you account for your inquiry?"

"I sort of gave the impression that I'm on to a new variety of narcolepsy, and want to write a paper about it."

"Neat," Kneller approved. And then abruptly: "Oh, hell! Godheads!"

Horrified, Hector hunched close to the windscreen. Half the streetlamps were out—an economy measure imposed by the Electricity Generating Board owing to its inability to meet demand this winter—but the shops, of course,

were all brightly lit as part of the government's desperate attempts to counteract the slump by stimulating consumer purchases, so he could clearly see the group of young people, well and warmly clad, working their way along the line of stationary cars in teams of three and demanding alms.

A girl came banging on the window at Hector's side. He scowled and ignored her. Promptly her companions, both burly young men, took station at the car's nose and poised their big plastic crosses hammer-fashion.

"Pay up or they'll smash your headlights!" the girl cried.

Providentially, though, a police-car appeared from the opposite direction, siren howling and light flashing, and drew to a halt only twenty yards ahead. As men in uniform piled out of it, the godheads made off with expressions of disgust.

"Amazing," Kneller said. "1 didn't know godheads had any reason to avoid the police."

"You wouldn't think so, would you?" Hector agreed sourly. "Not when quoting the Bible in the dock seems to get you off any charge short of murder. You know the bunch who set fire to that Hindu temple were only given a year's probation?"

"No, 1 haven't seen the news this evening." Kneller was peering ahead. "What *are* those policemen up to?"

"Oh! Then you haven't heard what Dalessandro's done?"

"No, what?" Absently. Then: "Lord, they're putting a barrier across the road! Diversion signs, too!"

"He's called for everybody who wants a Government of National Unity to stay away from work on Monday. He claims he can shut down the country—factories, offices, railways, docks, the lot."

"Remind me not to be in Italy on Monday, then," Kneller said dryly, and wound down his window as one of the policemen approached. "Constable, what's going on?"

"Bomb-scare in Whitehall, sir. Phone-call from someone who claims he's planting bombs on behalf of those bloody strikers in Glasgow. Probably a hoax, but it's best not to take chances, isn't it?"

He moved on.

"What the hell are they trying to do to us?" Kneller said after a pause.

"Who—the government, or the terrorists?"

"The government!" Kneller snapped. "If they weren't such incompetent idiots, there wouldn't be any terrorists! I mean—well, look at this street right here! Hordes of people who can't afford to buy anything! Two million out of work! Advertisements all over the place saying *buy, buy!* Power-cuts literally every evening! I mean they must have known there was bound to be another cold snap sooner or later, and every winter I can remember when there was more than a week of snow it's been the same—'we weren't prepared to meet the

load!' "

Hector nodded. "1 know exactly what you mean."

"And because people don't trust them, seeing how incompetent they are, how incapable of providing a decent life for everybody in this, which is one of the richest countries on Earth, what do they do? They try and *force* people to behave the way they want! At the point of a gun!"

"I was born in Glasgow," Hector said. "When I heard they were sending the army in, 1 felt sick. Literally. You'd think that after Belfast . . . But not a bit of it. They won't stop until Glasgow is a heap of rubble, too."

"I've been to Belfast," Kneller said. "Street after street of ruins. Beggars by the hundred. But the children are the worst. The orphans. Not only ragged, not only half-starved, but insane."

"You don't have to tell me," Hector said sombrely. "Those who could get out did, and quite a lot of their families have settled in my clinic's catchment area. They bring their kids to me and complain about them screaming in the night—and a lot of them have bruises to show how they tried to shut them up—and expect me to drug them into docility. Undo the effect of years of terror with a single pill! And you're absolutely right about not providing a decent life for the citizens of this rich country. It's bad enough having to fight every inch of the way for adequate medical facilities, having to justify every drug you prescribe to some hidebound bureaucrat, but what I find worst is having to treat people who could be cured in a week if they could afford to eat a balanced diet. You know I've had scurvy cases this winter?"

"Maybe I'm wrong, then," Kneller said. "Maybe they aren't relying exclusively on guns. Maybe they're intending to starve the public into submission."

"Maurice said something like that," Hector muttered. "The last time I saw him. And not only to me, either. To Malcolm Fry as well apparently."

"And to me," Kneller grunted. "Weeks ago. At the time I thought he was just suffering one of his regular fits of the blues, and I didn't pay too much attention. But the more I think about the missed chances we've had, the more I look at the mess we're in, the more inclined I am to believe even his most extreme charges."

The traffic was moving again, by fits and starts. Without warning, on catching sight of an intersection ahead, he swung to the left and signalled a turn.

"Are you sure—?" Hector began.

"That I'm going the right way? Not to worry! I just realised: if the bomb-scare is in Whitehall, the only alternative routes open for traffic will be streets we'd pass along if we continued straight ahead. If I go this way, we can cut across them at junctions where there are traffic-lights. We ought to save—hmm!—about eighteen or nineteen minutes."

"You must know London as well

as a taxi-driver," Hector said. "I have no sense of direction to speak of."

Kneller looked briefly surprised. "Nor do 1, realiy! But . . . Well, this just seems like an obvious idea. 1 hope I'm right. Ah—you were talking about Malcolm a moment ago. I presume he was still all right when you saw him today?"

"Oh, he's perfectly fit. No doubt of it. I did something new this morning, though, which I was going to tell you about. Remember I sent to MENSA for one of their Cattell Three tests and gave it to him the other day?"

"Yes, you told me."

"Well, he didn't score any higher on that than you'd have expected—he says he was rated 135 when he was at school, about what you might guess, I think, and MENSA scored his paper at 139, which is too close to be significant. But—well, do you know the Christmas general-knowledge test they always reprint in the *Guardian?"*

"The one from King William School that's supposed to occupy the boys for the whole of their four-week holiday?"

"That's right. The answers won't be published for at least another fortnight. So I gave it to him. He does read the *Guardian* himself, but he swears he hasn't researched the quiz because he's been far too busy. I believe him."

Hector licked his lips. "Well, he answered ninety-seven of the questions. The other three he left blank. Said he didn't know and wouldn't pretend."

"And—?"

"And during my lunch-break I made a random check of a dozen of his answers. Phoned a librarian I know. All correct, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica."*

"So he's probably telling the truth about what vc has done to his memory."

"Yes. I don't think there's any doubt about it. Those question-papers are deliberately made so hard that nobody without eidetic recall can cope—and at that you'd have to be extremely widely read. I think we can take it for granted that Malcolm Fry does now have total recall."

"And seems physically fit," Kneller muttered. "Well, if there are no untoward side-effects . . . You were going to try and talk to his girl-friend, and this lodger who helped to nurse him over Christmas."

"I've seen them both, yes. Billy Cohen isn't much help—he only met Malcolm five months ago when he answered an advertisement for a room to let and Malcolm doesn't socialise very much with his lodgers. Small wonder, because apart from Billy they sound like a terribly dreary bunch. And frankly Ruth can't tell me much more than Billy, because she met him even more recently, at a party about three months ago. She has given a couple of important hints, though."

"Such as?"

"Well, she let it fall that he's become a spectacularly good lover, almost overnight. In fact she's decided to move in with him and dis-

regard the scandal and the complaints of the neighbours. She says she can't imagine ever meeting another man who would turn her on so well."

Braking for yet another stoplight—but they were making good progress on the roundabout route he had switched to—Kneller said, "That sounds like a real boon! Lord, when I was in my midthirties, I thought the millennium had arrived, you know. I had . . . Well, I had a rather repressed upbringing. It wasn't that my parents wanted me to be inhibited; rather, it was that to find out how to make me uninhibited they had to go and look up a book! Twenty years ago, fifteen, I was really getting excited about the relaxed and casual attitudes of my students. I thought maybe we were going to digest this conflict between the Christian injunction to get married and stay married, and the simple fact that nowadays we live so much longer it's a miracle if you can settle for a single partner, so— Sorry! It's a hobbyhorse of mine, that. I didn't mean to go off at a tangent."

"The only other point I was going to make," Hector said, "was that apparently Malcolm has had a couple of bouts of extreme depression. But this may well have no connection with vc. Wouldn't you expect someone to be depressed in his position? You know his wife packed the kids in the car because he'd been six months out of work, and drove off, and now she's found someone else and wants to prevent him seeing his own children ever again? With or without vc, that plus the state of the world could easily explain his depression."

"Agreed," Kneller said with a grimace.

"So on balance I'm very optimistic about vc," Hector concluded.

"I'd like to be. I have reservations, though. There are people I've run across in the Civil Service, the armed forces, commerce, even the academic world, who would cheerfully exploit the stuff for the purpose we mentioned the other evening: creating an elite and a subcaste. I'm not joking, you know . . . Well, here's the right road—and by a miracle there's a parking-space right outside the place we're going to!"

Hector said in surprise, "But that's where Habib always parks!"

"Damn! Is it? I hope he hasn't got sick of waiting!"

THE DOOR of the apartment opened cautiously on a security-chain and a tremulous voice said, "What do you want?"

"Eileen! It's me—Hector!"

"Oh, thank goodness! Come in!" Eileen, a pretty blonde looking very tired and miserable, released the chain. "I'm sorry, Habib isn't here. I gather he found exactly what you wanted, and he's left you a note. But he had to go out when they told us about the bombing."

"You mean it actually went off?" Hector demanded. "No wonder we

were diverted! That's why we're late."

Locking the door again, Eileen stared at him. "But Regent's Park is nowhere near your route, surely!"

"I think we must be talking about two different bombs," Hector said slowly. "Why Regent's Park?"

"Because they blew up the Islamic Cultural Centre, that's why! Habib isn't exactly devout, but when something like this happens . . . They think it was godhead work. At any rate there were bloody great crosses painted all over everywhere."

She hesitated. "Look, forgive me, but I'm just going to hand over the note Habib left and turn you out again. I can't stand company tonight. I want to sit by myself and—and cry my eyes out! It's terrifying! The world feels as though we're on a roller-coaster ride to Armageddon!"

BACK IN THE CAR Kneller said, "That about sums up my own view."

"And mine," Hector said, examining the sheet of paper—a computer print-out—which Eileen had given him. "Hmm! How interesting! I recognise one of these names."

"Which one? And how many are there?"

"Five. I can't place Bott or Bradshaw or Crawford or Jarman-Sawyer, but 'Dennis Horace Stevens' sounds like the first soldier to get hurt in the Glasgow riots—the one who caused a scandal when he appeared on TV and told the world what he thinks of the army."

"I'm not with you," Kneller said after a pause.

"Likely not. I didn't see it in the London papers. But my sister was watching, and wrote to me about it. To top it off he's vanished from Rathcanar Hospital. Walked out with heaven knows how many stitches in him. I wonder how the poor devil's feeling—if he's alive!"

Kneller took and scanned the list. "I think I recognise another of these names," he said.

"Which of them?"

"Didn't you know that Brother Bradshaw is the same as Bob Bradshaw, who used to star in the TV series *Gunslinger?"*

"Of course, but . . . Oh! 'Bradshaw Robert Emmanuel'?"

"It would account for his extraordinary behaviour at the Albert Hall, wouldn't it?" Kneller restarted the car. "I suggest we call on Malcolm and find out what he thinks."

"Professor, you must concur with Maurice," Hector said.

"How do you mean?"

"In his view, Malcolm was a deserving case likely to benefit from vc. Are you convinced he was right?"

Kneller looked faintly surprised. "Well, on present evidence—"

Hector cut in. "Apparently you've stopped worrying about vc, as Maurice did! Last time I talked to Randolph, he appeared to be tending the same way. I can't help

wondering . . . Well, you do work in the same labs, and even if you don't open the culture-vats as often as Maurice used to . . ."

Kneller had turned paper-pale. He said after a dreadful moment of silence, "Yes, 1 see. Tomorrow I'll try and dodge Gifford long enough to run the necessary tests."

1 DON'T GET IT!" complained Sergeant Epton.

"Get what?" David Sawyer countered. Officially he was still on sick leave; however, for what reason he could not guess, since he woke up in hospital his mind had been haunted by a non-stop sequence of surprising insights. His brain was whirling like a Catherine wheel, throwing off sparks of brilliance, and today he had been unable to endure the tension any longer, so he had come to the station to pass on some of his ideas, and Epton was overwhelmed.

"You know very well what I mean, chief. Chas Verity coughed in under the hour when we taxed him with the Post murder, and that was your suggestion. Soon as I had the statement signed, I called the murder squad, and were they delighted? Not a bit of it—they acted as though they'd been done an injury! On top of which, thanks to you we finally nailed Joe Feathers, caught him red-handed. Wouldn't you expect a commendation, at least? Instead—*well!"*

"Not really," Sawyer sighed.

"And now this lot!" Epton went on. He tapped the sheet on which he had noted down what Sawyer had been talking about this past half-hour. "If even a couple of these work out, we could see off some of the nastiest villains on the patch . . . What? Did you say you weren't expecting a commendation?"

Sawyer rose and limped to the window overlooking the yard. He said, his back turned, "Frankly, no. No more than I was expecting jail for the bastard who drove that car into the Italian demonstration before Christmas. You remember he broke a man's legs? And he got away with it!"

"As good as," Epton admitted. "What's a twenty-pound Fine these days?"

"What you get for parking in the wrong place!" Sawyer sighed. "Well, it's all of a piece, you know."

"What with?"

"With them not being happy at having the Post case cleared up on the local level. Who gave orders for it to be taken out of our hands? The Home Secretary himself! And who did he give it to? Owsley! Owsley isn't a jack like you and me—he's been with Special Branch most of the time since he joined. Murder isn't his line. What he's good at is waking anarchists at three in the morning and turning their rooms over!" He gave a harsh laugh. "No wonder Charkall-Phelps likes him so much!"

"You've become very bitter all of a sudden, chief," Epton said after a

pause.

"I suppose I have. But there are reasons. I've been thinking over my sins of omission. I have left undone those things that I ought to have done."

"I didn't know you were a churchgoer," Epton ventured.

"I'm not. I've been turned off it. But the phrases tend to stick, don't they?" Sawyer swung back to face the sergeant. "By the way, you had Harry Bott in court this morning, didn't you? What happened—remanded in custody?"

"What else?" Epton grinned. "That ought to make you feel pleased with yourself, if nothing else can. As a matter of fact . . . ?"

"Yes?"

"He asked to see you. I said you were still on sick leave, naturally. But he was very persistent."

"Then fix me an interview!" Sawyer said. "I'd rather Harry than some people I could name. An honest villain is a cut above one who smiles and smiles."

"What? Oh! Is that . . . Shakespeare?"

"Right in one. *Hamlet."*

"Been reading it up in hospital, have you?"

"No, thinking about it. Thinking about a lot of things. I told you. For some reason I simply can't stop."

"HELLO, HARRY," he said, half an hour later.

"Hello," grunted Harry Bott from the other side of the plain wooden table which, with three equally plain chairs, furnished the remand centre's interview room.

"So what do you want to see me about?" Sawyer went on, sitting down. "If it's Vera, I—uh—I tracked down the right kind of doctor for her."

"I heard. Thanks." Harry put his fingertips together, closed his eyes, seemed to squeeze himself; his jaw-muscles knotted and his elbows pressed into his ribs. He said after a pause, eyes still shut, "Mr. Sawyer, I got to talk to somebody. I'm scared of going out of my mind."

Sawyer was startled, but kept his tone carefully neutral. "In what way?"

"I—I can't face going back to jail! You know I done a bit of porridge before, don't you? I was still pretty much a kid—twenty-two—and it was only six months, four after good behaviour, but I remember clear as crystal what it was like, and . . . Oh, sweet suffering Mary mother of God! Being shut up with two other men in a cell for years on end—I'd go crazy! My mind is spinning and spinning and all the time I keep remembering *and it won't stop!"*

There was a dead pause. Harry took advantage of it to collect himself, while Sawyer simply stared at him.

—But that's exactly how I feel! I don't know what the hell's happened to me, let alone to him, so—Oh, no. I don't see how, but . . . Dr. Randolph. What he said about vc.

It was clear in his mind in the

space of a heartbeat and all his earlier facile assumptions blew away on the wind.

—What do we have in common? Same hospital, same time . . . I'm going to start digging into this! Contact Kneller!

"So?" was all he said aloud, however.

"So I want to make a deal, Mr. Sawyer."

"Try me. I'm listening."

Harry licked his lips. "Just what I'd have expected you to say, Mr. Sawyer. I've always thought of you as a square jack, not like some of the bent bastards I've bumped into. I know you'd rather knock off real villains than people like me . . . Funny thing for me to say, isn't it? But at least I've bothered big companies, chain-stores, the sort of tickle where people get hit in the pocket, not the guts! Except once. For about a year. I was a—a frightener. Did you know?"

"And . . . ?"

"And I got sick of it. We used dogs, we used petrol-bpmbs, we shipped in tarts and junkies, just to force people out of their homes so a bastard with more cash than he knew what to do with already could tear down houses and put up luxury flats. I could finger that bugger for you. Didn't think I could, but I've been working it out in my mind. Little hints, little clues . . . And how would you like someone who owes half a million in tax? How'd you like a crook solicitor who takes a thousand nicker a go to supply perjured witnesses? How'd you like—?"

Sawyer held up his hand. "Very much. And you know it! But what do I have to do to get it?"

"Spring me and get me out of the country. To Australia. With Vee and the kids."

Sawyer whistled.

"I know it's a lot to ask!" Harry pleaded. "But—but I've got to go straight now, Mr. Sawyer. Just *got* to! I simply couldn't carry on like I used!" There was anguish in his voice. He literally wrung his hands. "Thinking back on my spell as a frightener, I can't sleep! I swear it! What I did to people who'd never harmed me or anyone . . . !"

"You know something funny?" Sawyer said. "I believe you. There's a million who wouldn't. But I do."

"ARE YE NO' feeling well?" inquired the plump old body behind the counter of the little sub-post office, peering at Dennis Stevens over her glasses.

"Och, I'm fine," he muttered in reply, planting the parcel he had brought on the scales beside her. He gave an anxious glance around. This place was far enough away from the centre of the Glasgow disturbances for there not yet to be an armed soldier on guard at the door in case of a raid by strikers after money to supplement their union's strike fund. Three days ago they had audaciously carried out one in broad daylight which netted almost four thousand pounds.

—And bloody good luck to them,

I say!

But he hoped to heaven the postmistress wasn't going to try and engage him in a long conversation. He was getting the hang of the local accent well enough to make a sentence or two pass muster, but it was terribly difficult to concentrate. What he had just told her was a lie.

He hurt.

Well, he had been expecting that. But he had carefully duplicated the treatment they'd been giving him at the hospital—he could remember, as clearly as though they were still before him, the labels on the packets of dressings and the phials of antibiotic which the MO had used, and the gradation to which the hypodermics had been filled, and the intervals between injections, and he had raided one of the largest chemist's shops in the city, eluding locks and burglar-alarms with ease, and possessed himself of all the necessary equipment and drugs.

And other things as well, which were here in the parcel.

But something, nonetheless, wasn't right. There was a wetness between his legs, and this morning when he awoke there had been a yellow ooze from the hideous, hateful, horrible wound the stitches closed. He felt giddy, and now and then his eyes drifted out of focus despite his best efforts. Ideas came and went in his mind—went before he had time to examine them properly. It was going to be necessary after all to appeal to a doctor. But how? Would the strikers, embattled in their no-go zone where soldiers dared not venture on foot, welcome him if he admitted who he was? Surely they would—surely they must! Because anyone else would doubtless call the police immediately and have him arrested . . .

"What?" he said foggily, realising that the plump woman had asked a question.

"I said first class, or second?" the woman repeated. And went on, staring at him: "Are ye *sure* ye're no' ill?"

"I have a headache!" he answered curtly. "Mak' it first! The sooner it arrives, the be'er!"

He glanced one final time at the address* confirming he had remembered it correctly: *Mrs. June Cordery, No. 35, Officers' Married Quarters* . . . Yes, no errors in that. He felt in his pocket for coins to pay the postage. Under his fingertips, squelching foulness.

—Oh, no! It's getting worse by the minute! But what's happened to me is nothing compared to what will happen to that bastard's wife when she opens what looks so much like a present from her husband, what with its Glasgow postmark and everything. I hope she's leaning close when it blows up. I hope it blinds her—no, only in one eye, because I want her to see the look of loathing on her husband's face next time they meet . . .

The world swam. The day turned dark all of a sudden. The floor rocked and abruptly rose to hit him on the side. At a very great distance

he heard a cry of alarm.

—But I haven't paid for the parcel yet. I must. I . . .

Only it seemed like too much of an effort to say so.

"I SHOULDN'T have brought you this way round," Cissy muttered as she felt Valentine leaning on her instead of merely holding her arm companionably. It was dark and cold here on the narrow street; as in most low-income areas of London—and other British cities—they had switched off not half the streetlamps, but three out of four of them. Who, after all, gave a damn about people who had to live in slummy districts like this one?

"Keep going!" Valentine directed, gritting his teeth. "I ought to see what the brothers and sisters did to the bastard who carved me!"

Cissy gave him a doubtful glance. Somehow, in a way she could not fathom, that last remark had rung hollow.

—Forced? Yes. But . . . Oh, well: here we are.

And they rounded ,a corner, waving hello to a newspaper-seller who (exceptionally, in London) was black, and stood shivering as he presided over poster-displays announcing GLASGOW DESERTER CAPTURED and ITALIAN GOVERNMENT DEFEATED, and came in sight of what had been a grocery store.

Now, its entire frontage was boarded up and there was a for-sale sign straining in the wind, threatening to pull loose the nails that secured it to a black-painted pole, and smears of smoke-grey washed up the wall towards the windows of the small apartment above it.

"There!" Cissy said with pride. "And when he came rushing out we grabbed him and tore his pants off and left him right here in the street to watch the place burn!"

Valentine said nothing, staring at the ruined shop.

"Val?" She drew back a fraction, turning to him. "Is—?"

"Is something wrong?" he interrupted roughly. "Yes, *something!* I don't know what!"

"Don't tell me they turned you out of hospital too soon!" Leaping to an obvious conclusion. "I did think it was kind of—"

"No, not that." He bit his lip. "My body's mending okay, no doubt of it. Think I'd have let them buckra doctors turn me out before I was well on the way to being healed? No, what's wrong is . . ."

He hesitated. "I don't get it. It goes into words, and then it doesn't make sense."

"Explain!" Cissy ordered, hunching the fur collar of her coat higher around her pretty face.

"It's so complicated . . . To start with, though: the way you've helped me and Toussaint. I—uh—I love you for it."

"Man, I've loved you since the day I met you!" Cissy threw her arms around him and administered a smacking kiss on his cold dark cheek. "So what else is new?"

"So it makes me feel bad to know that because I got cut up you got in-

volved in—that."

"It was a pleasure! How often do you watch one of them bastards swallowing his own medicine?"

"It's not like that. It's— Ah, *shit!* Let's get on home. But I hope one thing. Really do."

"What?"

"You never have to do that again." With a jerk of his thumb at the shop as he moved away, stiffly to favour his half-knit belly-muscles.

"So long as they walk on us like we were dirt, we'll have to keep it up!" Cissy snapped.

"Yeah, but . . . Cis honey, I got things cooking in this head of mine. I'll tell you about them when we get back. Right now, you go in the baker's, and find some cake for Toussaint's tea."

XV

TONIGHT SNOW in big soft pillow-down flakes was adding the latest of many layers to the winter-glaze of London's streets. Snow, thaw, frost, sleet, frost, snow . . . It had been going on since November. Caught by surprise as usual, the city council had snowploughs enough only for a few crucial thoroughfares. Elsewhere they had fallen back on men with shovels and truckloads of sand, and in minor streets not even that much effort was being made any longer. Like miniaturised geological strata, ice and sand in alternation had compacted to the level of the kerbstones or higher, embedding fossils of rubbish. No council employees had been spared to clear litter-bins since early December, and all of them had been overflowing for weeks.

Now, at the end of this narrow street—what was it called? Reddened eyes searched for, found, failed to read a name-plaque covered by a fringe of icicles—a bus had skidded and rammed a wall. White-faced, teeth chattering from shock now as well as cold, its passengers were returning to the last stop to await a replacement. Passive, he stood watching from about thirty yards' distance.

—Fossils . . . Yes, this is like being a corpuscle inside a dying dinosaur. Half the streetlamps out. Cars abandoned. Buses running off the road. Not enough power to keep the underground trains on schedule. Gangrene is setting in.

At the thought of that, he reflexively touched his arm. Amazingly, though, it was healing well. It no longer hurt.

"Are you all right?" The question, kindly enough, from one of the frustrated bus-riders as he drew abreast: a man in a fur-fabric coat, worn at collar and cuffs, but still enviably warm.

"Me? Oh—yes, thanks. I'm okay."

"You don't look it! Standing out here in your shirtsleeves, soaking . . . What you ought to do, chum, is go to St. Sebastian's. They'll give you a cuppa and something to eat, and they may have a coat to spare." The man

hesitated as though about to venture an obscenity. "That is, unless you—uh—take drugs? They don't let in addicts."

