



# GAMMA

50¢  
CN

VOL. 1. NO. 2. 1963

## **WILLIAM FAULKNER DOROTHY B. HUGHES**

**CHARLES BEAUMONT**

**ROBERT BLOCH**

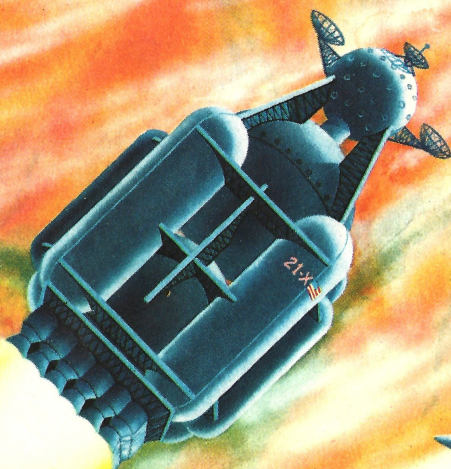
**RAY BRADBURY**

**JACK MATCHA**

**RICHARD MATHESON**

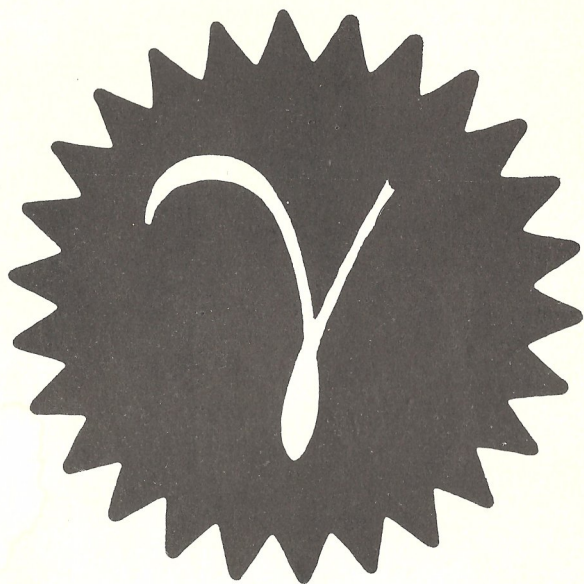
**ROBERT SHECKLEY**

**WILLIAM F. TEMPLE**



## **SHAKESPEARE**

Art Portfolio by  
**BURT SHONBERG**



# GAMMA 2

## *New Frontiers in Fiction*

### STORIES

The Granny Woman (novelette).....	3	Dorothy B. Hughes
The Old College Try.....	22	Robert Bloch
Michael.....	34	Francesca Marques
Deus Ex Machina.....	37	Richard Matheson
The Kid Learns.....	45	William Faulkner
King's Jester.....	50	Jack Matcha
Here's Sport Indeed!.....	58	William Shakespeare & Ib Melchior
The Undiscovered Country.....	70	William F. Temple
Castaway.....	89	Charles E. Fritch
Something in the Earth.....	98	Charles Beaumont
I'm Only Lonesome When I'm Lonely.....	108	William F. Nolan
Sombra y Sol.....	119	Ray Bradbury

### SPECIAL FEATURES

Portfolio (art).....	62	Burt Shonberg
The Gamma Interview.....	82	Robert Sheckley
A Note on Ernest Hemingway.....	118	The Editors

### COVER PAINTING

Cargo Rocket Passing Mars (second in a series).....	Morris Scott Dollens
--	----------------------

Editor/Publisher  
CHARLES E. FRITCH  
Executive Editor/Publisher  
JACK MATCHA  
Managing Editor  
WILLIAM F. NOLAN

GAMMA is published quarterly by Star Press Inc., with editorial offices at 10523 Burbank Blvd. North Hollywood, Calif. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright 1963 by Star Press, Inc. All rights reserved. Second-class mailing privileges applied for at the Post Office at North Hollywood, Calif. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the publisher assumes no responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.