With a reassuring headshake: "Thank you. I didn't know about this. I'm pretty much a stranger in London."

"I can hear that. Canadian, aren't you? Well, just turn right at the end of this street, and . . ."

So he did, and found himself in a few minutes on the front steps of a pillared building declared by a big board to be CHURCH OF SAINT SEBASTIAN MARTYR. He climbed the steps, pushed open a heavy door of dark wood on iron-strap hinges.

A high roof. Empty chairs. Air marginally warmer than outside, not much. Candles burning distant on an altar backed by a stained-glass window depicting Sebastian the Human Pin-Cushion in all his gory. Childhood image: a fakir drawn by Ripley, with *believe it or not* great spikes through arms and calves.

He walked slowly towards the eastern end.

"Here, you! What do you think you're doing?"

Emerging from a side-chapel, a portly florid dark-clad man, bustling and puffing with self-importance. And, taking in the shirt-sleeved soaking stubble-chinned stray: "Down the crypt, get along with you! Don't want you up here making a mess all over the place—we got a special service in the morning, and we only just cleaned up for it!"

There were wet smears from the door to where the snow-saturated shoes had halted.

But his flow of words broke off abruptly. The newcomer had looked at him, square in the eyes.

And now said, "I fell among thieves. But I'll let you pass by on the other side."

He walked away.

"Now—now just a second!" the portly man gasped, and came hurrying after. "I didn't mean to—!"

"But you did," the stranger said, and with a burst of angry energy hauled wide the heavy door and slammed it behind him with a crash that almost deafened the Pharisee.

—Thieves? True enough.

Three of them, while he had been hiding from pursuers barely less friendly. He had heard whispered words—"Look, he has his arm in a sling!"—and imagining sympathy had let them come up to him, and when they set about him it was impossible to fight back. They took his jacket containing his billfold, gagged him, tied his hands to his ankles with the sling, left him in the cold and wet to work free if he could.

It had taken time. It had been managed.

And, moneyless, he had gone exploring. Strange to this city, having visited it before but only on the luxury level, he had walked mile after freezing mile, staring in dismay—at lines of grey-faced housewives waiting for loaves a penny cheaper here than across the street; at children hobbling bandy-

legged with rickets out of snow-white school playgrounds; at others who had scratched their scalps raw for the lice that infested them; at able-bodied men in groups of six or eight at street-corners, hands deep in pockets, shoulders hunched, coatless and down-at-heel, while sleet and scraps of litter blew around their legs.

At a Rolls-Royce whose indecent half-nude mascot had been replaced by a crucifix.

He had slept where tiredness overcame him, under the arches of an incomplete elevated road; it carried no traffic, so he was quiet there. On either side houses stood vacant, windows smashed and doors nailed or padlocked, signs warning that they were patrolled by guard-dogs. Curiously, he had not been cold, though his only covering had been a couple of sacks. But he ought to have eaten something. He could feel that he ought. That was a novel sensation, known as hunger. In thirty-four years he had scarcely missed a meal; there was always food in his world, at fixed times. Now, he realised, he was burning vast amounts of energy to keep warm. His muscles, his very bones were complaining, and he had had to draw his belt in a full inch.

Around the side of the church a sign said REFUGE and pointed down a flight of icy steps to the crypt. He descended, found a door, on pushing it open was assailed by the smell of old clothes, steaming tea, stale bread. In a dour line fifty men and women as shabby as himself and even grimier were awaiting sweet tea in enamel mugs, bread-rolls smeared with margarine, and the chance to sit down on benches already fully occupied, so that a young man in a black front and clerical collar was walking around saying, "If you've finished, *would* you make room for others, please?"

A man responded, near the door, letting fall a copy of *The Right Way,* the monthly journal published by the Campaign Against Moral Pollution. It must have passed through several hands, being torn and tea-stained. Seeing it would be long before he reached the head of the line, the new arrival picked it up and glanced through it. He had seen it before. Lady Washgrave had sent a copy to his home in California. The main feature was an article by the Rt. Hon. Henry Cftarkall-Phelps, PC, MP, fulminating against the decline in educational standards he claimed had overtaken Britain.

A paragraph containing a name leapt to his eye.

We would do better to copy the example of the government of Greece, cradle of Western culture. A godless and immoral corrupter of the young, like that so-called "teacher" Malcolm Fry whose foul influence fortunately came to light thanks to the selfless dedication of members of our Campaign . . .

"So if you wouldn't mind moving on—? Hey, I say! I didn't mean you, I meant people who've already been served!"

But the door was swinging shut.

IT WAS SELDOM that Billy Cohen felt the need to patronise a gay club or gay bar. There were few of them left in London anyway; the palmy days of ten years ago when he had finally come to terms with his own nature and decided not to be ashamed of his inclinations had faded into wistful memory under the battering of the Puritan backlash. No question of legislation was involved—that remained theoretically very liberal. Just as passing laws had not stopped people drinking under Prohibition, though, it had not affected the fury of the bigots who, perhaps, were afraid of admitting to the same impulse in themselves. Bands of vigilantes patrolled Hampstead Heath and Wimbledon Common with dogs and water-pistols full of indelible dye; sometimes a young man was found dead with a cross carved on his forehead, though admittedly that had only happened three times in the three years since he moved to Britain permanently, thinking it less risky than New York on the basis of half a dozen short visits.

One after another, however, gay clubs and gay pubs were having their liquor-licenses withdrawn on specious grounds, in every case as the result of a well-organized, well-financed campaign of local agitation. So few were left.

Tonight he felt for once that he must be in company where he could relax. Ruth had been given notice to quit the Civil Service, a terrible blow in these times of high unemployment, and . . .

—How can she have been so *cruel?*

He had finished helping Malcolm to clean up the wreck of Mary's room, the quiet devout girl lodging next to him who barely exchanged helloes in the morning before vanishing to work. She had become, without warning, hysterical, and had screamed that she could no longer live in the same house with a man who shamelessly kept a mistress, and boasted moreover that it had been she who informed on Ruth to her department's chief. And smashed the windows, and the mirror, and the lamps, and the china hand-basin, and stormed out calling down fire and brimstone.

Malcolm had taken it all philosophically enough. Even so . . .

—I'm going to ask Kneller if I can be a vc guineapig too. Mai's been transformed. He's suddenly confident. He breathes the impression that he's going to do something big, very soon. What? And will he get the chance? All this talk of war . . .

He shivered as he walked, not from cold. It was dreadfully convincing, that war idea, the way Malcolm argued it. Dalessandro's general strike had succeeded fantastically; the entire country had been brought to a halt fpr a full day. Now he was in the open, addressing public meetings where the response was as frenzied as in the time of Mussolini, whom he often invoked. If he took over, he promised, he would pull Italy out of

the Common Market, re-impose high tariffs, close the frontiers to competing foreign goods . . . And the other countries in the Market wouldn't stand for it.

If war did follow, what could hinder it? He knew a little history; knew that in 1914 the international labour movement so many people had relied on to prevent open conflict had crumpled like wet paper under a wave of crazy nationalism; knew there had been self-sealing feul-tanks marked "Made in USA" in the Messerschmitt 110 which Rudolf Hess flew to Scotland, epitaph on the aspirations of those who had struggled to stop the Nazis. And knew above all that the guilty had more often gone free than been condemned.

This time, there was no massive anti-war movement at all. The super-powers might even be glad of a European conflict to distract their people from local problems: in America, the black ghettos were exploding in winter instead of summer, measure of the desperate frenzy the workless underprivileged were feeling, while it was in the cards that the USSR was about to reap the harvest of decades of bureaucratic inefficiency, commit troops ignominiously within its own borders as formerly in Budapest, Prague, East Berlin . . . and as another Power had been compelled to do in Belfast a few years ago, in Glasgow recently.

Once you had been shown the path of the powder-train, it was hard not to believe that a spark would sooner or later light it.

Here he was, though, at his destination: a club of which he was not a member but where he could rely on finding an acquaintance willing to invite him in. It was a basement in a narrow alley to the north of Oxford Street whose manager by dint of incredible ingenuity had kept one step ahead of the Campaign Against Moral Pollution's attempts to close him down. He complied scrupulously with fire regulations, liquor laws, hygiene laws, never allowed noisy music to leak out that might cause neighbours to complained.

And never never advertised except on the grapevine.

As Billy had hoped, several friends of his were present, and one of them promptly signed him in as a guest. Relaxing, accepting the offer of a drink, he joined in the normal small talk of the day: theatre-gossip, scandal, wishful thinking . . .

Almost an hour had gone by before there was an interruption. A loud bumping noise was heard from the front entrance: something heavy falling down the flight of steps that led to it. The duty barman and two customers hurried to see what had happened, and found the door jammed by the—the whatever. Their best efforts could not force it back more than three or four inches.

Alarm spread like a cold wind. The customers fell silent. One drew back a curtain and peered through a window.

"Godheads!" he screamed at the

shrill top of his voice.

"What?"—from a dozen throats. And someone said, "Back way, quickly!"

At which same moment came a noise of hammering.

Billy was among those who reached the fire emergency exit first. Just in time to recognize the stench of kerosene being poured under the door—to lean against it with insane force and find that the nails newly driven into a bar across it were going to hold . . .

And a fiery cross came smashing through the window.

XVI

BRAKING HIS CAR outside Number 25 Chater Street, Kneller muttered, "I never thought the day would come when I had to steal from my own labs!" Automatically he patted the bulge in his pocket where he carried a precious test-tube well protected with plastic foam and cotton-wool.

"I don't imagine Maurice did, either," Randolph said greyly. "After what Gifford let slip, though . . . Isn't it incredible? It's the kind of thing you read about in other countries, and smugly believe could never happen here."

"Exactly," Kneller said, locking the car. "And— Oh, we must have timed it perfectly. Isn't that Chief Inspector Sawyer?" He pointed at a dark-coated man favouring one foot as he climbed Malcolm's steps.

"So it is. Fantastic how he deduced what had happened to him, isn't it? And to think we had his name right in front of us and didn't make the connection!"

"Well, when he phoned he said he never uses the double-barrelled version . . . Ah, there's Malcolm opening the door. Come on."

A moment later, in the hallway, Malcolm was saying, "So you're the mysterious 'David Eric Jarman-Sawyer', are you?"

"I still don't know how you worked that out," Sawyer parried.

"We have a list," Malcolm murmured.

"Of people affected by vc, you mean? I'd like to see it!"

"So you shall. But wait a moment. There's someone in the living-room you ought to meet."

Puzzled, they followed him, and found Ruth—red-eyed as though she had been weeping—silently serving soup and bread to a lean man with a stubble of new beard seated at the breakfast-counter. Sawyer stopped dead.

"Brother Bradshaw!" he burst out.

"In person," Malcolm said, while Bradshaw set about the food as though he hadn't eaten in weeks and Ruth retired quietly to the far end of the room, where the TV with its sound low was showing a series of riots: Glasgow, Detroit, Tbilisi, Milan, in swift succession. "He found his way here for such a ridiculous reason, I can't help wondering whether vc may not be infinitely more powerful than we imagine. He spotted an article by

Charkall-Phelps in *The Right Way* which called me a corrupter of youth, and having met Charkall-Phelps decided that anyone he hates as much as he hates me must be a decent type."

"It's more complicated than that," Bradshaw said, his mouth full of bread. "I went looking for refuge in a church, and a pompous guy ordered me out because I was dirtying the floor, and I kind of pulled the complete Jesus act on him, which blew his mind into tiny pieces. While my own mind was still running on the parable of the Good Samaritan—I'd told him I fell among thieves—I spotted Malcolm's name, like he said. Not for the first time, because they sent that issue of the magazine to help persuade me to join their Crusade. Being reminded of it, being here in a strange country where I know almost nobody, I thought well, who is my neighbour? More likely him than these Pharisees and Sadducees! So I went looking for a phone-directory, and . . . here I am." He renewed his attack on the soup.

"Bless you, Charkall-Phelps," Malcolm murmured. "Do sit down, all of you—use the bed if there's nowhere else. Ruth dear, what about some wine for . . .? Sorry." Turning to fetch a bottle and glasses himself. Over his shoulder: "I'm afraid Ruth got sacked today. Thanks to a bitch who was lodging here that I'm glad to see the back of . . . Oh, Chief Inspector, you wanted to see our list. I'll give it to you."

Sawyer said, "About to be ex-chief inspector. I've put in my resignation." And without bothering to explain, seized the computer print-out.

"Bott! That's Harry Bott! No wonder he was able to shop so many villains to me! And . . . Incredible. I know them all."

"Crawford?" Malcolm rapped, distributing glasses of wine to Kneller and Randolph.

"Yes, he's been in trouble with the school attendance officer. Runs a Black Power study-group that keeps kids away from regular schooling. I can give you his address if you like."

"And Stevens too? Just by reputation?"

"No, personally. I arrested him when he was about seventeen. He was running with a gang of bloody-minded yobboes. Got probation. But he's dead now, you know."

"What?"

"Yes, they cancelled the deserter's warrant they had out for him this afternoon. It'll be in the news tonight, I expect." Vaguely waving at the TV. "YOU know he walked out of hospital with his wounds unhealed? Well, he caught an antibiotic-resistant infection and it gangrened. When they found him he was delirious with toxaemia. Not a hope of saving his life."

He checked. "You heard that? I said 'delirious with toxaemia'! A week or two ago I'd have had to look that up in the dictionary!"

"Typical," Kneller said after a

brief hesitation.

"How can you be sure? Don't answer that. I know this vc stuff can produce amazing effects. Now I've met Mr. Fry, for example, I recall an assault case involving a Mr. Cohen of this address which should have led, but didn't, to a charge of assault with a deadly weapon, and happened the day after Dr. Post was killed and furthermore on blood-donation day at the Lister Clinic. Mr. Fry, were you the man Post showed off his pills to?"

"Yes."

"And you took one, and gave blood . . . I I see! So everybody who has vc caught it the way Harry and I did, through plasma?"

Kneller drew a deep breath. "That list isn't complete any longer. Dr. Post had it. I have it. Dr. Randolph has it. We carried out tests, and they proved positive."

"Anybody else—?" Sawyer began, and was interrupted by a sudden sob from Ruth, who, unnoticed, had buried her face in her hands.

In astonishment Malcolm turned, poised to hurry over and comfort her . . . and halted, staring. He said faintly, "Wilfred, it just hit me. I asked about supportive media for vc."

"Yes, and I have news for you on that front. Arthur and I think we've come up with a medium superior to what Maurice designed, and so simple you can literally cook it on a kitchen stove. It's a breakthrough like using brewer's wastes to grow *penicillium notatum—"*

"Shut up!" Malcolm ordered, clenching his fists. *"Saliva?"*

And at that moment the doorbell rang.

"I'll go," Ruth said, wearily rising. "It's Dr. Campbell. I recognise his walk, even though I've met him exactly twice. Yes, Malcolm. That must be how it happened, through kissing you— No, don't touch me! I'm still shaking deep inside. I only realised today, and I feel so . . ."

The words trailed away in her wake.

And a moment later Hector rushed into the room, waving a sheet of paper. "Malcolm—Wilfred—listen to this! Hello!"—on realising other people were present. "Chief Inspector! What in . . .? Never mind, listen to what I have here. It's Ministry of Health Procedural Directive eighty-oblique-oh-five, and it instructs hospitals to double the payment to blood-donors and stockpile the maximum quantity of plasma!"

Kneller's jaw dropped. But before anyone could speak Ruth clicked shut the door, having regained her composure, and said in a near-normal voice, "I'm sorry to be such a fool. It's just that coming on top of everything else it was a hell of a shock. Not so bad as what you went through, Malcolm, because my case must be more like Wilfred and Arthur's. I suppose I've been sleeping half an hour longer per night . . . But the tension! Oh, it's dreadful!"

"I don't understand!" Hector

cried.

"It would appear," Kneller said harshly, "that vc *is* loose in the world. Running wild, the way we suspected. But . . . Bluntly, the question is: wild *enough?"*

Bradshaw spoke up unexpectedly. "I think we should hold a council of war. I mean that literally. I only heard about this vc stuff when I met Malcolm tonight, but—well, I've been through what it can do to a man, and it's fantastic."

All eyes turned on him as he left the breakfast-counter and came to join them.

"I don't imagine any of you have been aboard a nuclear submarine equipped with MiRv-Poseidons?" he went on. "I have. A college friend of mine captains one, and invited me to preside at her launching, and later when she was commissioned took me to sea to witness a full-dress rehearsal for hostilities. At the time I was thrilled, of course. I didn't realise what I was watching: proof that there are people in the world willing and able to destroy mankind."

There followed a chill pause, almost total but for the very faint sound from the TV.

Bradshaw glanced at Kneller. "I know what you mean when you ask 'wild enough?' In my case, and I hope this is some reassurance to you, ma'am"—with a glance at Ruth—"vc has done a lot of good. Mr. Sawyer, I gather you are, or were, a detective?"

Sawyer nodded.

"Can you imagine what it's been like for me, wearing one of the best-known faces on Earth, to remain anonymous when everybody and his uncle was hunting for me? I did it. I was never much good as an actor—I traded on my looks—but I was trained by one of the finest coaches in Hollywood, and things he taught me years ago have come real in my mind. I swear I could meet my wife on the sidewalk and she wouldn't give me a second glance."

"You've had no undesirable side-effects?" Kneller demanded.

"Sure I have." Bradshaw grimaced. "It's no fun to discover that you've let other people do your thinking for you all your life, is it? Me, I've always leaned on a psychological crutch: in school and college, then the army, then with the agent who got me my part in *Gunslinger,* then the Church . . . But I finally learned how to stand up and think for myself."

Sawyer was very pale. He said, "Isn't it hell? I . . . Oh, I have at least three murders on my conscience. Killings I had the data to prevent, only I didn't work out in time what was going on."

Sweat stood out on his face. "I thought until today I was getting my chance to make amends, thanks to vc. I've been assembling a dossier on a property developer who used frighteners to evict people illegally from their homes, and made a fortune as a result. He's out of reach, but the money is still around, and it's an old principle of

Common Law that a criminal shall not profit by his crime. But today I was called to the Home Office and told that if I persist I can look forward to a faked medical discharge. He didn't just break the law, that bastard, he smashed it and danced on the bits! And because the Home Secretary is a friend of the person who inherited . . . Well, that's why I've sent in my resignation. I'm sick of it all."

"I imagine you're talking about Sir George Washgrave," Malcolm said.

Sawyer blinked. "You don't sound very surprised!"

"Should I be? I taught some of the kids whose families he evicted from buildings near here." Malcolm turned to a chair, kicked it around as though it had injured him, and sat down, reaching to take Ruth's hand. But she avoided him.

"I know people like that in the States," Bradshaw said. "Bleed the poor in slum tenements, salve their consciences with gifts to charity . . . But—Mr. Campbell! Or is it Doctor?"

Hector, who had been more and more at a loss as the conversation developed, said mechanically, "Doctor."

"I take it you think this directive about stockpiling plasma is a precaution against war?"

"Uh . . . Well, I can't be sure. It just seems likely."

"It's more than likely," Kneller said. "As some of you know, our Institute is plagued with government investigators evaluating vc. In charge of them is a smooth devil named Gifford. Something he said today, in a fit of bad temper, scared Arthur and me out of our wits."

"He accused us both of being traitors," Randolph said. "Hampering him when, if it weren't for him and the other people who are loyal to Charkall-Phelps, nobody would be taking any steps to help Britain survive the coming war."

"He said that, in so many words?" Malcolm took a pace forward, and the others gasped in dismay.

"In so many words," Kneller confirmed.

"That figures," Bradshaw said. "World War Three is going to start in Europe, same as the other two did. I believe I can tell you why. I—uh—I did take a degree in theology, you know. I'm not just an unqualified self-appointed evangelist. I mean I wasn't. That's behind me. Same as with everything else in my life, though. I approached what I learned with eyes and ears half-closed. It's only now I realise how dangerous and destructive Christian culture has become. If there was ever any love in it, it's been bled out. Three major religions preach Holy War: Shinto, Islam and Christianity. Christianity is the only one hypocritical enough simultaneously to enjoin its followers to turn the other cheek and suffer fools gladly and the rest of it. Look at the record. Germany was a Christian country almost exactly

one hundred times as long as it was Nazi. Did the Nazis undo in twelve years all the Church had done in twelve centuries? No, they built on it. Hitler was a baptised Catholic and never excommunicated. When he was enlisting the support of the bishops in 1933 he promised to do nothing to the Jews that the Church had not done already, and kept his promise. Which is why the clergy turned over their parish records so that converts with Jewish ancestry could be identified and killed."

"That's not fair!" Ruth burst out. "They weren't all—"

"For every Niemoller," Bradshaw snapped, "there were a thousand who collaborated. And even Niemoller was an ex-U-boat captain, a willing professional murderer!"

"J—uh—I'd forgotten," Ruth muttered, and added almost inaudibly, "But I can't forget anything any more . . ."

"Did Gifford say"—from Malcolm—"the people at your lab are personally loyal to Charkall-Phelps?"

"Yes, he did," Kneller sighed. "It's of a piece with his career in politics, I suppose: business background, safe seat, Home Office within ten years where he can control the police . . . I was saying to Arthur as we arrived, the kind of thing you imagine can't happen here. Plus an enormous populist movement handed to him on a plate, the Moral Pollution Campaign whose members are desperately seeking a scapegoat for what's actually due to government incompetence, like high prices and bad housing and unemployment. I suspect he's after a monopoly of vc. It would be the very thing he needs to secure personal supreme power in the chaos caused by the coming war."

"Which, we are agreed, will be triggered off in Italy," Randolph said, and added dryly, "Capital-Rome!"

Bewildered, Ruth said, "How is it you're always in agreement? Is the result of vc going to be that everyone on Earth will think alike? We might as well be ants!"

"Let's ask Hector's opinion," Malcolm said. "If Billy were home I'd call him in too, but he's not. Hector, right here we have all but two of the people known to be infected with vc. There were two others, but both are dead. I say the consequences of taking vc have been good in my case. I can organise data more efficiently, and on levels I never before had the chance to react on. And you know I'm physically healthy."

Hector nodded. "Granted. Uh—Wilfred, what about you?"

"I'm doing work at the labs, or could be but for those damned meddlers, which I'd never have expected. It's a cliche that a scientist does no original work after thirty. Maurice disproved that, and now Arthur and I are doing the same."

"As for me," Bradshaw said, "I have no reservations about vc. I've suffered . . . but it's the right kind of suffering. I feel purified."

"David?" Malcolm looked at Sawyer. "Oh, excuse me. It's the blood-brother bit, as it were."

"I don't mind. It's the same with me. Obviously I have an aptitude for detection, or I wouldn't have made chief inspector. But these past few days I've been solving, in my head, cases five, six, seven years old." He hesitated. "Moreover I've watched Harry Bott grow a conscience. Small-time thief, practising Catholic, treated his wife abominably. Now he says he's going to go straight. I believe him."

"But what about Corporal Stevens?" Ruth cried. "Caught trying to send a parcel-bomb to his officer's wife? What about this man Crawford who runs a Black Power group? What about his opposite number in South Africa who's spent his life sopping up so-called proofs that black people are sub-human? You can't calculate with data you don't possess!"

"I think," Malcolm said slowly, "our minds have been made up for us. Sorry, Hector." He pointed at the TV, whose screen showed the single word NEWSFLASH, and turned up the volume.

A voice said, "—regular programmes to bring you this important announcement. The northern frontiers of Italy have been closed since an hour ago, and both radio and television have ceased transmission. It can be confidently assumed that as a result of his successful strike call last Monday Marshal Dalessandro—"

"Did you know," Malcolm said at random, "that they're advertising the army again on Radio Free Enterprise? Owing to the record unemployment, recruiting figures have been high for months. Do I hear anybody say 'waste of public money'?"

The TV voice said: "—mobilisation in Switzerland . . ."

"That does it," Randolph said. "Nobody could fail to be aware what another war would mean. Not since 1945. But it's clear that it's possible to disregard that knowledge."

"I've met people who can," Bradshaw said.

"Yes. Well, what vc does is make it more difficult to ignore data you possess, right? So it's our duty to turn this outbreak of vc into an epidemic. There simply isn't any other way to save the world."

He glanced at Kneller. "Wilfred?"

The professor felt in his pocket, produced the packet which made it bulge, and began carefully to unwrap it.

"We have the means," he said. "This, for your information, is what vc looks like in the unpurified state." He held up a sealed glass cylinder full of a yellowish mass with red veins running through it. "There's enough here to affect five or six hundred people. With luck, in a month we could multiply that by a thousand. But we may not have a month. We shall just have to do the best we can."

"First reactions from Brussels . . ." said the TV.

"But you have no right!" Ruth cried. "People ought to have the chance to choose!"

"So they should," Malcolm countered sternly. "But how many of us will be given the choice whether or not to die in World War Three?"

Book Three

DISSENT

"An atheist could not be as great a military leader as one who is not an atheist . . . I don't think you will find an atheist who has reached the peak in the Armed Forces."

-Admiral Thomas H. Mooter, when Chairman-Designate of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, quoted in the *Milwaukee Journal*

XVII

THERE WAS SILENCE. Malcolm made it more complete by switching off the TV.

"Ruth," he said in a tone suddenly full of tenderness, "it would clear all our consciences, not just yours, if we could persuade Hector what we plan to do is right. That's what I had in mind when I appealed to him just now. I submit to you that one could not at random pick a more ideal judge. He is not affected by vc, but he knows about it, and he knows people who have it, and he has examined one of them—me—using tests of his own choice and all available medical facilities. Furthermore, he is a doctor in general practice at a large clinic. Not only is he acquainted with the use of virtually every drug in the pharmacopoeia; he is also acquainted with the social conditions that obtain in London today, because he sees patients from every class every day. It's a dreadful burden to place on any man. But if he is willing to undertake the task, will you abide by what he says?"

Stiff-featured and pale, Ruth countered, "Will the rest of you? Or will you simply go ahead anyway?"

"If we can't prove to you and Hector that it's right, it won't be worth doing. Particularly to you."

"What? Why?" She stared at him.

"Because you were deprived of your own life, and that hasn't made you hate the world. You care about it, and the people in it. It would be pointless reasoning with somebody like Charkall-Phelps, who doesn't give a damn for mankind, only for himself."

"And if we can't persuade you," Kneller said, "I'll personally destroy this." He held up the test-tube.

"Good. Hector?"

"You want me to—to sort of interrogate you about your motives, is that it? I'll do my best, although . . ." Hector gathered himself. "Very well! To begin with, all my instincts as a doctor cry out against turning loose vc, a substance that once at large can never be eradicated short of killing everybody who carries it. Maurice asked me whether someone who had it in his power to alter human nature should do so. I couldn't answer. I still can't. Such a thing is unprecedented."

"Not at all," Malcolm said. "It's directly owing to just such a chemical alteration in a large terrestrial population that we can sit here and reason with one another." He glanced at Kneller. "Wilfred, you must know what I'm talking about."

"I believe I do. The loss of the enzyme which converts urea to allantoin."

"I don't know about that," Ruth said stubbornly. "Or . . ." Seemingly suddenly giddy, she put her hands to her temples. "Or do I? It's so awful, this turnover period! Neither able to remember nor able to forget!"

"Urea stimulates activity in the nervous system," Malcolm said. "Loss of the power to excrete it as allantoin has been compared to adding a permanent pep-pill to our diet."

"I—uh . . . Yes, I read about it once. But in a story. Not an article or a book that I'd have taken seriously." Ruth let her hands fall to her lap.

"But that occurred naturally," Hector objected. "What you're planning is—"

Malcolm interrupted. "Are we not natural creatures? Are we not evolved, too? Surely all the lessons we've learned in the past century come to a single point: we have to stop thinking of ourselves as somehow apart from nature, and recognise that we're inseparable from it."

"Which is something I'm keenly aware of," Randolph said. "Since catching vc I feel that instead of being an isolated entity which I keep here in my frontal lobes"—tapping his forehead—"my consciousness is more integrated with the rest of me. The forebrain has been termed a tumorous outgrowth, and inasmuch as a tumour has the power to kill that's an apt comparison. Thanks to it, we've become able to ruin the world we live in and even to exterminate our species. Rationally, that's a decision we ought never to take. But if it is taken it won't be on a rational basis."

"Inside my head," Malcolm quoted, "a man is trying to ride a dog which is trying to ride a lizard. We find it easy to decide which way we'd like to go. Because we're being pulled three ways at once, small wonder we never get there!"

"And small wonder," Bradshaw chimed in, "that so many of us give up—cast ourselves on the mercy of a hypothetical all-powerful supreme being who can really do

what we can only envisage."

"We all know what it's like to have plans frustrated," Ruth said, and gave a slight shudder. Clearly she was struggling to control herself. "That's among the reasons why we sometimes lose our tempers and strike out at random and even kill one another. But it's an inescapable part of being human."

"What we're saying," Malcolm contradicted, "is that it isn't inescapable any longer. Consider. Plans can be frustrated by inanimate forces, and it's foolish to rail against them. If a thunderstorm blows tiles off your roof and your home gets flooded, you may be angry but you don't blame the storm. On the other hand you have every reason to blame the builder who last mended the roof if he charged you a fat fee for making it stormproof. The weather is beyond reach of a complaint. Other human beings aren't. What hurts is to have your plans frustrated by people whom you think of as being trustworthy because they're members of your species."

"Wait a moment," Hector said. "I was describing to Wilfred the other day how some of my Irish patients expect me to cure with a single pill children who are mentally disturbed because they had to live through years of violence at home." He leaned back in his chair. "I can't help letting them down. What they expect of me is literally out of the question."

"Don't you tell them so?" Malcolm said.

"Of course, but they don't listen."

"Vc makes it impossible not to listen," Malcolm murmured. "If they had vc, those people would stop treating you like a magician and start treating you like a doctor."

"Exactly," Kneller agreed. "They'd be able to draw on their own and other people's experience of what medicine is. They no doubt have the information, and they disregard it."

"But merely making use of more information isn't a panacea," Hector snapped, reverting to his devil's advocate role. "While I'm not a hundred per cent convinced you've made your point about this being analogous to what's already happened in the course of evolution, I do have to concede that the chance of another war breaking out does seem very real, and what with nuclear weapons that's like writing a factor of infinity into an equation. Admitting something has to be done, the question stands: is this the right thing to do? Could the ability to calculate with all the data accumulated in a lifetime help a savage in—oh—New Guinea if fallout came sifting down and everyone in the village was ill with radiation sickness?"

"Yes," Malcolm said promptly. "Given that people had been weak and ill before and some had recovered when they did this or that or the other, ate this or that, drank this or that . . . You picked a poor example; radiation sickness has to

be cured by helping the body to mend itself."

"Besides, we're not talking about New Guinea savages," Sawyer said. "We're talking about technological western man. Here's a question for you, doctor. Do you approve of murder, the pushing of hard drugs, and driving people out of their homes with dogs and petrol-bombs?"

"What? No, of course I don't."

"As to driving people out of their homes, it's because Harry Bott caught vc that the memory of his spell as a frightener has turned him against crime for good. As to drug-peddling, vc persuaded him to shop his brother-in-law Joe Feathers, whom we'd been after for years without success. As to murder, but for catching vc myself I couldn't have deduced just by looking at Dr. Post's body that I very probably already had his killer under arrest. Nor could I have assembled that dossier on Washgrave Properties. How did George Washgrave get away with it? He exploited our selective inattention." Glancing at Kneller and Randolph. "1 didn't know that term until I heard it from you at Post's home. But that's what he took advantage of. He was a filthy villain, but he was rich and respectable and gave to charity and went to church every Sunday, and that's what people took notice of."

"Which brings us to the nub of the matter," Malcolm said. "How do you fool people? How do you get them to put up with things that are harmful to them and bring you a handsome profit? How do you get them to eat food that doesn't nourish them properly? How do you get them to believe it's worth emptying serviceable houses at a time of shortage in order to build a motorway that the homeless citizens can't afford to use?" He pointed in the direction of the one which droned day and night within earshot of Chater Street. "How do you get them to re-elect you to power when you've made ghastly mistakes and propose to keep right on repeating them? As it were, 'We did it before and it didn't work but it damned well should have done so let us do it again!' We're seeing that around us all the time: the cost of living doubled in the past four years, the number of unemployed doubled too, and services *halved!* Lord, streetlamps switched off, tube-trains packed to overload capacity, the Health Service being cut back, people suffering from scurvy and rickets in one of the world's richest countries! How do you get away with it? Above all, how do you persuade people to risk their lives in order to kill total strangers whom they know almost literally nothing about? Why, the answer's simple. You lie to them!"

He leaned forward earnestly. "And all too often the lie is easier to believe than the truth."

"I've used that technique," Bradshaw said. "You said a moment ago, Malcolm, that Dr. Campbell's patients look on him as more of a magician. Magic is what movements like the Moral

Pollution Campaign are based on. The argument runs like this: we've misbehaved and so we're being punished. We must seek out the wicked atheists and perverts and deal with them, and when we've demonstrated that we hate their guts everything will be all right again."

"You can find magic in the law, too," Sawyer said. "It's used to cover up every conceivable type of inconsistency. If you kill a dozen people by sniping at them from a roof-top, you're a criminal. Unless you had a uniform on. Then you get a medal. That's more or less what Corporal Stevens said when he created that terrific scandal on TV in Scotland—and he was quite right. I arrested him when he was running with that gang I told you about, for doing what he was ordered to do in Glasgow!"

"Our whole society is schizophrenic from top to bottom," Malcolm said.

"Absolutely!" Kneller snapped. "But it's not surprising when you're being asked to lick the boots of the people who are simultaneously either beating or starving you into submission!"

"I still don't see," Hector declared doggedly, "how vc can cure us. What we need is an injection of raw empathy. That might do some good. Not extra knowledge. Extra—ah—love!"

"That will come of its own accord," Malcolm said. "Will you grant that human beings are readily frightened by what they don't understand? And that when they're afraid they can more easily be manipulated?"

"Ah . . . Yes, of course."

"Will you further grant that they are most commonly manipulated by propaganda, which is a kind of lying?"

"Yes." Hector looked uncomfortable, as though he felt he was being pushed towards a conclusion he didn't relish.

"Will you concede that a population in full possession of data from past experience will, when invited to go and commit publicly-sanctioned mass murder at the risk of their own lives, remember the faults and shortcomings of the leaders who are issuing the orders? Remember, for example, that they are the people who couldn't arrange a decent diet for them, or decent homes, or regular work, or proper medical care?"

"Just a—"

"I hadn't quite finished. Likewise will realise that they don't know anything about the so-called enemy *except what those known-to-be-untrustworthy leaders have told them?"*

Into the dead pause that followed, the ring of the phone in the hallway stabbed like a dagger.

"I'll go," Ruth said, rising quickly. "I—uh . . . You just keep on at Hector. I'm leaving it to him, as I said."

And she hastened from the room, closing the door behind her.

"You're taking too much for granted!" Hector snapped. "Ac-

cording to what I've been told, a general who's taken vc will become a better general. Like Ruth's South African. If all the data you possess tend to a particular view of the world—"

"But they don't. They can't," Malcolm said.

"Surely they can! Someone who's spent his whole life in isolation . . ." Hector hesitated. "Oh, I believe I see what you mean. Nobody can remain that isolated and still be human."

"Precisely. Your Afrikaner can't avoid being aware that there are people in the world who disagree with him about *apartheid.* Your general in the Pentagon can't avoid being aware that there are people who seem perfectly happy under communism, while there are others who apparently hate living under American free enterprise. Data available and power to do damage run in tandem; the people in the best-informed countries are also those who can create most havoc. Savages in New Guinea can't exterminate mankind and very probably couldn't conceive the idea of doing so. Citizens of the nuclear powers—"

The door swung open, and there was Ruth again, very pale. She said, "Does anybody here know a Mr. Billy Cohen?"

They stared at her, not speaking.

"Because if anybody does," she went on, a high thin note of near-hysteria keening her voice, "they wouldn't know him now!"

"What's happened?" Malcolm leapt to his feet.

"That was the police. They found his wallet only partly burned." She walked forward very slowly, eyes fixed on nothing. "He was at a club called the Universal Joint. Have you heard about it? I have. Near Oxford Street. It was attacked by godheads this evening and set on fire. Seven people have been burned to death."

She was face to face with Malcolm now, her fists clenched, her eyes still not focused on anything in present time.

"Go ahead. Don't waste any more time arguing. If people could do that to Billy, they could do it to the whole wide world, and they wouldn't ask my permission any more than they asked his."

XVIII

\ ALENTINE CRAWFORD had a TV set again. It had suddenly occurred to him that a trained repairman could find and fix up a set that nobody else wanted. So far as helping to keep Toussaint amused was concerned, he was kicking himself for not having thought of it before. So far as the window it opened for him on the world was concerned . . .

A smooth-cheeked young BBC interviewer was saying, "Marshal, it's a great honour for us to be the first foreign news-service permitted to question you about your policies!"

To which a snort from Marshal

Dalessandro, heavy-set, going bald, wearing civilian clothes of course, framed by the tricolour Italian flag.

"First of all, I'd like to ask whether you don't think that by closing your frontiers with other Common Market countries—"

Dalessandro interrupted. "We the people of Italy have been cheated and lied to about the Common Market. It was a confidence trick. With it has been stolen our national pride. To be made into mongrel beggars is disgusting to a person of honour."

"I'm not sure I—"

"So recently as the week before Christmas in London was a demonstration of Italians bribed to England by promises of good work and high wages, left unemployed and so poor not to pay their fare home. Who would not complain? But as they did speak out, a man drove a car into the meeting of them, and broke a man's legs, and was hardly punished."

"If I know the case you're talking about, he was convicted and—"

"And fined twenty pounds!" Dalessandro snapped. "Pounds? What are pounds these days? It is to say no more than twenty francs, or twenty marks! More than that, too: have they not lured Italians to Germany with the same lies, and sent them home by force when they were not any longer wanted there?"

"It's true that the foreign labour-force in Germany has been somewhat over-large these past few—"

"Excuses! We in Italy are sickened of excuses!" Dalessandro barked. "What they wanted was cheap labour. When it stopped being cheap, they changed their minds. They lied!"

"But given the degree to which the Italian economy has been integrated into the rest of Europe, are you not worried by the fact that the West German government in particular has said it won't stand for what you've done? And the French have adopted the same attitude. Millions of—uh—of kilos of French farm-produce, for example, are spoiling at the frontier stations which you closed when you imposed your new protective tariffs."

"There has been wild talk of re-opening our frontiers by arms. Let them try. Let them only try!" Dalessandro leaned forward. "We the people of Italy have discovered again our pride. With God's help"—he crossed himself—"we shall guard it against all comers. No matter the cost, in life itself. We are decided."

He sat back and set his jaw defiantly.

"Cissy!" Valentine said.

"Yes, honey?" Prompt, she came and leaned over the back of his chair, putting her arms around his neck and kissing the top of his head. For an instant a pang of old doubt assailed him: having her live here with him, the reaction of the neighbours . . .

—The hell with 'em! She's a better wife for me at sixteen, and a better mother for Toussaint, than the other ever was! And if she likes it,

and her mother likes it—well!

"Cis, I think them stinking buckras gon' kill us all."

"What?" She drew back and came around the chair to his side, staring. "But you been planning all these clever schemes to fix 'em! You got a dozen of 'em nailed to rights by their own laws!" She pointed at a stack of paper on the table in the middle of the room. Since returning from hospital, he had reviewed several past incidents where at the time he had thought there was no case to be brought under the Race Relations Act, but now saw how a charge could be made to stick. It was as though his repeated reading of that and related legislation had all by itself turned him into a lawyer.

"So what's the use of fixing 'em one by one when they're lining up for a world war?" he rapped.

"You—you joking!" she said, appalled.

"No, I can read it plain as a newspaper. It goes this way. Them French and Germans say they won't stand for the Italian takeover. The Italians say shit on *you!* So they try and push through with guns, and the Italians fight back. And the Italians in America say, we got to get in on the Italian side, and the Germans over there say hell, no. So we got two camps lining up. Now the Americans don't like the French, so they send their carriers and battleships to support the Italians. Anyhow they want to break up the Common Market 'cause it's an economic rival for them. Meantime the Russians see this big rich capitalist bloc doing all the things it says in their creed must happen to it, like quarrelling over the loot. So they move into Yugoslavia like they did in East Germany and Hungary because they see their way to carving off a chunk or two of where the local communist parties are strong, like the big industrial cities, and—"

"Man, you going too fast for me!" Cissy complained. "I don't know about all these here economic forces." She hesitated. "Matter of fact, I guess you been talking too much about that in class since you got home. Like we only had five today, right? 'Stead of ten or fifteen!"

"But it's important!" Valentine clenched his fists. "I'm explaining how there's going to be a nuclear war!"

Into the brief pause that followed broke the shrill yammer of the door-bell. She rose, sighing.

"Man, you surely have changed since that buckra cut you up. If this goes on . . ."

And, unlatching the door: "Yes?"

A strange voice answered. "Is Mr. Valentine Crawford at home?"

"Ah . . .Who are you?"

"He doesn't know me, but . . . I'll be damned! Cissy Jones!"

Valentine jumped to his feet and hurried in Cissy's wake. As he came up to her, she said in amazement, "Why, Mr. Fry! I was in your class when I was—uh—eleven, twelve!"

There stood a white man with a brown beard, smiling at her.

"Hey, this here's one of my old teachers!" Cissy went on, turning to Valentine. "He's the one they sacked 'cause he talked back at the man from Moral Pollution—I told you about him."

"May I come in?" Malcolm said, and Cissy hastily stood aside. The weather was once more bitter; the forecasters said it would continue like this until April or even possibly May.

After which there was much bustle of chairs being moved and Toussaint being shown off—better, though still coughing a lot at night—and tea being made and . . .

"Mr. Crawford, I see you were watching the TV news just now," Malcolm said eventually. "I presume they included the interview with Marshal Dalessandro which they used in the early-evening bulletin?"

Valentine gave a wary nod.

"What do you think of the situation?"

"Won't make too much difference what I think, in the long run," Valentine said. "I'll be dead. So will you, which I guess is a consolation. And him, and the rest of you."

"Honey—" Cissy began in agitation. Malcolm cut her short.

"Don't worry, Cissy. I entirely agree with Mr. Crawford. The chance of war hasn't been so extreme since 1938. And this time there are likely to be very few pieces left for the survivors to pick up."

"He's been saying the same," Cissy acknowledged.

"I'm not surprised," Malcolm said. "So, unless I'm much mistaken, he's an ideal person to help us prevent it."

"Prevent it?" Valentine echoed with scorn. "Not a hope! You buckras are built for killing, that's all you're good for. You're the ones who fight world wars, and we're the poor buggers who get slaughtered!" He grimaced. "Might not be a bad idea to let you get on with it. The people most likely to survive would be my people, and we'd make a better world than you've done."

Casting his eye around the room, Malcolm spotted a paperback and shot out his arm. "Are you saying Chaka Zulu was less bloodthirsty than Napoleon or Bismarck? Chaka, who stood in the door of his hut at the beginning of every year and ordered his impis to ravage a season's journey in whatever direction he cast his spear?"

Disconcerted, Valentine said, "You—uh—you studied up on Chaka?"

"I had a lot of black kids in my class. Like Cissy. I thought I ought to be able to tell them about African history as well as the Battle of Trafalgar and the Wars of the Roses!"

"That's a fact, Val," Cissy put in. "We all liked him a lot, Mr. Fry, because he could answer questions like about Africa and places."

"Ah . . . Okay, Mr. Fry. I'm glad to hear it. Makes you pretty much of an exception! But what's all this about being able to stop the

next war?"

Malcolm explained.

"IN TIMES OF TRIAL," said the Rt. Hon. Henry Charkall-Phelps from the screen of the TV in Lady Washgrave's drawing-room—which when not in use could be disguised as an elegant commode in the gracious style of Queen Anne's reign—"the British people have never failed to respond with magnificent determination and unquenchable resolve. One can only hope that if this crisis does develop further, it will not prove to be the case that the dilution of our culture which we have sadly had to endure, the injection from abroad of traditions which are foreign to us, one can only hope that these forces will not prove to have weakened our glorious heritage. Speaking for myself, while I did indeed have misgivings a short time ago, I have been wonderfully reassured by recent events. In particular, I'm comforted and given new hope by the splendid response we've seen to the New Year's Crusade organised by the Campaign Against Moral Pollution . .' . of which as you know I'm a patron. No more convincing gauge could have been given to the world of our determination to sacrifice mere sensory gratification in favour of those higher and more admirable aims which in periods of open conflict are the sole justification for what we do: patriotism, love of freedom, and national honour!"

"How true!" sighed Lady Washgrave, clasping her hands. "How very true! And how well put, moreover . . . Oh, dear!" As the chimes of the front door-bell intruded. "Tarquin, be so kind if you please as to see who that is and state that I am not at home!"

But Tarquin was already on his way.

"You seem, Home Secretary, to be taking the present European crisis somewhat more seriously than the majority of your colleagues," ventured the TV interviewer. "Last night when the Prime Minister addressed that meeting in—"

"One does receive the impression," Charkall-Phelps broke in, "that certain persons take nothing seriously at all. It could well be argued, in my view, that a nation lacking strong leadership can scarcely be regarded as a nation."

He smiled frostily. "However, kindly do not attempt to lead me into a discussion of that nature. For myself, I have every confidence in the people of Britain."

"Thank you, Home Secretary," the interviewer said, and spun his chair to face another camera. "Well, I have to confess that I wasn't expecting such a forthright declaration from Mr. Charkall-Phelps! Over in our other studio we have a group of journalists who—"

Lady Washgrave used the remote control on the arm of her chair to cut off the sound as Tarquin reentered the room.

"Who was it at the door?" she de-

manded. "And—and what is that package you are carrying?"

He held up for her inspection an oblong box, flimsily wrapped in tissue which the rain had soaked; it was just over thawing-point tonight, and the wind was carrying what felt like half the ocean aloft.

Through the wrapping, a brand-name and a chart of enticing candies could be discerned.

"It was a—uh—a young *coloured* girl, milady," Tarquin said. "Accompanied by her little brother, a boy of about six, I'd estimate. A most sweet and well-mannered child, very disappointed when I said you were not at home."

He proffered an envelope on which the name "Lady Washgrave," ink-written, had run in blue tears.

"Possibly this note will explain the purpose of their visit?"

"Ah . . . Yes, of course." But as she took it, she kept casting nervous glances at the box. It was so easy to disguise a bomb in a small container nowadays, and one was aware that certain dissident elements . . . including coloured ones . . .

She read rapidly, and her mind changed on the instant. "Oh, Tarquin, listen to this! It touches my heart! The hand-writing of course is not of the most legible, but . . . Well, one must make allowances, must one not? And certainly even if the doctrinal content of the cults which such people adhere to is questionable, there's little doubt of their sincerity. The letter says, 'Dear My Lady Washgrave'—isn't that sweet?—'We think what you're doing with your Crusade is wonderful and Mom says it's all right if me and my brother give you these sweeties. God bless you and amen, love from Cissy!' "

Tarquin beamed. "How delightful! And they must have gone to so much trouble, too. I'm well aware that these are your preferred brand of sweets, but in view of your reluctance to associate yourself with commercial advertising it must have been remarkable insight which enabled the little girl to make such a correct choice."

He was peeling off the outer wrappings as he spoke.

For one last heartbeat Lady Washgrave felt a pang of alarm. There were certain associations connected with this make of candy. Whenever the late Sir George wished to put her in a mood to tolerate his—ah—animal urges, he had invariably prefaced the evening with a gift of just such a box as this one. Or rather, the large size, containing not half a kilo but a full kilo . . .

Then Tarquin was extending the open box for her to make a selection.

"It does occur to me," he murmured, "that since no reference is made in the note to a male parent, they may well be fatherless . . . I do wish you had seen them, milady. The little boy in particular was charming, like a walking doll."

"Oh, indeed, they can be delightful," Lady Washgrave con-

ceded. She popped a red sweet into her mouth, and poised her hand undecided between a blue and a yellow one to follow. "If it were not for the work of agitators, who infect them with dreams they are simply not equipped to accomplish . . ."

She picked up the yellow one, on reflection. And said, "Perhaps you would like one also, Tarquin?"

"Thank you, milady."

He took the blue one.

But she finished all the others herself before retiring.

XIX

"I THINK ALL THIS is fantastic," Sawyer said, leaning on the breakfast-counter in Malcolm's living-room and watching as his host checked over the ordinary gallon-size wine-jars in which—thanks to the new supportive medium—vc was being bred at an incredible rate. There were advantages to the substrate Kneller and Randolph had devised: not only was it harmless to humans, so that it could be eaten by the spoonful and indeed enjoyed because it tasted vaguely savoury, but it required no attention apart from being kept warm and occasionally stirred to let oxygen penetrate to the red veins of pure VC concentrate. Instead of having to be chemically purified, the latter could now simply be removed with a regular hypodermic syringe.

"There's nothing fantastic about it," Malcolm countered. "As you should know by this time."

"Yes, I,do, but . . ." Sawyer bit his lip. "The point stands. I'm no chemist. I have sopped up what acquaintances in the forensic department told me, but that apart I'd have said I didn't possess the background to understand the lecture I had from Wilfred and Arthur. Oh, they drilled me through elementary biology and chemistry at school, but I always got low marks, and the data didn't grow into any sort of pattern in my head. Now I understand why vc is what it is, what natural laws govern its behaviour, what effect it has when it enters a living system . . . I can't claim that I took it all in at once. But I certainly didn't need more than about an hour to get the drift, after I'd had the chance to review what had been said."

He shivered. "It's almost as though . . . No, I'll correct that. It *is* the first time that any creature subject to evolution has been aware that it was happening in present time."