## NOT REALLY AN EDITORIAL, BUT —

just a few words of appreciation for the gratifying response which met GAMMA 1 on its initial voyage into the world. Starting a magazine is rough, we've discovered, but keeping it alive is even rougher. There are printing problems, an unfortunate imbalance between editorial budgets and our desire to get the best stories, difficulties in distributing the magazine in the smaller but just as important cultural centers such as Horses Neck, Iowa — and many other not so obvious but equally frustrating items that came at us unexpectedly.

Despite that, here is GAMMA 2, which we feel is even better than GAMMA 1. As usual, the emphasis is on the off-beat and the imaginative. We've got the "original" Shakespeare, as promised, and a surprise, the Burt Shonberg art portfolio, as well as stories by the best people in the business. We hope you like it.

In a couple of months we'll have GAMMA 3 for you. We're going to try to make that one better than GAMMA 2. A couple of months after that, we'll have GAMMA 4, which we'll try to make better than GAMMA 3. And so on — until we run out of numbers.

You can count on us.

In future issues the GAMMA reader can expect to find such names as:

Theodore Sturgeon

Arthur C. Clarke

Chad Oliver

Fredric Brown

August Derleth

C. L. Moore

Miriam Allen deFord

Robert A. Heinlein

Walter M. Miller, Jr.

Anthony Boucher

Raymond E. Banks

Shirley Jackson

Ron Goulart

Stuart Palmer

as well as stories by the writers whose work you've already seen in GAMMA:

Ray Bradbury

Richard Matheson

A. E. van Vogt

Fritz Leiber

Dorothy B. Hughes

Robert Sheckley

Charles Beaumont

Ray Russell

Kris Neville

Robert Bloch

Rod Serling

William F. Temple

Since fantasy and mystery go hand in hand, most of the top-ranking mystery/detective writers have, at one time or another, turned to fantasy in their work. Raymond Chandler wrote weird stories like *The Bronze Door*; Dashiell Hammett edited *Creeps By Night*; Erle Stanley Gardner wrote of lost worlds for the early-day pulps; Cornell Woolrich has often dabbled in fictional voodoo. The list, happily enough, is endless. Therefore, it should surprise no one that the very able mystery practitioner, Dorothy B. Hughes (best known for her novels *Ride the Pink Horse* and *The Fallen Sparrow*, both of which made excellent motion pictures), has chosen to enter the fantasy field with this absorbing novelette of witchcraft and murder in the hill country. Miss Hughes, who recently took over the mystery review column for the *New York Herald Tribune*, has had more than a dozen novels published over the past three decades. She won a Mystery Writers of America "Edgar" in 1950, and has established a loyal readership over the years with her careful, challenging prose. *The Delicate Ape*, her startling novel of international intrigue in the near future (published in 1944) qualifies as science fiction — and she won a poetry award with her first book of verse back in the thirties. A native of Kansas City, now living in California, Dorothy Belle Hughes attended Columbia and the University of New Mexico and was active in newspaper work for several seasons in New York. She tells us that *The Granny Woman* is her own favorite among her shorter works — and we at GAMMA 2 predict that it will turn out to be a favorite of our readers as well. In any event, we're delighted to publish it.

## THE GRANNY WOMAN

*Dorothy B. Hughes*

They was waiting for him, the three of them, setting there on the stoop of Aunt Miney's cabin. I remember like it was yesterday. Old Cephus wasn't rightly on the stoop, he was on the gallery in Uncle Dauncy's rocking chair. He wa'nt

rocking. He was setting tall and upright as the silver-mounted Old Betsey he was holding aside him. Old Cephus must of been eighty year then, gaunt and gray as an old goose, but strong not weak in his age.

## THE GRANNY WOMAN

Orville was setting on the top of the stoop. He wasn't doing anything, just setting there chawing looking mean and sloppy and dirty like always. You'd find it hard to believe Orville was Old Cephus' son. There wa'nt nothing like in them.