"Yes. I'm sure that's so." Malcolm exchanged one jar for another from the shelf in his kitchenette. "In fact I must have sensed that, I think, when I compared it to loss of the power to excrete allantoin. And what's most significant is the fact that if vc had evolved naturally it would instantly have caught on."

"Didn't someone argue that DDT probably occurred in the course of evolution?" Sawyer said.

"Yes, I've seen mention of that

idea." As a loud creak came from overhead, Malcolm winced. "Oh, dear! I used to think it was Billy's weight that made that floor squeal as he walked across it. Ruth's not more than *half* his weight! The central heating must have loosened the nails during the time 1 could afford to run it." He hesitated a moment. "Hmm! I *can* afford to run it again. I wonder whether I should."

And switched the subject back again. "Yes, if DDT did occur in a natural species, it very likely killed it off!"

"Malcolm, could I ask . . .? Well, you know I resigned, so I'm out of work, and I'm blacklisted at the Home Office, so I can't set up my own agency or join a security force—which I don't want to do, but couldn't even if I did—and I have a wife and kid, so I wondered if you could . . . Well, you're out of work too, and you've lost your lodgers, all of them, and you're surviving. How?"

"No loss, those lodgers, barring Billy," Malcolm said, and for a moment his face darkened. "Bastards! How I'd like to get even with the godheads who set fire to that club! But . . . Well, last Saturday the weather was good enough for there to be football the first time in two months, right?"

"Yes, I remember."

"So I sent in a pools coupon. I didn't win the jackpot, but I did get twelve thousand pounds. Gambling, I suspect, is among the things that vc will wipe out."

Sawyer's jaw dropped.

"Want a thousand of it?" Malcolm added. "You're welcome. I can name companies whose shares will double because of the approaching war. Companies that Charkall-Phelps and Lady Washgrave have holdings in!"

"That didn't occur to me," Sawyer said. "And it should have done."

"Why? If the same things occurred to everybody as a result of taking vc, there'd be substance in Ruth's charge about it turning us into ants. I don't believe there's the least risk of that happening. The human genetic pool is inconceivably large. So far, all vc has done is accentuate a bias already there—provided it was a social bias. Anti-social responses seem to be overlaid with an enhanced awareness of what it would feel like to suffer the consequences of the actions that stem from them. The more I think about this, the more I'm convinced that we are witnessing an evolutionary advance, neither planned for by a deity nor the result of blind chance, but a necessary and highly probable occurrance. Put sufficient quantities of raw elements a certain distance from a certain type of sun, and life cannot help but appear. Perhaps if you put a sufficiently large number of conscious beings in a sufficiently terrible predicament that may lead to their extermination, they will necessarily hit on the solution to their problems. If that's true, then we have some very interesting

contacts to look forward to in a century or two, when we've cleaned house."

"I—uh—I get the feeling you mean *we,"* Sawyer said after a pause.

"I very well may," Malcolm conceded. "I don't know about you, but I've already started to avoid, automatically, some of the things which I know can accelerate the natural aging of my body. Later, when we have time and leisure for introspection, I see no reason why we shouldn't analyse the cause of senility and take very effective steps to postpone them. We aren't built for immortality, and that's scarcely surprising, but despite our inheritance of a universe in constant flux there's no obvious reason why we should not attune ourselves to something more like a galactic time-scale."

He hesitated, gazing into nowhere. "Not the present generation," he said,, "but the next after that, ought to be a very remarkable group of people . . . That is, if we can bring them into existence." He briskened. "And we have that problem in mind, don't we? And its solution!"

He opened a drawer and produced a hypodermic which he carefully rinsed before inserting it into one of the widest red veins in a jar of vc.

"Speaking of godheads, as we were a moment ago," Sawyer said, "I gather you've had no more trouble with them since poor Billy died."

"Almost none. It's conceivable that godheads from around here fired the club, isn't it? Possibly followed him from home. If so, maybe they feel they've overstepped the mark at last." Malcolm's tone was stern. "They do still show up one or two evenings a week, but they've been content to stand begging in the street rather than invade people's homes. I hope I can ignore them for the time being."

He closed his eyes for a second. "Matter of fact, they're about due. If they do come by tonight, it'll be soon."

"You—ah—you're not wearing a watch," Sawyer said.

"Nor are you," Malcolm grunted, transferring the contents of his syringe into a small jar already primed with the substrate. "Nor would Ruth be, except that I gave her the one she wears as a present after the first time we made love."

"I know." Sawyer licked his lips. "Funny, isn't it? I've been wondering whether the ability to agree on a common subjective time, rather than obey the dictates of clocks, which are after all machines, may not give us back some of our lost sense of shared humanity."

"That's a very good point," Malcolm said. He handed over the jar of vc-infected substrate. "There you are. Harry knows what to do with it, does he?"

"Oh, yes. And, given what the Australian government has been saying, that may make all the dif-

ference. Their pompous posturing has made me *sick!* All those hot-air speeches about how the British have ruined their precious heritage and let their traditions be eroded by admitting dark-skinned immigrants . . . Lord, it's the same process which made English the most flexible and versatile language on the planet."

"And I suspect the only one which can adapt to express what vc endows us with," Malcolm said. "You saw the note that Maurice left."

"Yes, and given that he'd reached a stage even more advanced than you have I see what you mean." Sawyer was hiding the little jar safely in an inside pocket. "Funny!" he muttered. "To think I'm aiding a thief to skip the country . . . Well, circumstances alter cases."

He glanced up alertly, like a dog catching a scent. "By the way, your local godheads appear to have changed their minds, don't they? They've started banging at doors again."

Malcolm concentrated for an instant. "So they have. I wonder why. After the fiery cross was found in the ruins of the Universal Joint, even around here they were being howled down, for the first time ever."

"Perhaps they've taken fresh heart from the fact that Lady Washgrave's Crusade is still packing in the customers. You saw? Eight thousand in Doncaster, eleven thousand in Liverpool . . ."

"How people delude themselves," Malcolm muttered. "Sooner or later all the finest ideals of mankind have led to overreaction. Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and was perverted into a justification for slavery. The proud slogan of the French Revolution was inscribed over the guillotine. The oppressed victims of the Tsars proceeded to treat their former rulers with even greater brutality."

"It's a fearful pattern," Sawyer sighed.

"But one which we're in a fair way to breaking," Malcolm said. He was absently listening to the oncoming godheads. They were chanting now, sure sign of a large gang of them.

Before Sawyer could comment, Ruth came rushing down the stairs and ran into the room. Daringly, she had put on a pair of tight jeans such as she might have worn ten years ago for the dusty job of clearing out Billy's room and packing up his belongings for return to his parents in America; Lady Washgrave had declared it disgusting for a woman to wear man's clothing, and jeans, pantsuits, slacks, hot pants, had all vanished from London's streets under a hail of insults and sometimes missiles from her followers.

"Ruth, you look *fantastic!"* Sawyer said. "It must be—oh, two years at least since I saw a woman in trousers, and doesn't it *suit* you?"

She smiled acknowledgment of

the compliment, but didn't answer. Instead, she addressed Malcolm.

"Mai, there are godheads on the way—haven't you heard them?"

"Yes, of course we have. So?"

"They must have made a killing today. They're drunk. I have the window open upstairs to blow the dust out, and I can smell whisky on the wind. And glass is being broken, too."

Sawyer, instantly tense, said, "Not windows."

"No, empty bottles, I think."

Malcolm pondered a second. Then he said, "David, how long are you still officially Chief Inspector Jarman-Sawyer?"

"Why, until my four weeks . . . I'm with you. Yes, it will be a pure pleasure."

Ruth glanced from one to the other of them in amazement. "What was all that about—? No, don't tell me. I get it, too. Oh, Mai, I could kick myself, you know, for being so silly when I first realised you'd given me vc! I never had a better present in my life, and I never got one by a nicer means!"

She stretched on tiptoe to kiss his cheek.

"It's so wonderful not to be at a loss any more. All the time in my job I used to find myself staring and staring for half an hour at a time at columns of figures or new tax regulations, waiting for them to make sense . . . Now it happens in a flash. You answer, right? I come down the stairs, and David hangs back until they put their necks in the noose. Fine! A sort of—uh—memorial service for Billy!"

She darted out again.

"Has everyone else shown a similarly positive reaction?" Sawyer inquired.

"Oh, yes. Arthur and Wilfred are still successfully duping this man Gifford, whom I hate on the strength of what they've told me. Bob Bradshaw is recovering steadily—you know he's staying with Hector and Anne? Yes? He's had the worst passage of all of us, even worse than me; he had to undergo the process in ignorance, and what's more in .a strange city, and what's *more* he had further to fall, as it were. None of the rest of us had to abandon a long-cherished deep-seated faith; we were all disillusioned in some degree, but he was firmly convinced he was on the side of righteousness until vc changed his mind. I *do* wish chance had given us a rabid Marxist, for example, as a control study . . . But Hector says he will be okay in another few days."

"And well enough to play his part in this?"

"Oh, yes. By the way, later tonight I'm expecting Valentine Crawford and his girl-friend to drop in. He's going to sow a bit more vc in—ah—crucial places. Here they come!" he interrupted himself, and turned towards the door.

Five seconds, and the doorbell rang. Malcolm gave a wry grin and headed along the hallway.

"This," he faintly heard from Sawyer, "will make a change!"

He opened the door. At once four burly godheads, with a bespectacled girl following, burst into the hallway, their plastic crosses raised head-high. The first of them he didn't recognise; the one who entered second, however, was the same whom Billy had shouldered down the steps on the day vc broke loose.

"Ah!" the latter cried with satisfaction. "Mr. Fry as ever was! Shut the door, you!" he added to the girl, and as number four pushed Malcolm out of the way she compliantly did as she was told.

Very clearly they had all been drinking; the harshness of whisky was fierce in Malcolm's sensitised nostrils.

"A while since you tithed to us, isn't it?" the godhead rasped, while Malcolm convincingly pantomimed agitation. "Last time I remember was before that *bugger* Cohen knocked me over!" He laughed with relish. "And we all know what became of him, don't we? Good riddance, too!"

"Malcolm, what in the world is—?"

That was Ruth, rounding the curve of the stairs, and stopping dead with her hand to her mouth as she came in sight of the godheads.

"Well, I never!" the spokesman said, staring at her. "The Scarlet Woman herself! Like it both ways, do you, then?" He poked Malcolm in the ribs with the butt of his cross. "Well, someone that perverted owes us a lot more than the average run of decent people. Fifty quid, let's say—shall we?"

"Fifty?" Malcolm echoed, feigning horror.

"From each of you," the godhead said. And grinned broadly. "Come on, be quick about it! Otherwise . . . Well, you wouldn't want to wake up one morning and find yourself fried in your bed, would you? All melted down together into a big charred *intimate* lump!" He snapped his fingers at Malcolm. "Come on, let's be having you!"

"You're under arrest," said a quiet firm voice, and David Sawyer appeared from the living-room door, while Malcolm in the same moment pushed the girl in glasses away from the door and set his back to it. "I am Detective Chief Inspector Sawyer, and I am charging you with demanding money with menaces. I warn you that anything you—"

"Malcolm, look out!" Ruth shouted. But Malcolm's newly sharpened reflexes were adequate to cope with the wild swing the nearest godhead aimed. He snatched the heavy cross and used its butt to drive the wind out of its owner, and then the ends of the cross-piece to break the grip of the nearer two of the survivors on their own weapons, and by then Sawyer had tripped up and disarmed the remaining man. The girl simply stood there staring in dismay until Malcolm relieved her of her cross, too; then she started crying.

"Use of reasonable force to prevent them evading arrest,"

Sawyer said didactically. "Score one, as it were. Ruth, kindly dial 999 and ask for a Black Maria to take these ruffians away!"

xx

"You! KNELLER!"

The voice was as brutal as a blow from a club. Kneller and Randolph, who had been talking together in low tones close to the big window of the former's office—rain-smeared like half-melted gelatine—spun around in unison to face the door.

"Gifford!" Kneller snapped. "What the hell do you mean by marching in here without an invitation?"

"It's *Doctor* Gifford!" the intruder barked, and strode towards them, fists clenched. "Oh, I know damned well you think I'm a stupid son-of-a-bitch with no right to call myself a scientist—I know because I've overheard you!"

He realised abruptly that his hands were doubled over, and with a visible effort unfolded them and thrust them in the side-pockets of his invariable dark-blue blazer.

"Overheard?" Kneller repeated slowly. "Do you mean you've been—uh—bugging us?"

Gifford ignored that. He said, "But I wasn't such a fool as you thought! Oh, you went to considerable lengths, you displayed considerable ingenuity . . . but it's my job to smoke out traitors, and anybody with the wits of a jackass could tell you're both traitors within an hour of meeting you!"

He was on the verge of ranting; tiny drops of spittle flew from his lips.

"What in the world are you talking about?" Randolph said.

"Your theft of vc!" Gifford blasted. "A theft of government property, what's more!"

"What theft—?" Randolph said, but Kneller cut him short.

"I don't know what you mean when you refer to 'government property'! And I warn you, *Doctor* Gifford—since you insist on the title—that uttering charges of theft at random could involve you in a suit for slander, which I must confess would delight me. I should love to hear you explain in a court of law how you eavesdropped on private conversations, illegally under the Privacy Act of 1976, and decided to let fly with wild accusations because you heard yourself described as what you are!"

Planting his knuckles on his desk, he scowled at Gifford.

With intense difficulty the latter kept his answer down to a similar conversational level. He said, "Government property, Professor. On my recommendation, Mr. Charkall-Phelps this morning signed an order requisitioning all stocks of vc wherever they may be located . . . under the provisions of the National Emergency Act, 1978!" He straightened to his full height with an expression of triumph.

"I'm sure you thought you were being very clever when you aped Dr.

Post's example and filched some vc from these labs. But you made away with so much of it!"

Randolph and Kneller exchanged meaning glances.

"I don't know what use you have in mind for it," Gifford went on. "But most likely you've been planning to sell it to the highest bidder. I know what you're like when you're crossed. I know how desperately you cling to what you think is rightfully yours, determined to milk it for everything it can yield! Regardless of what other people's best interests may dictate!"

He glared furiously from one to the other of them. "It's the plain duty of someone who makes an invention essential to national defence to assign it to the government! I say again, *the plain duty!* Not that you'd know what the word means without looking it up in the dictionary, would you?" He sniffed and turned down the corners of his lips.

"I think I know what's happened," Kneller said, his face reflecting the great light which had just dawned on him.

"What's happened is that you stole at least a test-tube-full of vc from these labs and imagined that you could muddle the trail enough to fool me—me, the man with no right to call himself a scientist!" Gifford breathed heavily. "But I got on to you! I felt that breath of suspicion which people in my profession learn to respond to."

"Your profession?" Kneller said from the side of his mouth, and without awaiting a reply continued to Randolph, "Arthur, the trustees of the Gull-Grant Foundation."

"Yes. Eager to move us off this potentially valuable site."

"And Washgrave Properties."

"Ditto. Eager to buy."

"And—uh—a certain cabinet minister?"

To that Randolph merely nodded. Gifford, infuriated worse than ever because his bombshell seemed to have left them more instead of less at ease, said sharply, "What are you going on about?"

"We just realised why Charkall-Phelps is so eager to shut us down," Kneller said. "And was already before vc gave him the excuse. What use do you have in mind, Dr Gifford, for this site—assuming it's habitable after the radioactivity has died away?"

Gifford blinked rapidly several times. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said at last. "But you know what I'm talking about. You admit you abstracted a quantity of vc in its substrate from these laboratories!"

"I admit nothing of the sort," Kneller said promptly, and Randolph echoed him.

"Very well, we shall have to place you under arrest, and carry out the necessary tests to determine whether you have indeed illegally ingested vc." Gifford shouted at the door; it swung wide, and two stolid-faced men walked in, while two more waited in the corridor.

"Warrant cards!" Kneller said.

They were duly produced; all four were from Special Branch, the department of the Metropolitan Police concerned with political offences and subversion, which alone of all the police forces in Britain has reported direct to cabinet level since its inception, with no intermediaries.

"You could, of course," Gifford hinted, "avoid considerable indignity and discomfort by admitting where you hid the stolen vc . . .?"

"You," Kneller said in a calm voice, "are completely and literally insane. Don't worry, though. Nowadays treatment for your type of paranoia is—"

He drew back the necessary few inches to avoid a wild punch Gifford had aimed at his jaw, and glancing at Randolph shook his head sorrowfully.

"Really, it's almost a law of nature," he said. "Defectives of this type find their natural home in the service where suspicious temperaments are at a premium— Oh, really, Dr. Gifford!" This time evading a kick with perfect aplomb; it would have hurt like hell if it had landed. "I'm sure this is not in accordance with the regulations you operate under is it?"

"Heaven give me strength!" Gifford hissed.

"Not unless they've been substantially altered," Randolph said. "I was offered a contract at Hell's Kitchen once, you know." He meant the biological warfare research establishment at Porton Down to which Gifford had formerly been attached. "I recall the wording of the draft clearly, and it said nothing about kicking and beating people who by retroactive decision of the Home Secretary have committed crimes that aren't actually crimes."

"Precisely," Kneller said. "Even if we did remove a quantity of vc for study away from the interference of Gifford's henchmen, as Director of this Institute I was quite entitled to do so, the vc being the property of the Institute."

"It isn't your property!" Gifford flared. "It's a national resource! It could make the difference between our being wiped out as a nation, and our dominating the world again!"

"And," Randolph said softly, "between you being fired for gross incompetence and sitting on the right hand of Lord Protector Charkall-Phelps when he enters into his kingdom!"

"Take them away before I kill them!" Gifford shrieked.

Puzzled, but obedient, the Special Branch men closed in.

"BOB, WE'RE BACK!" called Anne Campbell. "Would you like some tea?"

"Yes, please!" Rising from the sofa in the living-room, laying aside the newspaper which, it seemed, he had been reading at the same time as he was watching an afternoon news-bulletin on TV. And four-year-old Elspeth hurried to say hello to him, three-year-old Fiona in her

wake.

—I have to confess that when Hector said he wanted us to put up an international celebrity who'd had a breakdown . . . Well, I should have known better, I suppose. He's invited lame ducks to stay before, and they all turned out to have some good reason for us paying special attention: that poet who dedicated his next book to us, that poor girl whose husband had nearly strangled her . . . And the children do like him so much!

As he entered the kitchen wearing the children like a collar and a wrist-muff respectively, she greeted him cordially.

"I ought to say how much I appreciate your hospitality," he said as he accepted his teacup. "And tell you that I don't propose to trespass on it any longer."

"Oh, it's been no trouble at all," Anne said. And, after a brief hesitation: "You—ah—you're going home?"

With a wry smile, Bradshaw said, "I don't quite feel up to that for a while, to be honest. Since I'm on this side of the Atlantic, I thought I'd wander around Europe for a few weeks first. Go to Italy, perhaps."

"You think it's safe to go there at the moment?" Anne countered. "I mean, this military take-over they've had . . ."

"All the more reason," Bradshaw said.

"I don't quite see why."

"Well, the only other visits I've made to Europe have been on business, you know. To make personal appearances, or to attend movie festivals—that kind of thing. But there are a few places I've always wanted to see. Rome, for instance. Venice. Naples. If I don't go now, there—well, there may not be anything to see next year."

"Do you really believe the crisis is that serious?" Anne whispered, after glancing to make sure that the children had wandered out of the room again. "Hector was asking whether I wanted to emigrate, you know. To Canada or New Zealand."

"I saw an article in the paper I was just reading which says that emigration levels are at an all-time high," Bradshaw said with a nod.

"Do you think . . .?" Her voice failed her.

"Do *you* think you should?" he countered.

"I—no. I don't see why I have to! Oh, it may be sensible, but . . . It's the kind of giant upheaval in my life that I want to decide about myself, not have imposed on me!"

"I think the vast majority of people would agree with you. Something's very wrong, isn't it, when you get a forced movement of population owing to something other than natural causes, like earthquakes, or floods?"

"Yes, terribly wrong!"

"And it's started already . . ." He gazed past her, unseeing, towards the window; beyond it, there were shrubs whose branches carried the last greyish remnants of the recent snow. And beyond them again, houses where people could

be seen going placidly about their normal business.

"Well . . . All hope is not lost," he said, and drained his cup. At the same moment the front doorbell rang, and he rose promptly.

"That'll be for me. I hope you don't mind—I made some phone-calls while you were out, and I've booked a night flight."

"But . . ." Anne had been going to say that he had no luggage for a continental trip; on reflection, it seemed like a very stupid comment, possibly insulting, and anyhow Fiona was eating something she oughtn't to and required instant salvation.

"Was it a problem?" Bradshaw asked as he accepted what the man at the door had held out to him.

"Not in the least." With a crooked grin. "If I can spring a villain from the toughest remand centre in Britain and see him safely away with a wife and four kids, I can pull almost any trick in the book. A forged American passport is nothing compared to what I've done already."

He added a second item to the first. "And here's your—ah—ration," he went on. "Those capsules are identical with the commonest anti-diarrhoea remedy currently on sale here. I gave Harry the same thing. Nothing's more likely to be taken for granted wherever you go."

"Thanks. Anything else?"

"Best wishes."

"Thanks."

"CIS, ARE YOU OKAY?"

She had put her hands to her head and swayed giddily while reading a story-book to Toussaint. Valentine was busy mixing up substrate for vc in precise accordance with the instructions he had received from Kneller via Malcolm, pausing now and then to glance at the TV. A current-affairs programme was on, the usual rag-bag mixture, and French troops had been shown mobilising along the Italian border.

—It's going to be a close thing. If the French and Germans have really agreed to issue an ultimatum . . .

After a long moment and with infinite effort she said, "Val, I think I've been awarded the vc like you said I might."

"Oh!" At once he abandoned his task; it wouldn't suffer from the interruption. "Tous' boy, bedtime—sorry! Cissy isn't feeling too well. No fuss, hear?"

And there was none. Amazingly.

—Nor has there been, come to think of it, since Cissy arrived. There's a problem here we shall have to sort out. Cis spent half her childhood raising younger kids; she got the knack by soaking it through her pores. When there are hardly any children, which has got to happen or we'll eat ourselves out of house and home on this planet, will we be able to . . . ? Shit, of course we shall. Just to watch it happening once will be enough for a lifetime. I keep overlooking what vc can do, even though it's happening right in-

side my head. And hers too, now.

He was shivering a little as he rejoined her, from awe.

"I'm, okay, Val honey," she said in a dull voice. "I just wish, though, you weren't going away tomorrow."

"Baby, I have to," he murmured. "It's important."

"Sure, I know. But it's going to be tough without you. I can stand remembering everything I know, but it makes me realise how many things I *don't* know."

He waited.

"Like—like why that buckra devil carved you. I don't get it. Don't see why he wanted to just 'cause you black. Not like the way I felt when we set out to even the score, you with me? Then I felt I got a purpose, a target I could reach. Even that wasn't worth it, though. Because . . . Hell, he probably didn't know why he treated us so bad, did he? We gave him his own back, and what's come out of it is more hate. When we need less!"

She looked up at him with huge beautiful dark eyes full of hurt.

"Val, taking that box of candy to Lady Washgrave—did it do any more good than fixing that goddamned shopkeeper?"

"A whole lot," Valentine said softly. "You saw the news. She's in hospital, in a coma. Same as I was. Same as Malcolm. Same as Dr. Post should have been, except he didn't go sleep it off in time. Too high, maybe. Too sure the initial dose he'd already inhaled was cushioning him against—"

"Val!" she cried suddenly, putting her hands to her head again. "Half of me knows what you mean and half of me doesn't, and the half that doesn't is more—more *me!"*

Stroking her crisp hair comfortingly, he said, "Honey, you and a hell of a lot of other people. A hell of a lot. In the end, the whole damned world. I hope it's soon."

XXI

THE PHONE SAID, "Malcolm?"

"Yes, David?"

"Get out, fast, and preferably out of the country."

"What? Why?"

"Arthur and Wilfred were arrested by Special Branch this afternoon on Gifford's orders."

A score of alternative plans flashed through Malcolm's mind as he looked along his hallway, imagining the quantities of vc breeding in his kitchenette.

"Very well. Valentine has his, you have yours, Bob has his and is probably on his way by now. Ruth speaks German."

"You speak French?"

"Yes. Thank you. I'll miss the house, though, I must say . . . Still, all being well it'll be here when we come back. 'Bye!"

THE NEWS was of the joint ultimatum issued by the other signatories to the Treaty of Rome, demanding that Italy resume adherence to it within twenty-one

days. So far there had been no response.

BRADSHAW WOKE from an uneasy doze as the train, which had been grunting up the northerly inclines of Italy, slowed to a halt. He was alone in his compartment; it was clear that even though this was normally a popular resort area the whole year round few people felt inclined to risk heading for it now the crisis was intensifying to the point where the possibility of actual fighting was being openly debated.

He slid up the window-blind, to find grey dawn-light beyond. Half-hidden by mist, mountains white with snow loomed in the distance. And, on a twisting road which at this point the railway overlooked . . .

—Troop-carriers! Half-tracks!

A whole convoy of them, reassigned from duties further south to judge by the olive-drab of their paint, conspicuous against the off-white piles of snow flung aside from the road. But the men they carried were properly clad for winter in the mountains, wearing all-white insulated clothing and with anti-glare goggles loose around their necks.

The train moved on. Beyond the next curve was another line of military vehicles, this time trucks with snow-chains around their tyres, passing through a small village where a man with bright fluorescent batons was directing them which route to take at an intersection. Early-rising locals were staring in amazement as the tinny bell of the church announced the first mass of the day. It was Sunday.

Bradshaw glanced up at the one lightweight travel-bag he had brought with him, containing something far more important than clothes or shoes or money. His thoughts were grim.

—Still . . . A twenty-one day ultimatum is far better than we were hoping for. Do the meteorologists expect the weather to have broken by then? Right now fighting over this kind of terrain would be as bad as the Russian front in winter 1941.

Not that it would be the same kind of fighting.

Abruptly the door from the corridor was flung open and an officer in a greatcoat and an armed private were demanding, *"J sui documenti!"*

He produced his forged passport and leaned back in his seat unconcernedly. While staying with Hector and Anne he had let his beard grow, then trimmed it neatly into a shape he had never worn in any role for movies or TV.

"Ah, you're American, Mr Barton," the officer said as he leafed through the passport. His English was impeccable. "What brings you here?"

—I wonder whether acting will disappear in the Age of vc. When everybody can do it perfectly . . . No, of course not. It will remain a talent, a greater concern for some people than others. But I never dreamed I could outface suspicious

officials so easily. He no more recognises me as Bradshaw than did the immigration people at Milan airport.

"A sentimental journey," he said with a shrug. "My mother's family was Italian. Her name was Gramiani, and her father was born in Piedmont. But he died before I was born."

"I see. Where exactly are you going at present?"

"To a little town which has surprised me by suddenly becoming famous. Arcovado."

—No point in lying about that. But what's the betting he will now search me, and my bag?

The reason for its sudden notoriety was simple. It was the ancestral home of Marshal Dalessandro; his family owned large estates in the neighbourhood. Moreover, he was due to come back to it next weekend, assured of a rapturous welcome.

—But well guarded against assassins, no doubt!

The search followed, as predicted. On finding his travelling medicine kit, the officer inquired what each item was or carefully read the label. For diarrhoea; indigestion; headache; earache; cuts and bruises . . .

It was clear the officer thought him a thorough hypochondriac. However, he replaced everything and shut the case with a shrug.

"Tell me, Mr. Barton," he said musingly, "what do you think of—ah—recent developments here in Italy?"

"Oh, I think a foreigner should defer judgment," Bradshaw answered easily. "Though of course if law and order can be restored and the country regain its prosperity, I'll be one of the first to applaud."

"Good. Thank you, and apologies for putting you to all this trouble." The officer returned his passport and then, struck by an abrupt thought, reached past and slid down the window-blind again.

"Take my advice, and leave it that way for another half-hour," he said with a wry smile. "It may enable you to relax a little more during your vacation."

THE NEWS was of reinforcements joining the American Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, and of the Austrians following the example of the Swiss and issuing preliminary mobilisation notices to twenty thousand reservists.

SO FAR THIS MORNING all had been quiet around the perimeter of the embattled strikers' no-go zone. Having made a complete circuit of the area he was responsible for, Lieutenant Cordery returned to his sergeant at the headquarters radio vehicle.

"I saw a tea-van in the next street," he said. "I think you might as well let the men take ten minutes' break by twos. And—ah—you might get someone to collect a cuppa and a roll of some sort for me, would you?"

"Right, sir!" the sergeant said smartly, and after glancing around

pointed at two of the nearest of the shivering soldiers. The snow was lasting much longer here than in the south; there had been a fresh fall last night and the air continued to wear its knife-cruel edge. "You two! Ten minutes for chah and wads. There's a tea-wagon in the next street. And bring some rations back for Mr. Cordery."

"Here's fifty pence," Cordery said. "That ought to be enough."

"Okay, sir," the man who took it said, and moved off gratefully. He was out of earshot when he said to his companion, "Well, hell. Never thought the day would come when I'd be glad to see a blackie!"

But Valentine Crawford heard him, and wryly countered inside his head as he put on his best Uncle Tom grin and leaned past the wisp of steam escaping from his big urns.

—Never though I'd be glad to see a buckra soldier with a gun, baby! But it all adds to the day's business, doesn't it?

Aloud, he merely said, "Yes, gents? Tea, buns, sausage-rolls, ham-rolls, cheese sandwiches—all here and waiting!"

"Hah!" one of the soldiers said, looking at the neat piles of food under their scratched plastic domes. "Not doing much trade, are you?"

"Only just started for the day, sir. Thought you ought to have first call!" Broadening his grin still further.

"We deserve it, no doubt of that. Okay, tea, and plenty of sugar. And a cheese sandwich."

"Coming up!"

Over the next week, he became a familiar and popular visitor to the nearby streets.

THE NEWS was of Russian forces being unexpectedly assigned to "manoeuvres" in Southern Hungary, and a call for stern resolution in the face of trial issued by the Rt. Hon. Henry Charkall-Phelps at a giant Moral Pollution rally in Birmingham, where he was cheered non-stop for almost five minutes.

—So LITTLE of it available . . . If only Malcolm hadn't had to flee, destroying half of what we'd painfully bred for fear Gifford's people might discover traces of it! I'm not sure he had tracked the connection between Malcolm and the Institute, but obviously he must have been monitoring phone-calls from and to there, so the risk was acute.

Sawyer shifted from foot to foot and blew into his hands. It was chilly waiting here in the line for admission to the Public Gallery of the House of Commons, but it seemed like an absolutely perfect target, far better than cinemas or tube-trains or other obvious possibilities. Particularly today, when it was being rumoured that at long last Charkall-Phelps would launch his personal attack on the Prime Minister, expected since his recent veiled insults on TV and at public meetings. Of course, it would not be in the gentlemanly tradition of British politics to hold a fight out in

the open; the real business would be conducted behind the scenes, so that the country would eventually be presented with a *fait accompli* under the guise of democratic process. But certain aspects of what was happening might now and then be glimpsed between the drifting smoke-clouds of verbiage.

—Even if I don't manage to get to the head of the line in time for the big speech of the afternoon, it'll be worth going in anyhow. And I've already done marvels, though I say it myself. That special service for forces chaplains at St Paul's yesterday: that was a real stroke of luck! I wonder whether Malcolm's friend at the Epidemic Early Warning Unit has begun to notice another outbreak of this curious variety of narcolepsy . . . Probably not. We're having to spread the vc so thinly, it's an even chance whether people are actually receiving the threshold dose. Apart of course from Lady Washgrave. Reminds me: I should see how Cissy's doing.

THE NEWS was of shouting-matches behind closed doors at EEC Headquarters in Brussels, with the big countries' delegates—those from France, West Germany and Britain—insisting on a hard line and the literal execution of the ultimatum, while the smaller countries, led by the Dutch, were claiming that there would be no way of confining a war if it broke out, and although big nations might have a faint hope of surviving nuclear attack small ones would be completely depopulated with half a dozen bombs.

Not that anyone ought to have needed to be told.

This winter, the most popular of all restaurants as a rendezvous for members of the Bonn parliament was *Am Weissen Pferd,* whose proprietor was a great sentimentalist. On noticing an attractive dark-haired woman weeping openly before one of the city's countless monuments to Beethoven, it was only natural that he should stop and inquire what was the matter.

Having been reassured that she was in tears purely because she was overwhelmed by the awareness of walking on ground Beethoven himself had trodden, he equally naturally invited her to visit his restaurant. He was married and had three grown children, but he was a notorious womaniser.

Besides, he was extremely proud of his cuisine, and took her on a tour of his kitchens to demonstrate that even in this heavily-polluted land of Western Germany it was possible to eat at certain places, even now, without risking one's health because the food was contaminated with artificial substances, preservatives or insecticides or flavour-enhancers.

Fascinated, she inquired why he did not offer sea-salt, but had ordinary commercial salt on every table, and he told the sad story of the salt from Aigues-Mortes which had proved to contain more than one per cent of some fearful

industrial waste-product, and resulted in many of a rival restaurant's clientele being taken to hospital.

He had not, as it happened, heard of Maldon salt, from the still relatively uncontaminated North Sea, and by way of making a gesture towards repayment of his hospitality and generosity she obtained some for him, which he had tested and was able with a clear conscience to give his guests. Overjoyed, he asked her advice in other matters, and was equally pleased to discover that she herself was an immensely knowledgeable cook.

—If he only knew that it's all book-learning . . . But vc does make the most incredible acts of imagination possible. Like reading the score of a symphony; Ernest Newman once said that was a purer pleasure than listening to even the best orchestra under the best conductor! A cook-book can be a banquet for me now. Luckily eating is still better, in my view, or I could find myself sitting over a bowl of soup, reading about a gourmet meal, and paying no attention to the muck I was actually ingesting. Didn't realise until now how much of what we're sold as food really is muck. Dangerous, too . . .

When she produced, with a flourish, a seasoning he had never heard of but which at her table at least, in the small apartment she had temporarily rented, seemed to make the simplest food taste exquisite, he had no qualms at all about trying it out *Am Weissen Pferd.*

Where, sadly, the majority of the customers continued to do as they had always done: drink so much they blunted their sense of taste, smoke between courses and even during them, and leave half the food on the plate.

But that was politicians for you. And with the clouds gathering over Europe, it was perhaps less than surprising.

THE NEWS was of mounting roar of support in Italy for the New System of Marshal Dalessandro, of recognition of his government by Greece first, then Spain, then Portugal, then the United States. And of air-raid warnings being tested, and shelter-drills for schoolchildren, and the printing of ration-cards.

"QUE JE SUIS *desolee, mais aujourd'hui il n'est vraiment pas possible!"* the madame exclaimed, and it was obvious that she really meant it. Within a week or so of his arrival this English milord—unmistakably a milord, even though he was travelling incognito as a plain *mee-stair*—had become the most popular client her house had ever had. "It is the *armee,"* she added by way of explanation, and spread her hands.

"Mais je comprends parfaitement," the Englishman said. And did. The existence of this streetful of brothels in this small garrison town was tolerated on conditions, chief among which was that

when one of the locally-stationed regiments was dispatched for active service its men would have first call. "Another time, then. For tonight, perhaps you would distribute these among the girls as a token of my appreciation?"

He snapped his fingers, and the young man who seemed to be, his valet produced an armful of expensive and delicious candy, at least a dozen boxes.

Receiving them with cries of exaggerated gratitude, the madame whispered, "Milord—I mean *monsieur*—it is not only you who are appreciative. I swear, never have I seen before such a phenomenon as yesterday, when a girl came to me who I *know* never touched a man in her life except in the course of the profession, who has always saved her heart for other women. And said if there is a man who might change her, it would be you. Milord, it is of the most extraordinary!"

—Madame, you ain't seen nothing yet. Promise, promise.

"A bientot, madame," he said, turning away.

"Oui, Monsieur Frail A bientot!"

OH, MILADY, you're awake at last," cried Tarquin Drew, and in his excitement almost dropped the flowers he had brought to replace yesterday's, now drooping on the bedside table in this neat clean hospital room.

"I woke up hours ago," Lady Washgrave snapped, laying aside the *Daily Telegraph* she had been reading. "They tried to telephone you, apparently, but you didn't answer!"

Tarquin blushed brilliant crimson.

"I—uh . . . Well, for some reason, milady, I've been oversleeping. Even though I've been retiring early for the past three days, I've slept until ten a.m. each morning." He essayed a little joke. "Sympathetic magic, perhaps!"

He sat down eagerly at the side of the bed, and then caught sight of the headlines on the *Telegraph.* "Oh, you must know already the great news I was going to impart!" he exclaimed. "What a shame!"

"What 'great news'?"

"Why, that Mr. Charkall-Phelps is almost certain to oust the Prime Minister at the next meeting of the Parliamentary Party!"

"It'll be a sad lookout for the country if he does," Lady Washgrave grunted.

"Why, milady! What on earth makes you say—?"

"What he's been saying makes me say!" she interrupted. "Since I woke up I've had a chance to catch up on these speeches he's been making. The man's mad. Should have realised it years ago."

Totally disoriented, Tarquin could only stare.

"Must be mad!" she declared. "The way he's talking, you'd think he was a reincarnation of Churchill

and the enemy were lining up to invade! Going on about our determination to withstand the most appalling onslaught, confident in our great traditions, and the rest of it. I'd like to see him try and stop an H-bomb with fine words and flowery phrases!"

She glared at him. "Oh, he fooled me all right, I have to admit that. It's only now he's coming into the open, showing himself up for what he is—a thorough-going megalomaniac!"

"But, milady . . . !"

"It's perfectly clear," she snapped. "Perfectly clear, at long last. If I'd been at the last few rallies of the Crusade, I'd have given him a piece of my mind! Hah! I take back everything I said about Brother Bradshaw. He saw through the sham at once, and I should have done, and I didn't. To my lasting disgrace! I knew perfectly well that if he was a business associate of George's he must be a bad egg, and I hid the truth from myself."

"I—I honestly don't follow you," Tarquin whimpered.

"Well, you never knew George. And even if you had met him you might not have caught on. You're easily fooled by charm, aren't you?" And, as he bridled, she gave a harsh laugh. "Oh, you know perfectly well you are! Maybe because you have so much of it yourself. Even more than George. Of course, I don't suspect you of hiding anything under it half as bad as what he did. Vicious bastard."

"Milady, I—!" Tarquin seemed on the verge of crying.

"Brace yourself, man! You know damned well this is a hell of a world we live in, and lying here I've realised that the effort *I've* put into trying to make it better was like—like wallpapering a room to hide the cracks and the dry rot! I even managed it inside my own head. But . . ." Her expression changed suddenly; she looked inexpressibly miserable. "But I can't fool myself any more, Tarquin. It hurts dreadfully, but I have to put an end to it. I have to admit that I knew without knowing how George made that fantastic fortune of his."

There was a dead pause. Eventually Tarquin said, "In—ah—property, surely!"

"By driving people out of their homes, Tarquin! I was living with him. I knew all right! I just pretended to myself that I didn't. That's one of the reasons I was glad when he dropped dead."

"Glad?" he echoed in horror. And then, with an unexpected access of boldness, "Milady, can I say something? I . . ." He had to swallow. "I can't help wondering whether when you called him vicious just now, you meant . . ."

It broke off there.

"Vicious to me?" Lady Washgrave said. "Oh, yes. True to type in marriage and out. And I don't mind who knows it. Not now. There's a word I've often read but never until now grasped the true meaning of: *catharsis.* Like having a boil lanced in your soul. I've been hiding knowledge of something foul

from myself, under a veneer of 'good works'. I hope I never delude myself that way again."

"But your work has been good!" Tarquin insisted. "You've done marvels!"

"Good enough to repay the people who were driven out of their homes to make the fortune I enjoy?" rasped Lady Washgrave. "And you of all people should condemn some of the consequences I've aided and abetted, like what led to that gay club being burned out and seven people killed!"

Tarquin gasped. "Milady, I—"

"Come off it, you're as queer as a coot and you know it and I know it and to be absolutely honest the only thing I can genuinely regret about it is that it means I can't invite you into bed with me. George was the only man I ever had, and he was so unspeakably incompetent I don't suppose our marriage ever recovered from the ghastly honeymoon he inflicted on me. Of course I took it for granted that that was how all men behaved to their wives, but it obviously can't be true because so many women actually *like* sex." She eyed him speculatively. "It may be a bit late in my life but I do feel it's high time I— Tarquin!"

But he had rolled his eyes upward in their sockets and slid off his chair in a dead faint.

It was forty-nine hours before he reawakened.

THE NEWS was of frantic in-front-of-the-scenes speeches declaring determination to stand firm and not to compromise and frantic behind-the-scenes negotiations undertaken in the intervals of trying to find the right person to bribe for a booking on a ship or plane bound for the Southern Hemisphere and drafting advertisements to sell desirable residential properties at ridiculously low prices, "owner unexpectedly posted overseas."

But there was reference, a long way down the News in Brief column, to a curious sickness afflicting troops on duty in Glasgow.

"WELL, VEE, how d'you like Canberra?" Harry Bott said proudly.

"Don't," she answered sullenly. "Not much, anyway."

"Ah, I know it's going to be tough for a while. But I have a job already, don't I? Not much of a job, but enough to make ends meet. With one of the best air-conditioning companies in the whole of Australia!"

"And all of us packed in two rooms!" she snapped back. "At least at home we'd have been in four rooms!"

"If we'd stayed at home I'd be in jail!" Harry exploded.

"Yes, and it'd have been no loss . . ." Vera pushed back a stray tress of hair from her face. It was beginning to grey near the roots.

And then, as if she had overheard herself say that in memory, "Harry! I didn't really mean it! Don't hit me!" She cringed away

from him, one arm raised as though to ward off a blow.

—Lord. Have I made her that scared of me? I suppose I must have. Makes me so angry with myself, deep inside. I feel ashamed. There's more to life than playing out a part. I been doing that far too long.

He reached for the bottle of Foster's beer which he had going and hesitated as he poised it over his glass. "Er—want some?" he ventured. "You haven't tasted this Aussie beer yet, have you?"

Not quite believing that he hadn't hit her, she lowered her arm slowly and stared at him.

"Harry, what's come over you?" she said at last.

"I'll tell you one day," he grunted. "For the time being mark it down to my being so pleased that I'm here, not sweating out Five years' bird!"

—And . . . Well, I don't know how he fixed it, I really don't. But I'm going to keep my side of the bargain I made with Mr. Sawyer. When those new air-conditioning units go into that posh hotel all the MP's and diplomats use, there's going to be that little gadget added to each one I can get my hands on. Not much to pay back for years of extra life, is it?

"I'll find you a glass," he said. "Or a cup, or something."

THE NEWS was of a crisis in Japan, with a fervent right-wing movement demanding that advantage be taken of the mess Europe was drifting into, and of a violet argument between those Australian politicians who maintained that old loyalties required them to support the British government come what may, and their opponents who declared that the British had long ago cut them loose by their repeated perfidy.

And the days of the ultimatum were wearing down, like rocks eroded by the swift tumult of a river.

"OH, IT IS a very great day for all of us here in Arcovado," the priest said, rubbing his hands as he led Bradshaw through the bitterly cold church. In the past week he and his American visitor had become fast friends. Belying his modest disclaimers about his ignorance of the language, the latter had been able to pose amazingly technical questions about ritual, vestments, the sacrament of the mass, and other abstruse theological subjects, and had shown a greater and greater interest in the Roman confession, to the point where the priest was if not confident at least optimistic about the chance of welcoming this declared heretic into the fold.

"Yes!" he went on. "Without misusing the term, one might well refer to Marshal Dalessandro as the saviour of Italy, the man who will restore the true faith . . . Forgive me, I am admittedly prejudiced in that area!" He laughed as he opened the door from the nave into the little stone-walled room where the raw materials, as it were, lay

waiting: the wafers and the wine, not yet transubstantiated by blessing.

"To think that in the morning he and so many of the famous will take the communion here! Oh, it's the fulfilment of a dream, the answer to a thousand prayers . . . Excuse me, is something wrong?"

Bradshaw was sniffing the air suspiciously.

"Father, you'll forgive me if I mention a most delicate subject, I'm sure," he said. "Perhaps through long habit you simply do not notice, but . . . Ah—is there sewage somewhere nearby?"

The priest blinked rapidly several times. The point sank home. He said, "Oh!"

"I believe I'm right," Bradshaw said. "There is an open drain to windward of here somewhere. While I'm certain that in cold weather it can lead to no possible harm, the aroma, the effluvium . . . Your distinguished visitors, after all, do hail from somewhat more prosperous localities!"

"Yes, how terrible, I should have thought of it before, with so little time to go before the great occasion . . .!" The priest was close to babbling in his agitation.

"Never mind, leave it to me," Bradshaw said.

"You, Mr. Barton? You can help me?"

"I can indeed. By pure chance I happen to have with me one of the newest aerosol products from America. It will disguise unpleasant stinks more efficiently than the finest of all possible incense. Allow me to offer it to you in the morning prior to the mass which Marshal Dalessandro will attend."

"And. two other cabinet ministers, and the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, and hundreds of journalists, and—oh, the Good Lord knows who else!" Clasping his hands, the priest turned to Barton-Bradshaw.

"What requires to be done?"

"Merely that I should come here a little early, perhaps by half an hour, and wander around spraying it in the most strategic places. That is all."

"I shall make sure you are admitted," the priest promised, and could not restrain himself from embracing the marvellously helpful stranger. "What a shame, Signor Barton, that you are not of our persuasion, for clearly you have its interests at heart, and what is more those of the country from which your ancestors hailed!"

"But of course," Bradshaw said modestly. "Would a man be able to call himself a man if he did not?"

—If the officer who searched my bag on the train were to learn of this and start wondering how I laid hands on this "new aerosol from America," there'd be trouble. Thank goodness (a very interesting phrase, indicative of the way human thinking may well develop in the next age after ours, invoking pure concepts rather than hypothesising personal deities . . . but skip that!) it takes vc to make

one treat that kind of insight as a matter of course. I'm half-scared by the success of this plan. One could not be *sure* until his helicopter landed that Dalessandro was going to do the "obvious thing" and celebrate his birthday in a suitably symbolic fashion, here on the land his ancestors used to farm. One makes a guess: human beings react more predictably the more stress they have to endure. Small wonder, if so, that governments have always found it easier to cope with a population threatened by war, unemployment, epidemic, injustice, what have you? A totally free man is also totally unpredictable to anyone else who is not himself free. And in Donald Michael's immortal phrase, "anyone who offers himself for election under a democratic system automatically disqualifies himself, because those who crave power are those least fitted to wield it!" Addicts. That's what they are.

"Why do you smile, Signor Barton?" the priest inquired.

"Because I'm pleased to do you this small service," Bradshaw returned, bowing. "You, and everybody!"

THE NEWS was of a form of narcolepsy.

It seemed to have no after-effects worth mentioning. It certainly did not adversely affect the health of any known patient.

And it did not appear to be an epidemic in the formal sense. There was no clear vector-pattern, as far as computer studies could reveal.

It was fairly common in Glasgow.

There was a discernible incidence in London and elsewhere in the Southern Counties of England.

There were foci in Bonn and in the South of France, not far from the Italian border.

There were minor outbreaks in and around Rome, connected in a manner which did hint at the possibility of a link with other affected areas, inasmuch as everyone concerned had been at the same place at the same time.

But on the other hand there was a totally separate outbreak in Australia, and it was suggested by authoritative experts that the likeliest common cause was stress. The persons who succumbed were typically involved in politics or some other extremely demanding occupation, such as active service with the Forces, or else were facing a crisis of conscience of unparalleled severity. The spokesmen cited army chaplains in particular, who were confronted with the dilemma posed by the risk of nuclear war, and those soldiers who had been day and night on patrol in the riot areas of Glasgow.

Meantime, Down Under, there was the traumatic experience in progress of taking for the first time in Australian history a genuinely independent policy decision without reference to an overriding loyalty.

Not that, in fact, a great deal of attention was paid to this minor mystery. There was too much else to worry about: above all, the

warning just issued by the Soviet Union that the United States was to treat the dissension in the Common Market as a purely internal matter, or must face the consequences of meddling in it.

The world was singing a note of hysteria now, like the string of a violin tightened to the limit of its strength.

XXIII

"VOICI LE JOURNAL, *m'sieur,"* the chambermaid said, and added as she set down the paper and a tray with his morning coffee at Malcolm's bedside, *"Quelquechose d'incroyable vient d'arriver a Londres, parait-il!"*

Malcolm sat up frantically and seized the paper, giving only a glance at the window beyond which the grey morning light typical of Brussels showed him roofs dripping moisture like leafless boughs in a lonely forest . . . though with no expectation of turning green upon the advent of spring. It had taken a while to work out why he found this city the most depressing of any he had ever visited, barring the dismal towns of the industrial north of England. He had deduced at last that what it lacked was water. A river, or even a canal, would have given it shape and some extra dimension the human psyche needed on a deep obscure level.

But this was no time for reflection. The headlines stated that the new British Prime Minister, M. Charkall, was . . .

He stared, not believing his eyes, and then began to laugh. And laughed, and laughed, so loudly and so long that the girl who had delivered his tray came back to inquire anxiously what was wrong.

"Oh, bless you, David!" he forced out at last. "Helping the police with their inquiries into offences under the . . . No, it's too much!"

—Has there ever been a case like this before? There have been MP's who ran afoul of the law, like Horatio Bottomley, and others who were screwed by a scandal, from Profumo to Parnell. But a Prime Minister . . .! How? How?

He was scanning the story as fast as he could. It was continued on page 2. Turning, he discovered the key to the puzzle.

"Amelia," he said softly. "So it worked even on a case-hardened old figurehead like her."