Down on the low step was Toll, Cousin Tolliver Sorkin, another mean one, though he wa'nt no more than twenty year to Orville's fifty. Toll was whittling nothing like he'd do when he was waiting. Some men whittle something, a dog or a bird, or maybe a doll poppet, but Toll never whittled nothing .

I knowed the man wasn't coming friendly because none of them was fixed for company. They was wearing their working pants and shirts, dusty boots, and their old sweaty-stained hats. None of them appeared to be looking down the road but they was seeing without looking. They didn't know I was there, hiding up in the old crab-apple tree aslant of the house. I'd sneaked up in the tree afore they come out on the stoop. If'n they'd knowed, they'd of sent me packing. They wa'nt meaning no good to the man.

You could see him coming over the hill afore he was in sight. You could see him when he wa'nt no more than a twig of a man, down

there below. It could of been that Toll, when he took his maw and paw down to Middle Piney that morning, heerd about him coming. But I think they'd knowed it afore then, the way a body does know things in these hills. Knowing don't come from smoke signals like the Indians made when they lived here afore the war, leastways the Granny Woman used to claim she'd seed smoke signals when first she come to the Ozarks. Knowing is just knowing something afore you been told. It whispers out of the town and up into the hills some way or tuther.

I could hear everything the menfolks was saying, not that it was much. The man was big enough to reckonize as a man when Cephus asked for about the hundredth time, "Is he still a-coming?"

"He's a-coming all right," Orville grunted.

"Purty nigh here." Toll had that sly mouth on him, like he was itching for trouble.

"What-all's he coming up here for anyways?" Cephus complained.

"You know what for," Toll said.

"You best keep your mouth shet, Toll." When Orville had that real ugly look, it'd fair give you the shivers.

"Sure, Orville. You don't need to worry none about me."

Cephus' voice sounded again. "Where's he at now?"

"Cain't you see for yourself, Paw?"

"The sun gits in my eyes. How nigh is he?"

Toll said real quiet, "Not more'n six or seven paces."

I'd been watching my kin for a time, not the road, so I'd missed him approaching that night. Now I looked down at him, a nice clean-appearing man, older'n Toll, not so old as Orville. He was wearing jeans and a blue shirt too, but they wasn't all begaumed, the shirt had been clean afore he sweated it out clumbing up the hill. A woman can tell these things. He stopped there out in the road, keeping his distance until he was invited in, like was the custom. When he commenced talking, he talked somewhat like he was a native. Young as I was then, I figured out he was Ozark born but had been gone long enough to be a furriner.

"Howdy," he said.

None of the menfolks said anything for what seemed an awful long time. Finally Toll spoke up. "Howdy."

"Mighty hot day."

"Yeh." Toll took his time responding. "Hotter'n the cinders of hell." He gave a sidelong look at the stranger. "You come far?"

"From Middle Piney."

"A far piece," Toll allowed. "Mighty hot day to clumb all the way up here." Middle Piney was about seven mile uphill to Tall Piney.

"I found that out," the man said rueful-like.

Toll threw away his whittling stick. "Light down and set a spell," he said like he was natural neighborly. "You must be plumb tuckered out."

"Thanks." The man walked over towards the stoop. "Could I trouble you first for a drink of water?"

"Help yourself." Toll pointed with his knife. "Bucket's around yander."

I didn't dast move a muscle when the man walked under the tree to the water bucket. First he drunk a full dipper of water, then he took off his hat and poured a little water onto his head. I didn't blame him none. No place in the world hotter'n Missouri in August. He shook off the water and took another drink from the dipper afore going back to the stoop. He set hisself down at the far end of the second step. This way he could be looking at all three menfolks while he visited, and them at him.

Orville said, "You must of had some extry special purpose to clumb all the way up here today."

The stranger seemed to think

## THE GRANNY WOMAN

about it. Before he had a chanct to answer, Toll cut him off like as if he was suddenly reckanizing him.

"Ain't you the Perfessor been stopping down to Little Piney?"