What had happened vtas not spelled out in the paper. It was all plain to him, though. Lady Washgrave had suffered a fit of conscience on realising with intolerable clarity where the fortune she had inherited had stemmed from. And she had gone to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

And prior to his entry into politics, ten years ago, one of the directors of Washgrave Properties had been Henry Charkall-Phelps.

And very likely thanks to David Sawyer, the PM had not been able to hide the fact that he had connived at the kind of unsavoury—

Another paragraph elsewhere on the page caught his eye, and his train of thought broke off, derailed.

—Troops deserting in Glasgow? *Fourteen* courts-martial? Oh, it's all happening, it's really all happening! But how about the bloody French? Surely by now something ought to—but there it is! On page three!

He read hungrily, scarcely daring to credit the agency the dispatch was from. Reassignment of the 18th Infantry Division . . . resignation of a senior officer . . . political differences in the ranks leading to . . .

Aloud he told the air, "If I'd written my own script, I couldn't have improved on *this."*

"So WHAT DO YOU think will happen?" Sawyer asked the barman who was drawing his mid-morning pint.

"Dunno," the man grunted. "Except one thing. / know we've been led by fools and rogues, but this is the first time we've ever been led by a *criminal!"*

With a snort he turned to serve someone else. Sawyer smiled quietly into his beer.

"ACH, LIEBCHEN, it is beyond belief!" sighed the owner of *Am Weissen Pferd.* "Last night, it was a calamity! Nobody ate anything—anything at all bar a token mouthful! There was the most terrible scene in front of all the other customers, when this member of the *Bundestag* shouted across the room at *Herr General* Kleindienst, calling him a crazy killer who wanted to play with atom-bombs like children's toys, to sit safely in a concrete bunker and watch the pretty flames as they exploded!"

"But it's true, isn't it?" Ruth murmured, stirring her coffee.

"True? But of course not! It is necessary that we have these weapons to save us from the Russians who would otherwise walk in and steal our land from us! Not that someone with a memory as long as mine could *entirely* hold that against them, for I myself . . ."

Patiently she endured for the umpteenth time the recital of his experiences on the Russian front in World War II, and noted with interest that today, unprecedentedly, he interspersed accounts of his own heroism with references to the plight of the peasants whose land the great battles had been fought over.

—It's working. I wish I knew where Malcolm was! I'd so love to phone him and share this triumph.

"MORNING, VAL," said the sergeant in a dispirited tone. He and Valentine had become quite well acquainted now. "The usual, please . . . No, make it a sausage-roll today. I feel like a change."

"Coming up, sarge!" Valentine said, turning to his urns. And unable to resist glancing at the sugar he had so carefully doctored every evening in his squalid lodgings since he arrived. Once you

had the knack of growing vc, it was no more difficult than, say, making cottage cheese. Though it did provoke raised eyebrows when he bought the ingredients for the substrate.

"You been having trouble, sarge?" he added in a sympathetic tone.

"Trouble? Trouble is putting it mildly!" The sergeant took a moody bite of his roll. "Losing Lieutenant Cordery that way—never saw nothing like it in my life. You know what he did?"

"Well, 1 heard *something* . . ."

"Probably didn't hear the half! Called us all together and started giving us this lecture on how if the government had worked everything out properly to start with, there wouldn't be any strikers throwing bombs and sniping at us, and then the colonel interrupted and had him put under arrest, and . . . But tell me something, Val. How do *you* feel?"

Valentine hesitated only fractionally. He put on a disapproving tone.

"Sarge, 1 was brought up to think that this was a good country, a great country. Even if they did drag my grandfather off to be a lousy slave, they realised it was wrong, they passed laws, they gave us something to make up. And to be here now and see what's damned near civil war—well!" He handed over the plastic cup with four spoonfuls of sugar which he knew this customer liked.

"Right. / didn't sign on to shoot at Jocks," the sergeant said. "Nor at Micks. Hell, I've served with both, and there's some good and some bad in them all, same as with English people. I've had my bellyful. And, what's more"—with growing decision—"I'm going to go tell that bugger of a captain! Just as soon as I finish this tea. You make bloody good tea, you know."

Valentine shrugged and spread his hands.

"No, I mean it! Funny, but I only just got to thinking about it. Good food. Best fish and chips I ever ate came from a shop run by a bod from Cyprus. Near where I used to live. That was all you could do for a meal late on Saturday after the pubs shut, until a Chinese restaurant opened up, and then an Indian one just around the corner, too. Good scoff, most of it. Bit weird for the likes of me to start with, but— No, I was forgetting. You were born here, Val, right? I mean in London, same as me!"

He gulped the last of his tea and replaced his empty cup on the counter of the van. "Thanks! Now I *am* going to give 'em a piece of my mind!"

VERY CAUTIOUSLY the *adjudant* moved aside the branches of the bush at the crest of the hill, still so tightly wrapped in frozen snow that he could hear them crackle, and raised his binoculars to look towards Italy.

And uttered a gasp that must have been audible for half a mile.

Of all the spectacles that could be

presented to an officer commanding troops there was none, in his opinion, more ghastly than the sight that now met his eyes.

Down there, scarcely a hundred metres off, were the members of the patrol he had sent out at dawn, and who had been missing since an hour later. He had signalled the *Quartier-General* about them. Now, more than likely, indignant Notes would be flying back and forth between Paris and Rome—by way of Geneva, since of course the French government had broken off diplomatic relations with the Italians after their appalling treachery—and they were not dead at all!

They were here in plain sight, sitting around and chatting and exchanging cigarettes and gulps of wine with their Italian enemies-to-be!

Careless of consequences, he rose into plain sight and approached them at a crunching run, drawing his automatic.

"Are you mad?" he screamed at the corporal leading the patrol.

The latter looked at him coolly, and answered in a lazy drawling voice.

"Why, no, *mon adjudant.* Rather, we have come to our senses. We have been thinking, you know. We have been wondering why, if our leaders are so eager for us to die on their behalf, they couldn't have given us something first. I speak little Italian, but enough to discover that this poor *bougre"*—pointing at one of the nearer *Bersaglieri,* in white except for the dark panes of his snow-goggles—"is a Catholic like myself, and has three children, like myself, and had to join the army because he could not Find another job that would pay to support his family. Like myself."

He calmly took a swig of wine; the bottle being passed contained, according to its label, Valpolicella.

"Want some?" he added. "It's not bad. Not good, because it's so cold, but no bad."

"You're under arrest!" the *adjudant* barked. He raised his gun. Instantly, twenty other guns were levelled at him, both French and Italian . . . although in fact they were all made in Belgium. Identical.

"Mon adjudant," the corporal said, "we have been talking for about an hour. Despite our lack of interpreters, we have made better progress in that hour than the United Nations can make in a year! We are agreed that before we kill each other we should better serve mankind by killing those who order us to kill each other. Why do you not behave sensibly and sit down and discuss your views with us? We had just touched on something that I myself detest about the army life: the way we soldiers are given the chance of contact with a woman as a kind of supplement to our pay, whereas it is the natural right of us all. I do not deny that I have myself taken advantage of such offers, and indeed did so the night before we were sent here. But in principle I

think it is not right, because such a commercial transaction . . . Ah, forgive me. You would not of course have indulged, would you?"

The *adjudant,* with a cry of rage, aimed his pistol. A shot rang out. The pistol vanished from his hand like a conjuring trick and flew into a bank of snow.

"I hope that did not hurt so very much," the Italian who had fired said in broken French with a terrible accent. "Is better, though, not? Please, sir, have cheese, a cigarette, something! Is better French cheese yes, we agree, but is better Italian cigarettes, we think. Each have something proudly of . . . Ah, hm, uh?" He appealed with his eyes for assistance, bogged down in the morass of translation.

But the *adjudant* had turned and fled. Behind him he heard laughter.

And jokes about his inability to satisfy a woman.

"TELL ME SOMETHING, Professor," said the lawyer Kneller had engaged to represent himself and Randolph.

"Yes?"

"Have you ever studied law?"

"No, never."

"Then how on earth did you manage to give me the best layman's brief I've ever received? I never saw anything clearer or more detailed in all my—what is it now?—twenty-eight years of practice!"

Kneller gazed modestly at the floor. "Well, one of my best friends at Oxford was reading law, and I do number quite a few solicitors and barristers among my personal acquaintances."

The lawyer snorted. "Then all I can say is that you've missed your vocation. You have a rare aptitude for legal argument." He was turning the pages of the brief as he spoke. "Beautifully organised—beautifully! And there isn't a hole anywhere!"

"That's very kind of you. But the important question is: will it do its job?"

"You mean will it get you and Dr. Randolph out from under these absurd charges? Of course it will—not a shadow of a doubt." The lawyer hesitated. "As a matter of fact I believe the charges would be set aside anyway, but it's always more satisfying, so to speak, to know you had a winning hand despite your opponent throwing in his cards. You are aware that one of the most extraordinary cases in the whole of English jurisprudence is just about to break?"

"I take it you're referring to the remarkable coincidence in time between the selection of Charkall-Phelps as the new PM, and his investigation by the police for various rather unsavoury offences connived at, if not committed, during his time as a director of Washgrave Properties?"

The lawyer threw up his hands. "God's name! If half the charges are true, he should have spent the past ten years in jail, not in the House of Commons!"

"As a matter of purely clinical

interest," Kneller said, "they are *all* true. But if you don't mind my changing the subject—how soon are you going to get me out of here?"

"Oh, within a few minutes. Just as soon as Chief Superintendent Gladwin arrives. You heard he's taken over from Owsley?"

"I hadn't heard, in fact, but I'm not surprised. Is Owsley going to face disciplinary action?"

Staring, the lawyer said, "For a man who's been under arrest since before this affair came into the open, you're astonishingly well informed. Yes, it seems likely, and among the things he's going to have to answer for I'll make sure they include unreasonable opposition to bail for you and Dr. Randolph."

"You might also drop a hint in the right quarter," Kneller said, "about his inability to solve the murder of my late colleague Dr. Post, which in fact was solved by the man he displaced from the investigation, David Sawyer, and—"

"And who was so affronted by this high-handed treatment that he felt obliged to resign," the lawyer supplied. "I heard about that, and I was shocked. Obviously Sawyer was a dedicated and gifted officer; wasn't he also responsible for arresting that drug-peddler, Feathers? I imagine I'd have done the same in his place. Oh, I think I can say with certainty that this creeping personality-cult which over the past few years has been infecting the police, since the advent of Charkall-Phelps as Home Secretary, is at an end."

He gathered his papers and rose.

"I'll just go and see whether Gladwin is here yet. If he is, I'll be back at once and you'll be a free man again in a matter of minutes."

ON CAME the floodlights and the square, packed with workers returned from abroad, waved in their brilliance, like a field of grass when a breeze passes over it on a sunny day. This was where Marshal Dalessandro had drawn his support since the very beginning, in the stock populist tradition. Some of those people waiting for him tonight were former factory-hands in Birmingham, garage attendants in Munich, night watchmen in Lyons, dockside roustabouts in Antwerp . . . whose work had vanished thanks to economic forces they could not comprehend, and who had been compelled to come home trailing the dismal shreds of their vision of the Promised Land.

Disappointment had matured into anger. They wanted a messiah at all costs, and in Dalessandro they had found one. Elsewhere and at other times the shirtless ones had turned in similar fashion to Mussolini, to Peron, to Adolf Hitler—and sometimes been gratified, often not.

Now, when the marshal emerged, he looked pale and strained; it was known that he had been for two and a half days victim of this extraordinary sleeping-sickness one had read about. On seeing him recovered, the crowd exploded with

delight.

When, after three or four minutes, there was quiet, he approached the waiting microphones . . . and hesitated, looking from one side to the other of the square, with a special smile for the TV cameras. And finally seemed to brace himself, and spoke up: "My friends!"

"Il nostro Duce!" came an answering roar.

"My friends!" he repeated. "I have great news for you! It has come to me, as though in a vision, how we can spare our beloved land from the scourge of war!"

There was a near-silence, in which could almost be heard the thoughts of his listeners: "But we were looking forward to that!"

He went on doggedly. "We have the tools in our hands to make a good life for everybody. They have been ignored, they have been neglected. Those who neglected them were perhaps evil, or—more likely—they were unable to cope. Our world is so complicated, and so many decisions have to be taken, and so many people are trying to extract maximum benefit for themselves at the expense of others . . . But today I offer you a plan which will benefit everybody, and nobody will be deprived!"

Half an hour later, those of the reporters who were not clapping as wildly as the crowd were saying to each other, "But why didn't anybody think of that before? It's *obvious!"*

XXIV

"ONE THING DOES please me immensely," Malcolm said as he dexterously opened celebratory bottles of champagne in the small, and now crowded, living-room which Maurice Post had formerly rented. He had found on returning to London that in a final wild spasm of blind fury a godhead gang had attacked his house with fire-bombs and burned it to the ground, as though the war which had been so efficiently aborted had needed to leave some warning traces on the world. But that had been virtually the last such incident.

"What, darling?" Ruth inquired, taking the freshly-filled glasses and distributing them. It was going to be a grand party, this; perhaps never in all of history had there been so good an excuse for holding one.

"That there's still room for sentiment," Malcolm said.

"I know what you mean," Kneller agreed. "In a sense, the whole thing began here, didn't it? Here in Maurice's home. It must have been here that he first realised he was being affected by vc—here that he debated with himself hour after hour trying to work out whether his views concerning the fate in store for the world were justified, or illusory—here that he took the crucial decision to try it on himself, to be a guineapig on behalf of mankind."

"He had guts," Cissy said. She

was sitting in a nearby chair with Toussaint perched on her knee. The boy was looking very annoyed. He had insisted on trying the champagne for himself, and concluded it was a confidence trick.

"More guts than most," Valentine said with a nod. "A real hero, that guy." And, having sampled the glass of champagne Ruth handed to him, interrupted himself to say, "Hey, that's delicious!"

"I was just going to say the same," David Sawyer chimed in. "I never used to take seriously all the fine phrases the experts used about wine. A pint of keg has always been my regular tipple. But since catching vc I've developed quite a palate, and this is a marvellous drink."

"I can see one person who disagrees with you," Ruth murmured dryly. "I'll get Toussaint some apple-juice. Won't be a moment." She vanished in the direction of the kitchen.

"Heroes!" Valentine said, reverting to his former point. "I don't see how they got away with it for so long, giving phoney examples to kids—people who like held the bridge, or went on fighting with one arm and one eye. Me, I'd have been turned on more by the kind of people Cissy says you used to talk about in class, Malcolm. Doctors who gave themselves VD and yellow fever in the hope of finding a permanent cure."

"Well, it's taken us a while to learn to ride the dog," Malcolm said. "Let alone figure out how to teach it to ride the lizard."

Drawing the cork on another bottle, he added to himself with a quizzical cock of one eyebrow, "Never could pour champagne without spilling it before I got vc . . . Val, you look kind of blank. You weren't at the council meeting at my old place when I used that metaphor."

"No, but I think I caught on anyway," Valentine said. "Not the kind of thing you'd chance across in my line—after all, I never got into psychology much, learned more about electronics and then later went for politics and economics . . . But I guess you're referring to three levels in the brain."

"Mm-hm. The trammels left over from earlier stages of evolution."

"Makes sense," Valentine said. "And that's what's going to change the world, isn't it? Catching on quick! Used to be that if you wanted to make somebody see things your way, you had to argue and persuade and *hammer* away. After vc—well, Wilfred and Arthur could tell you how to make the substrate they'd invented, and you could tell me, and the first time I tried it I got it right." He grinned broadly. "No sweat!"

"Before vc," Cissy put in, "you couldn't boil a potato!"

Joining the group with his glass empty and holding it up for replenishment, Bradshaw said, "What I think is going to change the world is our long overdue acceptance of the true nature of freedom. First you do what has to

be done, and only then what you feel like doing. Ever since we evolved to consciousness we've been doing what we feel like doing and constantly losing our tempers when what ought to have been done because it had to be done interfered. I was talking to Hector just now"—pointing to the other end of the room where Hector was leafing through a book found in Maurice's library—"about his patients, and he says he can see the impact of vc already. Because people now describe their symptoms more accurately he's treating twice as many of them in the same period of time and probably more effectively too."

"L^elete that 'probably'," Hector said in a voice just loud enough to cut through the general chatter, continuing to flip through the book that had caught his eye . . . or rather, read it. For someone who had taken vc, as he had done a week ago, a single glance per page was enough.

—Something to do with being properly prepared psychologically. The sooner we can make the news of what's going on public, the better.

Malcolm sipped his champagne and over the glass gave Ruth a broad grin.

"There's one thing I can't reconcile myself to," she said. "Dalessandro being regarded as a great man. He's nothing but—but an arrogant dictator!"

"Oh, I think you do him an injustice," Malcolm murmured. "He was at least a patriot, genuinely concerned about the mess his country had been allowed to drift into, even though he was no better qualified to put it right than the people he was so rude about . . . that is, until Bob issued him a dose of vc. After which anyone who'd taken the trouble to keep reasonably well informed could have seen what was wrong with the EEC setup. He merely happened to be the first who was able to suggest improvements knowing that other people would listen because they'd just realised that they were likely to be blown up if they didn't."

"What's more it's a beautifully logical scheme," Sawyer put in. "One suspects that his military training contributed to it. Right, Bob?"

"I'm sure of it," Bradshaw said. "Malcolm is glad there's still room for sentiment in the world, and so am I. I'm glad that people like my friend who commands a Poseidon sub haven't entirely wasted their lives. Principles of strategy don't have to apply to warfare alone; they can be generalised, and Dalessandro has demonstrated the fact. Any competent officer could explain that if you want a body of men to behave well, you can be tough with them, but you must never under any circumstances be unfair or inconsistent. That's been the bane of our system, hasn't it? So few people rolling in more luxury than they knew what to do with, so many sweating their guts out and never earning a decent living . . . Thanks, of course, to

the contradictory teachings of my former faith."

"I was brought up a Christian," Cissy said. "Spelt K-I-L-L-J-O-Y. My mam still is one. When I said I was going to quit the church because of what I'd learned from Val about the histdry of slavery, I thought she was going to kill me!" She laughed nervously. But obviously that was not a joke.

"Yes, I predict that disillusionment is going to reach landslide proportions," Bradshaw said. "You see the Moral Polluters only quarter-filled Wembley Stadium for the climax of the New Year's Crusade? They were expecting ninety per cent capacity. Amelia Washgrave told me so herself."

"That's a reformed character, if you like," Cissy said. "And to think Toussaint and I did it when we took her those candies . . .!"

"She's recanted," Malcolm said. "But the one I'm waiting for is Charkall-Phelps. Maybe he never grew a conscience at all. Maybe he stifled it with his greed for power . . . That's a question for your theological chums, though, Bob." He hesitated. "By the way, you must be relieved that the part of your life you spent studying the subject can't be regarded as a total waste."

"I've been wondering about that," Kneller said. "Bob, how do you feel?"

"No, it wasn't wasted. Nothing's wasted. Nothing ever need be wasted, either past or future. Not now." Bradshaw sipped his wine. "You see . . . Well, we've been talking in metaphors about human personality, so I see no reason not to do the same about human community. I'd term the religious phase of our social evolution an adolescent phase, the logical sequel to the puerile phase in which, as we know, primitive people were unaware of the forces affecting their lives. Like children able to observe, and sometimes imitate, but never grasp the motives behind, the actions of their elders."

"To be followed by an adult stage?" Randolph suggested cynically.

"Well, at least an age in which we can begin to make up our own minds," Bradshaw said. "Free of the pubertal conflict between what we've been told is right and what our innate urges drive us to do. Time after time whole societies have become criminally insane, haven't they? Nazi Germany, New England at the time of the witch-hunts, countless others. But vc is going to change all that."

Ruth said with a visible shiver, "Is there anything it isn't going to change?"

"Nothing," Malcolm said positively. "Knowing what I used to know, I'd have guessed that its effects would take a long, long time to Filter from the private to the public level. I'd have been overlooking something transcendentally obvious."

"One man in the right place at the right time," Kneller offered.

"Precisely. Maurice Post above

all. Dalessandro too, in his way-after Bob's neat coup at the church in Arcovado."

"You mean the sewer bit?" Bradshaw chuckled. "I spotted that the moment I stepped off the train!"

"So you should add one thing in the right place at the right time," Randolph said.

"And our definition of 'right' has been revolutionised," Malcolm said, nodding. *"A priori* I'd have expected the relatively minor consequences, like greater empathy, greater sociability, touching the public scale only indirectly, for example by reducing racial tension." With a glance at Valentine and Cissy. "The sort of thing you told me happened to that sergeant in Glasgow, Val."

"Whereas what happened to his officer," Valentine said, "Lieutenant Cordery who never actually came to my tea-van but always had his cuppa fetched for him, was far more significant. Seems that of all the things that could have happened to a soldier under his command nothing could have shaken him more than castration. Even before he caught vc what happened to poor Corporal Stevens caused him to start thinking through what he'd been told and comparing it with his actual experience. You know he's joined up with the strikers? He signed a communique on their behalf today."

"And a very reasonable set of proposals it contains," Hector said, joining them for the regular reason, an empty glass. "I hope it's going to succeed. I was so afraid I'd live to see my home town turn into a smoking pile of rubble like Belfast!"

"It would have done," Malcolm said, poising the bottle. "Not to mention London, Paris, Rome, New York, Moscow . . . Enjoying yourself, by the way?"

"I was never at a party I enjoyed more," Hector said with feeling. "Incidentally, I can name one thing that vc won't change in a hurry."

"Hmm?" Malcolm blinked at him. "It's revolutionising politics, economics and the arts; it's abolishing warfare; it's caused a painful reassessment of our attitudes to race and reproduction . . . Ah. You mean parties. And by extension the use of soft drugs."

"They'll last for a good few generations, at any rate," Hector said. "Hasn't part of our problem always been that while we could conceive ideal societies in imagination we've been surrounded by proof that we didn't inhabit a rationally organised world? Well, that'll change in the end, but probably not for a century."

"I don't know," Kneller objected. "This conference that's been called to re-think the Common Market and its relationship with poor countries from the bottom up: I'm sure it'll be the first such conference to produce concrete results."

"And the law's certain to be re-

viewed," Sawyer said. "The whole clumsy top-heavy system which has made it a dinosaur in most people's eyes, an anonymous impersonal expensive barrier between themselves and justice!"

"Granted, granted," Hector said. "What's more the politicians who got to the top by graft and glibness won't be able to fool people as they used to, and into the bargain they may grow consciences that wouldn't let them try! But when it comes to reforming the life-style of more than three thousand million people, all suddenly more individual than ever before . . .! No, we're going to have to digest our heritage of irrationality, and that will be a very slow process."

With deliberate noisiness he gulped the rest of his wine and added, "Which means that we'll be swinking Posts for the foreseeable future."

"And vast," Malcolm said.

"Naturally!"

"Hmm! How interesting! It's started already, hasn't it? The change in language, I mean. Words are condensing. Were you aware, as a matter of curiosity, what you said just now?"

"Me?" Hector put his hand on his chest. "I . . . Oh, yes. I get it. No, I wasn't aware at the moment I said it that I'd packed *swinking for Post* and *drinking a toast* together. But . . . Well, did anyone miss the point?"

"Not except for Toussaint, I imagine," Malcolm murmured. "Who would hardly have read any Middle English, at his age . . . It's happened to me once or twice, too. It feels from the inside a bit like stammering in reverse. It's the listener who's slow to react, not the speaker. But we'll adjust. When I think how much more action we shall be able to cram into a given time, how much more communication into fewer words . . . It's going to be a fascinating world. Painful, but the pains will be growing-pains. He among us who was within sight posted the first stone and it won't come down."

As he spoke, everybody's attention had fixed on him, and now everybody laughed except Toussaint, who looked puzzled, and—to Malcolm's surprise—Kneller, who said, "What?"

"You don't get the reference? Ah, perhaps you never took an interest in folk-tales."

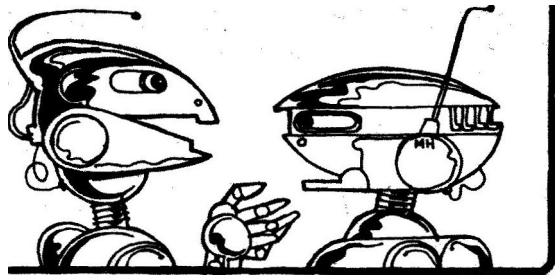
"No, I have to admit I never did."

"You should know this one. After all, you're among the handful of people who have stoned the entire world. It's my favourite Jack the Giant Killer story. Jack left home to seek his fortune carrying nothing but a bag, a cheese his mother had made, and a bird he had caught. On his way he met a giant. The giant swore to gobble him up if he couldn't match him in a trial of strength, and first he picked up a rock and crushed it so hard that water oozed out. So Jack squeezed the cheese and the whey ran out. Then the giant threw a stone clear out of sight, and it was a

(Continued from page 130)

ED SMITH

the Clubhouse



THE ALIEN CRITIC #5; Richard E. Geis, Box 11408, Portland, OR 97211; May 73; quarterly, offset; $1.00,4/54.00.

Either Richard E. Geis has gotten tired of the diary format of the first four issues of *The Alien Critic,* or he feels his new approach will be more accessible to the large circulation he is hoping for, or some combination of both, but this issue is quite different from the earlier ones. In reviewing the first four issues (the first three of which were called *Richard E. Geis)* I talked about the intimate personal nature of the writing—it was Geis, writing about himself and how the world looked from his point of view. The first two issues hit fandom by surprise, for there had never been a fanzine like it before. By the third issue he seemed to have told most of his secrets, and his life had settied into a comfortable pattern, so the third issue was much duller than issues 1 and 2. With issue 4 he changed the name to *The Alien Critic* and began to change the direction of the fanzine as well, Number 4 seemed to be a transitional issue, but I'm not convinced that the magazine has stopped evolving, even for the immediate future. The current issue looks enough like one of the offset issues of his Hugo-winning *Science Fiction Review* to make me wonder if he will eventually change *The Alien Critic* into the same sort of fanzine,

=?

It has already changed its emphasis toward science fiction, and this issue features lots of outside contributors—mostly in the form of letters of comment, but with a few genuine articles. Fritz Leiber is interviewed, James Blish talks about "The Literary Dreamers" and Jack Chalker writes an amusing piece about a collector of Lovecraft-related items. Yet there is very little material by Geis in here, and I miss him.

Geis' book reviews are as sharp and concise as ever, and it's enjoyable to watch him go through *Again, Dangerous Visions* story by story in a long review spread throughout the issue. But the only piece of Geis-writing to remind me strongly of the material he was doing for *Richard E. Geis* is an interesting discussion by him on ar-

tificial sex aids.

The outside material varies from one-sentence quotations (interlineations, or "linos") to excerpts from letters and fanzines. One fanzine excerpt that I found particularly interesting was a short piece by Don Markstein on the Warner Brothers cartoons of Chuck Jones, focusing particularly on Jones' Road Runner cartoons, and explaining the difference between Jones' treatment of the series and that of some inferior directors. It is always interesting to find that someone else in fandom is turned on by the same trivialities that I am. Most of us in fandom share some of the same interests, such as science fiction, but it is surprising that we share so many other interests as well. Whatever your areas of interest, you can probably find at least one or two other fans who share those interests, and you'll probably find it discussed in a fanzine sooner or later.

There is a lot of this sort of discussion of diverse topics in *The Alien Critic.* For all of my carping about its change of direction, and the fact that I liked its older incarnation somewhat better, there is still much of interest in this fanzine. I don't think Richard E. Geis could produce a completely uninteresting fanzine if he tried.

Rating . . . 7

VECTOR #64; Malcolm Edwards, 75-A Harrow View, Harrow, Middx HA1 1RF, UK; March-April 73; bi-monthly, offset; 60«', 10/S6.00 in check or money order payable to British Science Fiction Association; 39 pp.

This is the first issue I have seen of *Vector,* so I have no idea whether or not it is a "typical" issue. Anyway, this issue has a very enjoyable assortment of articles, and makes me look forward to the next issue. It features one strong lead article and a number of other interesting pieces, mostly about science fiction, but avoiding the stuffy pretentiousness that sf-oriented fanzines often display. It is generally serious, but without being pedantic.

The strong lead article, a notable contribution for any fanzine, is the text of a speech given by Philip K. Dick at the Vancouver SF Convention last year. This same speech has also been printed in Frank Denton's *Ashwing* and Bruce Gillespie's *SF Commentary,* but this printing of it marked the first time I had read the speech straight through in its entirety. Phil Dick has long been one of my favorite science fiction writers and, despite some major disagreements with his speech (perhaps I should say differences in our worldviews), I found it a fascinating piece.

Dick's speech, "The Android and the Human," deals primarily with the differences between the two. The main difference that Dick points out is that humans are unpredictable. He places great faith—to my mind, perhaps too much

faith—in the young to outwit the 1984-ish nightmare world that sf has been predicting is just around the corner.

"What has happened is that there has been too much persuasion. The television set, the newspapers—all the so-called mass media, have overdone it. Words have ceased to mean much to these kids; they have had to listen to too much. They cannot be taught, because there has been too great an eagerness, too conspicuous a motive, to make them learn. The anti-utopia science fiction writers of fifteen years ago, and I was one of them, forsaw the mass communications propaganda machinery grinding everyone down into mediocrity and conformity. But it is not coming out this way . . .

"The totalitarian society envisioned by George Orwell in *1984* should have arrived by now. The electronic gadgets are here. The government is here, ready to do what Orwell anticipated. So the power exists, the motive, and the electronic hardware. But these mean nothing, because, progressively more and more so, no one is listening. The new youth that I see is too stupid to read, too restless and bored to watch, too preoccupied to remember. The collective voice of the authorities are wasted on him; he rebels. But rebels not out of theoretical, idealogical considerations, only out of what might be called pure selfishness. Plus a careless lack of regard for the dread consequences the authorities promise him if he fails to obey. He cannot be bribed because what he wants he can build, steal, or in some curious, intricate way acquire for himself. He cannot be intimidated because on the streets and in his home he has seen and participated in so much violence that it fails to cow him. He merely gets out of its way when it threatens, or, if he can't escape, he fights back. When the locked police van comes to carry him off to the concentration camp the guards will discover that while loading the van they have failed to note that another equally hopeless juvenile has slashed the tires. The van is out of commission. And while the tires are being replaced, some other youth siphons out all the gas from the gas tank for his souped-up Chevrolet Impala and has sped off long ago."

I find it hard to accept that the world is really going to be averted from totalitarianism by kids "too stupid to read, too restless and bored to watch, too preoccupied to remember." I think the boredom and stupidity is one of the unfortunate results of the way "the system" has been conducting itself, hardly a force to keep the totalitarian society from happening. Later in his speech, Dick mentions that his house is equipped with infra red scanner to detect intruders. How would he feel if a burglar were breaking into his house, the police spotted him, and while putting the burglar into the van, the kids slit the tires and siphoned the gas tank?

In fact, I find when looking closely at various parts of the speech, I disagree strongly, but 1 still see it overall as a reasonable, even important, speech. Anyway, it should be read, if only to see where and why you disagree with Dick.

The same Bob Shaw who writes good science fiction is also one of the very best fanwriters. "The Extraordinary Behavior of Ordinary Materials" features him at his fannish best. He has started with one simple idea and developed it to the point of absurdity, in the grand fannish manner. This article first appeared in Michael and Susan Glickson's *Energumen,* which has since, unfortunately, stopped publication. Elsewhere in the issue, Peter Roberts does a well-written column of fanzine reviews, and Poul Anderson talks about the evolution of one of his books, from the first idea to the plotting of the story itself. There is also one of the better book review columns I have seen in a fanzine lately.

There is not a great deal done with layout, but everything is at least attractive and readable. Artwork is virtually non-existent, but there is enough interesting reading to make this a very good fanzine.

Rating . . .7(6

LOCUS #144; Dena and Charlie Brown, P. O. Box 3938, San Francisco, CA 94119; June 23, 73; bi-weekly, mimeographed; 12/ $3.00, 26/$6.00; 8 pp.

Locus calls itself "A bi-weekly newspaper of the science fiction field." It does come out with embarrassing frequency—embarrassing to other fanzine editors, at least—and it does seem to do a pretty thorough job of covering the sf field. In this issue, where nothing much "big" seems to be happening in the field, *Locus* is divided into numerous departments: Books, People, SF Scheduled for June, Magazines, Conventions, British SF for June, and so on. There is also a section of book reviews, and one movie review. This issue is mostly devoid of art, though in the past Locus has often featured a good assortment of art by the likes of Tim Kirk, William Rotsler, and Alicia Austin, all excellent fan artists in their distinctive ways. It is well-mimeographed and generally very pleasing to the eye. But I find it a very dull fanzine. There are endless lists of all the sf books to be published in a particular month, news of who is editing what at which publisher, contents of forthcoming sf magazines, and so on. Part of it is perhaps that the news in this particular little microcosm isn't usually all that exciting—we don't have anything as thrilling as the Watergate scandal, and I suppose that's just as well. But I think some good writing could at least make the news more interesting to read, and good writing is what *Locus* lacks. Also, in stressing the science fiction field, there is very little news of the fan world. This is a shame,

because there is no newszine coming out now that does cover fandom. Certainly the news of fandom is no more exciting than that of the professional sf scene, but an amusing anecdote here and there would add a good personal touch to break up the monotony of the lists of forthcoming books. *Locus* is complete in its own way, but not nearly as interesting as it could be.

Rating . . .

ALGOL #20; Andrew Porter, P. O. Box 4175, New York, NY 10017; May 73; semi-annually, offset; 80«!, 6/S4.00; 43 pp.

The cover states that *Algol* is "A Magazine About Science Fiction" and there is a list of the more well-known contributors to the issue displayed above the title. Andy Porter is making an effort to sell *Algol* in a few book stores and through extensive subscriptions, so he cannot aim the entire magazine toward an in-group fannish audience. He does a good job of editing a magazine that will appeal to both fans and those whose main interest is in reading science fiction.

It is one of the most attractive fanzines being published today. The offset reproduction is flawless, the layout clean and attractive, and the artwork is generally quite good. This issue does look a bit crowded, but Andy is aware of this problem, and promises more white space in future issues. He can be forgiven for trying to put in as much material as possible, however, for there is a lot of good reading matter in *Algol.*

This issue features a section on the writings of Cordwainer Smith. It is good to see Smith's unique fiction being discussed at some length in fanzines today. There is an interview with Arthur Burns and an article by him that tell us something about Smith as a person. This is very interesting, since Smith (a pseudonym) was a mysterious figure who did not take part in the science fiction subculture. The material by Burns fills in a few things about Smith and links up the many diverse things that he did. John Foyster writes about Smith's writing style, contrasting him with several well-known sf writers. Sandra Miesel talks about Smith's handling of the Joan of Arc story in his "The Dead Lady of Clown Town."

The only piece not directly connected to science fiction in this issue is Andy's editorial, in which he talks about New York fandom, and specifically the Fanoclasts.

"New York fandom is often a very strange thing. It waxes and wanes in long cycles, so long that it's hard to recognize them as cycles. But history often repeats, it's been said elsewhere, and history is coming around again, here in New York. New York fandom, the fandom that I knew and that shaped my fannish career, is on the wane. And there's not a thing that I can do to stop it, to slow that long road from the heights of fannishness to the bitter plains of

mundane.

"It's a strange feeling, watching something which I've been a part of, interacted with, which has shaped and nurtured my fannish career and approach to things science fictional, slowly fade away." Andy keeps leaving his subject matter and rambling off on tangents, but when he talks about the New York Fanoclasts it is a very good piece.

The regular features in *Algol* are up to their usual high quality. Richard Lupoff does an installment of his review column, "Lupoffs Book Week," and Ted White does an installment of his column (appropriately called "My Column") which this time talks about writers' agents. The letter column is very interesting, due to a large response and careful editing by Andy.

Algol is a very literate, attractive fanzine that is not in the least pretentious. With issues coming out only twice a year, Andy has the time to do a careful job of editing the fanzine, though I can't help but wish it came out more often.

Rating . . . 8½

Other fanzines:

OUTWORLDS #16; Bill and Joan Bowers, Box 148, Wadsworth, OH 44281; June 73; four to six times a year, mimeo with offset covers; 75*, 3/S2.00, 5/S3.00; 44 pp. Rating . . . 7

INWORLDS #6; Bill Bowers, address above; June 73; monthly, mimeo; 25*, 4/$1.00, 12/S2.50; 6 pp. A "fanzine about fanzines."
Rating . . . 8

SF COMMENTARY #33; Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia; irregular, mimeo; 9/S3.00 in Australia. American rates: 9/S4.00 surface mail, 9/S10.00 airmail from American agents Dena and Charlie Brown, address above; 49 pp. Rating . . . 6½

GORBETT #3; David and Beth Gorman, 3515 Lauriston Drive, New Castle, IN 47362; irregular, mimeo; 50*, 5/S2.00; 24 pp. Rating . . . 5

THRUST #2; Doug Fratz, Cumberland Hall, Room 202, College Park, MD 20742; April 73; bimonthly, offset; 30*; 18 pp. Publication of the University of Maryland SF Society.
Rating 4

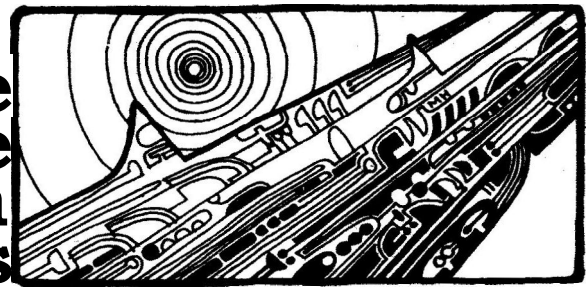
ASHWING #12; Frank Denton, 14654 8th. Ave. SW, Seattle, WA 98116; June 73; irregular, mimeo; no price listes; 31 pp.
Rating . . . 6

TANDSTIKKERZEITUNG #3; Don Markstein, 2425 Nashville Ave., New Orleans, LA 70115; June 73; irregular, mimeo; no price listed; 10 pp. Rating . . . 6

Send fanzines for review to my *new address:* Ed Smith, 1725 17th St. NW, Apt. 207, Washington, DC 20009.

—ED SMITH

the Future in Books



John Bruriner: THE SHEEP LOOK UP. Harper & Row, New York, 1972, 429 pp. Hardback, $6.95

When James Blish reviewed Brunner's *The Jagged Orbit* in the September, 1969. issue of this magazine, he called it "a novel of apparatus"—a book that drew its inspiration from and relied heavily on techniques developed by a writer outside sf. *The Sheep Look Up,* like *The Jagged Orbit* and Brunner's award-winning *Stand on Zanzibar,* uses a fragmented structure borrowed from John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* The novel is split into numerous segments, consisting of poems, bits of ordinary narrative, news releases, advertisements, etc. Brunner's genius is in realizing how useful this technique might be for the sf writer, for it has given him a way to fill in the extensive background detail often needed in a sf novel without intruding in some awkward way upon the plot and character development of the story. Brunner has found a way to largely separate these conflicting elements, and thus should be able (potentially, at least) to write a sf story that is more perfect in both these respects.

Brunner's theme in *The Sheep Look Up* is an obvious one: *Pollution is killing us.* I don't believe the author adopted it simply to be "relevant'' and cash in on a trend, but I'm afraid it still seems rather cliched. Brunner undoubtably portrays the horror and stupidity of ecological catastrophe with more power than any other writer I've read, but *The Sheep Look Up* is supposed to be a novel, not a tract; and a novelist must be judged by his product, not his intentions, as noble as they may be.

The plot strands in *The Sheep Look Up* are more diverse and complicated than in Brunner's two previous "novels of apparatus." Unlike *Stand on Zanzibar,* for instance, there is no main character around which the novel revolves, but dozens of lesser characters whose lives gradually intertwine as the novel progresses. This is one of Brunner's more subtle ways of showing how interdependent human beings are, how each of our actions affect other people and their actions affect us. This "interdependence" is one of the prime tenets of ecologists, and by constructing his novel without a main character but simply with lots of lesser ones, Brunner drives this point home. It is also a means of implying that pollution is not the result of some big conspiracy on the part of the government, big business, the communists, or what have you, but of neglect and stupidity on the part of ordinary individuals everywhere.

But while the elimination of a main or focal character reinforces the theme of Brunner's novel, some other factors in his method of constructing the book make it less interesting to read. The various fragments in *The Sheep Look Up* are put together with less skill and inventiveness than in Brunner's two previous "fragmented" novels, and the

future society Brunner constructs is less imaginative. The various segments are also very much alike, and are organized in irrelevant fashion; contrast this with *Stand on Zanzibar,* with its "context," "the happening world," "tracking with closeups," and "continuity." The major difference in construction between *Stand on Zanzibar* and *The Sheep Look Up* is that is that the former would lose much of its power if done in ordinary narrative form, while the latter would not. The message is more important than the medium in *The Sheep Look Up.*

There is also something else that I found unusual about this novel. Brunner, despite the fact that he focuses on a wide variety of characters in the many segments of the novel, from teenagers to businessmen to black policemen, never tells the story from the viewpoint of a child. Children are often mentioned in the novel, but never really focused on. As Brunner depicts young children under ages 10 or 12 as suffering most from pollution, from deformity caused by pollutants at birth, etc., it would seem that a segment of the novel as seen from the viewpoint of a child could be most poignant. But Brunner does not include one.

The Sheep Look Up is in some ways a fine book, and I could not agree more with Brunner's theme. But "relevance" alone does not make a novel great, and unlike Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar,* this book is not a science fiction landmark. It yet remains for Brunner or someone else to take up where *Stand on Zanzibar* left off, and produce a novel that both uses the Dos Passos technique more skillfully, and is better, more imaginative science fiction.

—Cy Chauvin

Gerard Klein: THE OVERLORDS OF WAR. translated by John Brunner. Doubleday, New York, 1973. Hardback, 186 pages, $5.95.

To appreciate what this book is, you must first imagine a large iron pot, filled to the brim with every possible type of herb, spice, and meat; then imagine that the pot is boiling over, spilling out a vile, inedible gruel. If you can even vaguely picture such a mess, then you will know what *The Overlords of War* is like.

The author, Gerard Klein, according to the jacket blurb, has published several collections of short stories in France (there is no indication as to whether or not the stories were science fiction, but I assume they are not), and many articles in French magazines on literature and imagination.

His novel has plenty of imagination, but there is damn little that could be called literature.

1 tried to judge this novel in comparison to other European SF that I've read recently, such as *Solaris* by Stanislaw Lem, *Other Worlds, Other Seas* edited by Darko Suvin, and *The Ice People* by Rene' Barjavel; and while none of the above were great books, they were immensely superior to *The Overlords of War.*

The book is a clumsy blend of thirties-style characters, and forties-style gimmicks and plot. It is a Space Opera of the highest order, with battle-cruisers from the "Terran" fleet wreaking havoc on the ships of the "Urians," who are described as evil "Princes" no less. The main character is as hollow as a piece of lead pipe and just as attractive. The plot is a seemingly endless array of movie serial-style predicaments in which the dumbfounded "hero," George Corson, bumbles his way through the danger. His ratiocination of the mysteries he encounters is inane because of the obviousness of the situations—which even the youngest of readers will pick up far ahead of the main character.

The dialogue is weak and the metaphors are standard stuff from the thirties (I almost quit reading after the hero pondered: " *When on Mars, breathe like a Martian . . .*"). The plot becomes overbearing and overloaded, containing too many twists and complexities that don't really add up to a satisfying resolution.

At this point, I think I should say a few

words about John Brunner's part in this book. Brunner has been producing some excellent work in the last few years, such as *The Wrong End of Time, The Jagged Orbit,* and *The Sheep Look Up;* and I couldn't imagine why he had bothered to translate a book as poor as this one. In no way does it measure up to anything that Brunner has authored in many years; and I kept thinking that perhaps Brunner had attempted to "doctor up" what may have been an even more dreadful book (although I can't imagine the original French version being any worse than this one).

I think that in translating *The Overlords of War,* Brunner wasted his time; and that you would be doing the same in reading it.

— Thomas F. Monteleone

Robin Scott Wilson (ed.): CLARION II, Signet Q5056, New York 1972, 256 pp. Paperback 95«

David Gerrold (ed.): GENERATION, Dell 2833, New York 1972, 236 pp., Paperback *95 <*

From the beginning, the science fiction community has always encouraged its younger writers; as long ago as the 1930's, *Wonder Stories* was sponsoring special writer's contests. More recently, both *If* and *New Worlds* had a policy of publishing at least one "first" story by a previously unpublished writer each issue. But not until now have anthologies come out made up exclusively of stories by young, new writers (although "new" is interpreted rather loosely at times), such as these two. For the writers, this is an obvious bonanza; for the readers, I am not so sure.

The *Clarion* anthology is derived from the Clarion Writer's Workshop, which was a special workshop in science fiction and fantasy started in 1968 at Clarion State College, in Pennsylvania. Robin Scott Wilson, editor of this book, was its founder. He based many of the workshop methods he used on those refined by Damon Knight during his years as director of the Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference. The Clarion Workshop has apparently been quite successful; out of ninety-three participants, in four years, thirty-five have already sold stories, and a number of others will be selling soon.

Eight of the twenty stories in *Clarion II* received prizes or an honorable mention in the NAL contest for the best stories from the 1971 Clarion Writer's Workshop. Rather than discuss all the stories (which would be impossible to do adequately in this space anyway), I'll just talk about these eight, since they are considered to be the best of the twenty published.

Ed Bryant's "Their Thousandth Season" and Robert Wissner's "Frozen Assets" won first prize. Bryant's story is set in the city of Cinnabar a thousand years or so in the future, when a tv program is being renewed for the thousandth time. The inhabitants of the city are immortal, and Bryant draws the analogy that their lives are like a tv program, renewed and repeated again and again. "Sponge and renewal," says one character, "But time wears deeply. We tend to live our lives in endless repetitions ... It takes a supreme act of will to break free." The problem is that Bryant's story itself sounds too much like a repetitious cliche. It is supposedly set in the far future, but everything reads as if it was still 1972; people still drive cars, they use current American slang, etc. Then, too, the rapid shifting of character viewpoint within this short (13 page) story tends to discourage the buildup of any reader identification with the characters, an essential ingredient of a good story. Wissener's "Frozen Assets" is about two workers in a cryogenics plant, where they deep-freeze people with incurable diseases in the hope that they can revive them later on when a cure is found. One of the workers begins to move the bodies around, arranging them like living sculpture into scenes from history, etc. Being only five pages long, the story suffers from lack of character development and real emotional impact, and is essentially a gimmick

story.

F. M. Busby's "Here, There, and Everywhere" and Robert Thurston's "Punchline" shared second prize. Busby's story is about an alien that becomes a man's friend by rescuing him from a "leaper," a dangerous alien animal. The man. in turn, attempts to rescue the alien at the end of the story and dies trying. A very old, and tired, story, and Busby adds little new insight to it. The author also probably makes a mistake in telling his story from the viewpoint of an alien, since in order for an alien to seem truly strange and "alien" there must always remain an aura of mystery around him: his motives and manner of thinking must always remain partially obscure. Thurston's "Punchline" is not sf, and while I don't care about labels, I *do* care about the loss of sfs unique characteristics. People read sf, after all, because they find something in it that they can get nowhere else: call it imagination, speculation, or even "a sense of wonder"—the name doesn't matter. The point is, however, that a writer who fails to develop sFs own unique characteristics, as does Thurston, is failing his readers just as much as the writer who neglects to develop his characters, plot, or prose style. This is the major reason why "Punchline" fails—although it does not have a particularly interesting plot, style, or main character either.

Third prize went to Geo. Alec Effinger's "Sand and Stones," a satire of the military's fetish for order. Effinger exaggerates its rigidity and drabness beautifully, and it is possibly the best story in the book.

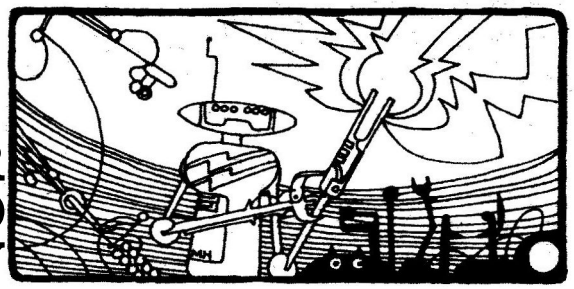
Three stories in the book received honorable mentions. "Magic Passes" by Steve Herbst is the best of these. Herbst attempts to show how a child *feels* as he is growing up, and his changing relationship with his mother. There is a lot of cute, childish action and dialog in the story, and a transformation at the end which is somehow just beyond both the child's and the reader's comprehension. Dave Skal's "Crayola" is another retread of the old story about a patient locked in a sterile room, etc. There are some subliminal sexual connotations in the story (i.e., "the bulbous white breast [lightbulb] glows above me," or "the vinyl chair the nurse had warmed with her buttocks," etc.), but basically Skal does nothing new with the idea, nor does he even explain why his protagonist is locked up in the room. Lin Neilsen's "In the Greenhouse" is intended to be humorous, I guess. It's about a talking plant named Barney; Les, a school teacher; an elm tree called Charlie; and a green parasite shaped like a nude girl. The biology in the story is pure nonsense, of course (plants couldn't talk even if they were hooked up to a "polygraph voicer" since they can't think), but I suppose this is forgivable because the story is humorous.

Besides fiction. *Clarion* // contains seven essays on various aspects of sf by Damon Knight, Harlan Ellison, Fred Pohl, Joanna Russ, Ursula K. LeGuin, etc. Ellison's is the most enjoyable, while LeGuin's is the most perceptive; but there is something of interest in all of them.

Generation is harder to assess, since there is no definite indication of which stories the editor regards as best. One thing does stand out, however: David Gerrold does seem to have a fondness for stories that are nothing more than extended jokes (and bad ones, at that). Take, for instance, Roger Deeley's "The Shortest Science Fiction Story Ever Told!"—"Time ended. Yesterday." Thafs the complete story. Not only has it been done before, but it wasn't even worth doing in the first place. Stephen Goldin's "Stubborn" is another joke story; it's about "little Frederick," the boy who *always* gets what he wants by throwing temper-tantrums, but in the end (surprise!) finally gets what he deserves. Trivia. "The Galactic Clock" by V. N. Mcintyre is about a man who *always* has bad luck—if anything can go wrong for him, it does. Like "Stubborn," the whole story focuses on this one particular aspect of the character, and like it too "The Galactic Clock" has a joke-type ending. Real, well-rounded characters are apparently old-

(continued on page 126)

...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication must be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to Or So You Say, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va,, 22046.*

Dear Ed.

In "Bill Noble's" review of Bob Silverberg's *New Dimensions I* in the AMAZING column, *The Future in Books* he refered to Damon Knight's *Orbit* series as being the oldest extant, or indeed, the oldest ever, book-anthology of original sf stories. This just is not so! *Orbit 1,* according to my information on it, was first published by G. P. Putnam's in 1966. John Carnell's *New Writings in SF 1* on the other hand was first published by Dennis Dobson in London in 1964.

I realise of course that nothing of any importance ever happens outside the US of A but we Poms (Limeys to you - Pom is actually an Australianism) will stand only so much!

To another matter. 1 disagree vehemently with M. A. Linneman (AMAZ., Nov 72, p. 128) as regarding your short fiction. Like everything else an SF magazine resembles the Curate's Egg—it's good in parts and a bit of everything has to be below par. In your September issue "Fat City" was excellent and the others only ranked fractionally below it. Other outstanding stories this year have been "Sky Blue" and "Of Mice and Otis" in the March 1972 issue. The only story I have disliked so far this year is "Get With the Program" which has the major weaknesses of inconclusiveness and shallowness—in that the plot is very poorly developed.

To be perfectly honest I consider FANTASTIC to be the better magazine as far as stories go. I would particulary like to mention "Vampire from the Void" "Time Killer", and particularly James Tiptree's "Forever to a Hudson Boy Blanket"—which, if it does not get any award, will have to be featured in most of the (alarmingly growing number of) "Best of' annual anthologies.

DERRYK ASHBY
26 Wybden Dr.
Franston, Victoria 3199, Australia

According to Locus, *Forrest J. Ackerman has picked "A Dome of Many-Colored Glass" by Bob Shaw (from* FANTASTIC/ *and "Star Level" by William Rotsler from this magazine for his* The Best Science Fiction for 1973 *to be published by Ace Books. And Jack C. Haldeman II tells us his "Watchdog" was selected by Lester del Rey for* his *best of the year collection. We've yet to hear from the other nearly half dozen annual "Best" collections . ..*—TW

Dear Ted:

I am gratified that a few of your readers

took the time to respond to my letter; it is nice to know that people at least *listen* to you.

Before I get a few things off my chest, I'll spend some time defending myself. Stephen Gross' basic contention about critisism is that no one can be totally objective so therefore the reviewer should expose all of his prejudices so people will at least know where he stands. I never implied total objectivity in my letter and I don't now. Perhaps to best exemplify my ideas of fair reviewing, just read any of the reviews in AMAZING, or better still read James Blish's review of *I Will Fear No Evil* in *F&SF.* These are my ideas of good, *fair,* reviews.

As for Gross' thought that 'Liberals' aren't likely to read or enjoy Heinlein and vice versa, I find this rather frightening. Any intelligent person wants to read idea opposed to his own, just for perseptive. Only loud-mouthed extremists are closed to other thoughts than their own and they usually don't bother reading anyway.

As for Hulvey's foolishness, I hardly feel it necessary to dignify his letter with an answer. I wonder if he even bothered to think about what 1 said before replying. He seems to imply that I was formenting a conspiracy to deny Joanna Russ the right to express her opinions. I never once attacked her right to be a critic, I never even judged her critical ability. I did, however, question her literary integrity in this instance. The fact that she didn't lose an oportunity to take a stab at Heinlein, whom she so obviously dislikes, is what bugged me.

Hulvey equated me with paranoia, yet I suggest he search his own moral integrity for evidence of Big Brother. Such references as "crude attempt at censorship" and "foil to silence others", do not exactly imply a healthy attitude towards other peoples' ideas. Who exactly is the paranoid one?

A Final word about my letter. When 1 mentioned that Science Fiction is probably the most flexable field in which to express your opinions, I refered to a fictional form, not getting up on a soapbox and editorializing whenever the oportunity arises. Of course everyone has the right to express their opinions, but there should be a sense of sobriaty about it, there is a time and place for everything. An ass need only open his mouth to make a fool out of himself, a talent with which Hulvey seems well endowed.

From what 1 have read, the main complaint of mainstream reviewers (here we go again), regarding SF films, is their lack of vivid characters. Most would have to agree when you consider the two best SF films, *2001: A Space Oddyssy* and *Forbidden Planet,* fall victim to this. Few can deny that the characters of Robby and Hal aren't ten times more interesting than . any of the human characters. In most films, the characters are just plain ludicrous, or as in Kubrick's film, they don't even bother to bring them out.

Why is this so? Perhaps one should consider the differences between the written word and the moving picture first. The important difference between the two is that words better express characters and moving pictures better express action. In a book, you can describe action, sometimes make it interesting. But it will never be as exciting as when you see it on the screen. On the other hand, only when you read a book can you get into a character's guts and know it and feel it. On the screen, you can show a character and an extremely skillful directer can bring him to life. But you can never fully appreciate one as you can in a book. Try reading the book of a movie that you have seen and you will see what I mean.

So now we get back to SF films. As anyone who has seen a good SF film will attest, it is usually the visual part that was what stuck in his mind, not the story. Science Fiction on film has always been beautiful to watch because Science and imagination have been the stars, not the actors. This is what Kubrick did; he concentrated on the visuals and made a beautifully stunning film to watch, but forgot the rest.

People are no longer satisfied with good 'special effects'. They want a story and

characters that will excite them. Fortunately, the first step has been taken, by Kubrick, with *A Clockwork Orange.* It is as close to perfect film you can get with a magnificent story and photography to match. It totally fulfils the promise that *2001* failed to.

I think it is wise that you print at least one 'self righteous zealot' letter per issue; it makes it interesting. As far as the latest one from Lester Boutillier is concerned, I can only assume that the 'ESP is immortal' statement is a typo. I'm still trying to figure that one out.

I think the magazine is improving with every issue and while some may disagree with me, I think you, Ted, show great foresight in printing so many new names. While they may not write as well as Simak or Sturgeon, there is no reason why they can't someday.

Speaking of Simak and Sturgeon, will you ever be printing any of their stuff? In addition to Heinlein, they are my favorite writers.

JACK HARRIS
14 E. 28th
New York N. Y. 10016

Dear Mr. White,

The January issue of AMAZING was a *very* good issue. The only two features I didn't like were the Martin piece, which 1 found boring, even though it was only a short story, and the Malzberg story, which was out-and-out pornography. I do think that he could have written the same story and gotten over the same thing with the same effect without being so descriptive. The best features this issue were the other two short stories (endlessly fascinating both!), which could easily and very entertainingly developed into novelettes or even novellas, and of the rest of the magazine I only skipped over *The Clubhouse* and that only because I recently obtained a *complete* copy of "The Enchanted Duplicator" from The Insurgent Press. Although not as satisfying as either "Link" or "Close Your Eyes and Stare at Your Memories," the novel this issue was also noteworthy especially because it was penned by Gordon Eklund, not one of my favorite science fiction writers. In fact it's almost hard to believe that the same guy who wrote "The Ascending Aye" was also the author of "Beyond the Resurrection."

Speaking again of Malzberg, I ran across mention of two anthologies recently in *Locus,* each of which contained sf stories by a variety of authors and each of which contained only one story by each of its contributors except Malzberg. He had two stories in each one. the only such contributor to either book. And in each case one of the stories was signed "Barry Malzberg" and the other was signed "K. M. O'Donnell." *How,* 1 ask you, did he get away with it, twice? *[Barry?* - TW]

Nowhere in the January issue was there an announcement of what the next issue's going to contain or even the date it's supposed to go on sale. But I know it will *be* on sale sometime in February, and I know it will be good. Actually AMAZING now is *the* best sf magazine being published, followed by FANTASTIC and *Analog,* which are tied for second place. But I like *all* the sf magazines and buy them all regularly. It's a shame there aren't more and/or they aren't published more often. It would be nice if there were monthly issues of AMAZING STORIES, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, *Astounding Stories, Galaxy Magazine. If, The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Venture Science Fiction, Vertex. Planet Stories. Thrilling Wonder Stories,* and *Startling Stories,* all edited by competent and knowledgable editors with a love for sf and all containing a goodly number of pages of all-original features and stories. I know the trend in sf magazines is, sadly, in the opposite direction, but it would be great and have many extra advantages such as eliminating the competition between the magazines and the original anthologies. Damon Knight. Harlan Ellison, and the rest would all wind up as sf magazine editors! And that in itself would be great. Anyway I am and will continue to be an enthusiastic

booster of the sf magazines, especially yours and *Analog.* May they survive unharmed by the rising postal rates and all other menaces to magazine sf. And especially may AMAZING and FANTASTIC both continue as bimonthly magazines (at least). We need them.

Finally, for my own purposes I've been trying to come up with a list of the 50 all-time best science fiction writers period, and although I've done my best I've run into problems. I've come up with a list of 49. but I can't seem to decide who belongs in the fiftieth spot on the list. With the 49 I've included so far being Christopher Anvil, J. G. Ballard. Otto Binder, Jerome Bixby, James Blish, Ben Bova, Leigh Brackett, Edgar Rice Burroughs, John Campbell, Terry Carr, Hal Clement, Miriam Allen DeFord, Lester del Rey, Philip Dick, Gordon Dickson, Harlan Ellison, Alan Dean Foster, Hugo Gernsback, David Gerrold, Joe Green. H. Rider Haggard, Jack Haldeman, Edmond Hamilton, Robert Hoskins, Fred Hoyle, Daniel Keyes, Ursula LeGuin, Murray Leinster, Dick Lupoff, Judith Merril. A. Merritt, C. L. Moore, Phillip F. Nolan, Denny O'Neil, Alex Panshin, Cory Panshin, Joanna Russ, Eric Frank Russell, Arthur Sellings, Cordwainer Smith, E. E. Smith, Jack Vance, Jules Verne. Stanley G. Weinbaum, H. G. Wells, Kate Wilhelm, Jack Williamson, and Donald Wollheim, I seem to be leaving someone out. Who is it? Maybe you or one of your readers could supply me with the name of the elusive fiftieth writer. Then my list would be complete.

LESTER BOUTILLIER
2726 Castiglione Street
New Orleans, Louisiana

Anyone's list of "the 50 all-time best science fiction writers period" is going to be subjective. and open to argument. I'm sure yours will provoke considerable discussion and argument—I see at least a dozen names which I would not include in any list of mine, and I'm stunned at the absence of such giants as Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov, just to name three which come immediately to mind.—TW

Dear Mr. White,

Several months ago I read an article by Murray Leinster entitled "How to Write Science Fiction". In this article he stated that there is a large demand for material by science fiction magazines, but that the supply of *good* material is limited. Due to this lack of good science fiction material, Mr. Leinster has said that magazines are forced to accept rather poor or amateurish stories to fill their empty spaces: preferring poor science fiction to no science fiction at all. Therefore. Mr. Leinster is of the opinion that science fiction is one of the easier fields of literature for new writers to break into.

Since reading Mr. Leinster's article, I have been searching through the pages of various science fiction magazines trying to find examples of new authors with first sales that might support Mr. Leinster's belief.

In the past five issues of AMAZING and FANTASTIC (Sept. 72-Jan. 73) I have found three such examples. They are: "Life Boat" by Karl T. Pflock (AMAZING; Sept. 72), "Dark of Storm" by Vincent Perkins (FANTASTIC; Dec. 72), and "Close Your Eyes and Stare at Your Memories" by Tony Moran (AMAZING; Jan. 73).

I would appreciate your opinion on this subject Mr. White. Do you agree with Mr. Leinster's views?

DAVID MANKIN
202 LeGeros Drive
Brookings, S. Dak., 57006

If by that question, you're asking me if I regard those three stories as "poor science fiction," the answer is no. If you mean, do I agree that there isn't enough really good sf around. I would have to say yes. There is never enough of the best to go around. But whose definition of "good sf are we working with? "Lifeboat," to take one of the stories you mentioned, has drawn everything from total praise to expressions of complete disgust from our readers. You'll find a wide

variety of opinions expressed about the stories published in the January issue in our letter columns. Therein lies the editor's dilemma: it is impossible to publish a story which everyone *likes, much less a complete issue of such stories.*—TW

(Continued from page 121)

fashioned, as are meaningful, logical endings. Gene Wolfe's joke, "It's Very Clean," is better than most; it's about mechanical prostitutes, and a "real" one that gets mixed in with the "clean" ones, to the disgust of one of the clients when he discovers that she's real. "The Reaction" by Robert Toomey Jr. is a God-joke story, and about as dull as you can get. Even Piers Anthony's "Up Schist Creek" is an extended joke—it ends with the protagonist sitting on a toilet, clutching a wad of paper, and the words "WITHOUT A PADDLE." There is nothing in any of these joke stories—no imagination, no emotional impact, no real characters, and in some cases, not even a plot. They were not worth publishing.

Joseph E. Pumilia's "The Porter of Hell Gate" has faults that are common in most of the rest of this anthology's stories. "Hell Gate" is about an energy being that holds the "nexus points" between the various "continua" and prevents "electronic virus clouds or entropy pockets or even sentient malevolent creatures" from passing through. "Imagine him as a sort of caretaker," the author says, "an old and faithful servant, an unsmiling major domo . . ." As if this wasn't bad enough, the author then drags in one of the hoariest old superscience pulp cliches, a *female* energy being. There is, of course, a romance ("He imagined the sinuous intertwinings of her energy Field, the reefs of sentience and love, the flows and alterations . . ."). This is simply silly. The author is showing his lack of imagination—a trait common in 90% of the stories in *Generation.* I cannot understand why a writer will take an alien (or almost any other worthwhile sf idea), and destroy whatever interest we might have in it by turning it into something utterly commonplace and cliched. It isn't even logical, or self-consistent; energy beings (of any sort) will *not* have feelings, emotions, or motivations closely resembling our own, if only because they live in a vastly different environment, and thus encounter vastly different problems and ideas. A writer who honestly attempted to tackle these differences could produce an interesting story (as did Terry Carr, with *The Dance of the Changer and Three)-,* but Pumilia, like most of these writers, has not tackled his story honestly.

But there are a few good stories in this anthology. James Tiptree Jr.'s "Through A Lass Darkly," is, as you might expect, the best—although it is rather poor when compared with some of his other works. Both C. F. Hensel's "A Sense of Thyme," and Kathleen Sky's "One Ordinary Day, With Box," have some interesting touches, and exhibit a knowing, tender touch of humanity; but they suffer badly from the clichedness of their basic material. Hensel's story concerns the arrival of "Death" ("he pulled his sleek Rolls over to the curb") to the home of one old lady, and the basic point of the story is that it is better to have lived for a while and experienced the pains and pleasures of life, than to live forever and never experience them at all. (And how many times have we heard that before?) Sky's story is about a man with a magic box that will give a person only what he needs—what he truly *needs,* not just what he wants. The basic point of the story is that people rarely want what they truly need, and like Hensel's, this idea is very old and overfamiliar.

The Clarion Writer's Workshop, and all new, young sf writers, are worth supporting and encouraging, for no field can evolve and develop without the emergence of new talent; and for this reason. *Clarion II* and *Generation* are a good thing. But no honest critic could say that they contain great Fiction.

—Cy Chauvin

Editorial (continued from page 4)
lab."

IN WHITTIER, CALIFORNIA, state and local narcotics agents killed two hours in a local bar, boozing it up while they waited for warrants on the night of October 3, 1969. In the ensuing raid, no drugs were found and no arrests were made But Sgt. Frank Sweeny, carrying an AR-15 military rifle which he was not authorized to have, shot and killed Heyward Henry Dyer, 22, while he was holding his 22-month-old son. A coroner's jury held that Dyer died by criminal means, but the district attorney's office "declined" to prosecute, and Sweeny, among others, was later suspended without pay for a period. It was not until June of this year that a court awarded the Dyer family $900,-000 in damages.

THESE ARE MODERN DAY HORROR STORIES. What links them is a common contempt on the part of narcotics-division lawmen for the constitutionally guaranteed rights of citizens. In the case of the Giglottos and Askews—well publicized in recent weeks—there has actually been a continued sub-rosa harrassment of the innocent victims by local law-enforcement officials who apparently resent the appearance of the Giglottos before a Congressional committee and the attention the Collinsville raids have earned in the national press.

At a time when Presidential corruption is hogging the headlines, the rise in storm-trooper-like tactics among narcotics-lawmen has gone all but unnoticed by the populace. It should not.

These are not isolated incidents, nor are they occurring primarily in inner-city ghetto areas. Thus far at least four innocent citizens have been *killed* in mistakenly directed drug raids.

Each raid varies in individual detail, but most involve heavily armed agents, arriving at night, often unshaven and in slovenly "undercover" attire, bashing in the doors of private homes or apartments, holding the innocent residents at gunpoint while furniture is ripped apart and belongings destroyed.

Sometimes the agents have warrants and identify themselves. Sometimes they do not. Frequently the raiding party is rude, abusive and, as in Collinsville, obscenities are shouted at the terrified victims. Compensation or explanation has never been offered voluntarily.

In Los Angeles a veteran police officer has been quoted as saying that mistaken raids occur as often as several times a month. In Miami complaints of police harassment on drug searches are so common that Legal Services of Greater Miami can't handle the caseload, and a civil liberties lawyer has called the raids "a common practice."

Nixon, in one of his more demogogic moments, called drug addiction "public enemy No. 1," and has pushed on a national level for these raids. The motivation, in other words, comes from the top—and the ways and means of these raids bear a suspicious similarity to the methods employed by Nixon's own secret police apparatus, "The Plumbers," who routinely practiced illegal entry, burglary, impersonation, wiretapping, and forgery in their zeal to carry out their boss's wishes.

WHAT WE ARE WITNESSING in this country is a breakdown of traditional law and order. What is astonishing is that this is occurring under the leadership of an administration which made "Law and Order" its official motto.

How is genuine law and order destroyed?

The attack is two-pronged. On the one hand, those who are the leaders of this country have been systematically subverting the law and its guaranteed rights toward their own ends. The former Attorney General of the United States, "Mr. Law & Order" himself, has gone on public record (and national television) to admit that he placed the re-election of Richard M. Nixon above the law and was willing to lie, suborn perjury, and tolerate felonies to this end. It is also apparent that he was willing to cooperate with private individuals (Robert Vesco) and powerful corporations (ITT) to bend or break the law when it appeared to be to the advantage of the Nixon administration. Equally, the Nixon administration has packed the Supreme Court with mediocrities in order to reverse the tide of decisions in favor of the protection of civil liberties and to divert the public with a phony "war on smut," the latest outcome of which has been legal chaos and the local option to make First Amendment guarantees "inoperative."

On the other hand, public contempt for the fair and equal enforcement of the law (true "law and order") has been generated and fed. The president who announced at the outset of his first administration that his mission was to "Bring us together" has been instrumental in setting us against each other. Expediency has been the watchword, and laws have been set aside in the name of expediency with the results which I have reported earlier.

The war against drugs is a typical example.

Starting with one debatable axiom—that "narcotics" are "bad" for people and they must be protected from them at all costs—the government has armed and set in action bands of thugs whose methods are as illegal and as reprehensible as those of the drug-traffickers they are supposedly pursuing.

In no case have the authorities considered a) the underlying motivations of narcotics users or b) means of stemming the demand for drugs which has generated a multi-billion-dollar market in this country for hard narcotics. Although published reports, books, and newspaper articles have repeatedly underlined the fact that the government's war of drugs has *increased* the profitability of the drug traffic, the government has taken no action in acknowledgment of this point. Basic tactics are no different than in the early days of Harry Ainslinger. Corruption abounds on the local police levels; arresting officers often confiscate the bulk of the drugs they seize for immediate resale. Hordes of drugs (worth millions of dollars) have "disappeared" from police impoundment. The number of users has until recently been on the steady increase—and if their numbers are now leveling off (an uncertain point, as yet—the only statistics are for drug-related deaths, which are down in some areas) it may well be because word-of-mouth warnings of heavily adulterated narcotics (often cut with poisons) have now received wide circulation, and school children are no longer impressed with the machismo aspects of hard drug use.

Instead, the official war on drugs has been aimed at lower-level dealers and at stemming the flow of drugs from source to user. In some metropolitan areas methadone is being pushed. Methadone is more addictive than heroin. (And it might be noted that heroin was originally developed in Germany to deal with morphine addiction.) The methadone programs are highly dependant upon fickle governmental policies and funding. Should

the) be cut back for any reason, a captive population of addicts will be forced to go back to the illegal markets for drugs—and a thriving black market for methadone is already in existence.

NARCOTICS ADDICTS have serious problems, both psychological and physical. Their drug use is usually motivated by these problems and is not the cause of them. Heroin, in a maintainance dosage, can be used without impairing the health or productivity of an addict—exactly as methadone is. There is absolutely no reason why heroin itself could not be supplied by the government as easily as methadone is. It would undercut and badly cripple the illegal drug industry, which is presently enjoying enormous tax-free profits. It would be considerably cheaper than subsidizing the destruction of the Turkish opium crop (where, by the way, opiate-addiction is almost unknown) and maintaining a large force of "captive junkies" who act as low-level informers for the narcotics-lawmen now. It would eliminate a pervasive force for the corruption of local police departments.

It will not happen.

It will not happen because the government does not want it to happen, has a vested interest in keeping it from happening. It will not happen because thousands of government employees would be out of a job if it happened.

The average citizen is aware of this, if only unconsciously. If he is asked about it, his reply will be cynical: "There's a lot of money involved, you know."

THE MEN WHO LEAD this country are morally bankrupt, as is now being demonstrated on national television four days a week. Their concerns are not for the good of the country, but the maintainance of their hold over the power structure. They have blackmailed the major corporations of this country to support their election campaigns, and their public programs have been cosmetic, no more.

This has happened in other countries. The most obvious example is Germany, but Germany was unique only in that an Adolph Hitler was waiting in the wings, ready to take advantage of the situation.

Here is the scenerio:

The country is reeling under heavy, runaway inflation and monetary devaluation. Public morals—in response to the desperation the populace is feeling—loosen, causing wild swings of counter-reaction and repression. Specific problems—drugs, pornography—assume scare proportions.

The citizenry, anxious for relief in any form, seize upon an extremist leadership who promise decisive action against immediate problems. The response of the leadership is to suspend a variety of civil liberties "for the duration of the emergency." Those whose feet are being stepped on scream, but the leadership assures the country that these are unpatriotic, dissident voices and in fact a sure sign of the success of the programs.

The emergencies do not come to a quick end. Once in power, the leadership does not willingly relinquish its hold. Civil liberties continue to wither. The problems supposedly under attack do not appear noticeably improved.

As OF YET, we have not reached the point of no return. Congress passed the "no-knock" law in 1970 which denied the constitutional right of a man to inviolable privacy in his own home—with

the results quoted earlier. Nixon's war on "public enemy No. 1" has resulted in the seizure of a lot of narcotics, and a lot of misery 'for innocent bystanders, but it has in no way stemmed the "drug problem"—which is a "problem" largely because of the actions of the government in making these drugs illegal and their price exhorbitant. There are now squads of "agents" operating lawlessly in this country, but their escapades have been receiving increasing attention in the press.

We can assert ourselves. We can say No to the simplistic and extra-legal solutions pushed by the man without principles who currently sits in the president's chair.

If we do not, however, it *will* happen here.

x

—TED WHITE

The Stone That Never Came Down
(continued from page 111)

long, long time before it fell back. So Jack pretended the bird was a pebble, and of course it flew away. His stone never came down.

"Disgusted at being unable to defeat this weakling, the giant took Jack home for supper and challenged him to an eating contest. Jack poured all the porridge he was given down the bag he had hidden under his coat, and in trying to keep up with him the giant over-ate and died of a surfeit. So Jack inherited the giant's castle and—"

"Lived happily ever after!" Toussaint shouted, jumping off Cissy's knee.

"I hope so," Malcolm said. "A chance like this won't happen twice. Killing is easy. Living with is not."

Toussaint blinked and his mouth fell ajar.

"Never mind, son," Malcolm said, rumpling his black hair. "You'll catch on."

"You won't be able to *help* catching on," said Valentine.

—JOHN BRUNNER

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