You could tell by the Perfessor's face that he'd knowed all along the three of them knowed who he was. But he feigned he didn't know. He said, "That's right. I'm Professor James. From the University up at Columbia."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Perfessor." Toll put out his hand and shook the Perfessor's. If I hadn't seed how they was waiting for him, I'd of thought Toll was right friendly. "I'm Tolliver Sorkin, mostly known as Toll. This here's my cousin, Orville. That's old Cephus up there on the gallery. He's my cousin also." That's the way the kinship was. Toll wasn't a close cousin to us, he was removed.

The Perfessor reared up and shook hands with Orville. He stretched for to shake old Cephus' hand but Cephus wa'nt letting go of Old Betsey. That meant plain that the Perfessor was no friend so far as Cephus was concerned. Cephus wasn't no sly one like Toll nor a bully like Orville. He was straight out what he was.

"Pleased to meet you all," the Perfessor said, setting again.

Toll took up another stick to

whittle. He went on talking, reasonable, if you hadn't knowed he was up to something. "I thought I reckanized you. You're the ballut man."

"That's what folks call me down at Little Piney." Little Piney was ten mile downhill from Middle Piney. It was the County Seat.

"This is the second summer I've been around, looking for old ballads."

"We'n got no ballut singers at Tall Piney," Orville said, real hostile.

"Down at Little Piney I heard different."

"Like to hear anything down Little Piney." Orville spat through the railing slats.

Toll said, sort of cautious, "What might they been telling you down there?"

"They said if I was to go up to Tall Piney, I might get some real good ballads off the Granny Woman."

"Reckon you won't."

"Why not?"

Orville said it blunt. "She's dead."

"She's dead?" He was just pretending to be surprised. I knowed it and I'm sure the menfolks knowed it too. But they went on feigning they didn't.

"Deader'n a doornail," Toll said.

"Been dead nigh on to two



weeks now," Orville went on. "Kind of peculiar they wouldn't know bout that down to Little Piney. Who all you been visiting with there?"

"I've been stopping with the Preacher," the Perfessor said. "He didn't say he'd done any preaching over the Granny Woman."

"She didn't hold with preaching." Orville spat again.

And Toll asked, "Didn't the Reverint tell you that?"

When the Perfessor answered, it was almost like hearing preaching about her. It was like he'd been fond of her the same as I, although he hadn't ever knowed her. "He told me if anyone would know the old, old ballads, she would. He told me she was the oldest woman in the Pineys. She could remember coming by wagon from Virginny when she was a young maid, before the war. Folks say she might be a hundred years old."

Suddenly Cephus shouted out in his loud old voice, "She's dead!"

Orville acted like nobody had heerd his paw. "We give her a proper burial."

Toll elaborated, "We didn't have no preachment because she didn't hold with preaching, but we buried her proper."

"That her cabin up yonder?" the Perfessor asked, looking up to

where it stood on the tiptop of the hill.

"Now, how'd you know that?" Toll asked him.

"The Preacher told me she lived on top of Tall Piney. Is that hers?"

"It's hern," Orville admitted.

"Might be her ballad book is still there."

"There ain't no ballut books there," Orville said flatly.

"What did you do about her belongings?"

Toll was quick to defend himself just in case. "We didn't touch nothing of hern."

"There wa'nt no ballut book," Orville repeated ugly. "There never was none."

Toll of a sudden looked right up into the tree I was in. I was so still I twinged but even so I was scairt he might of seen me. Sometimes it 'pears he has eyes like a chicken hawk. He didn't say nothing, he just turned hissself round to the Perfessor.

"Orville's right, Perfessor." He snapped his knife shut and put it in his pocket. "Now, if it's a ballut you're hankering for, reckon I can give you one myself." He began to sing in that scrawny voice of his:

"There onct was a mountain girl,  
Bonnie Bluebell,  
She lived on Tall Piney or so

## THE GRANNY WOMAN

I've heerd tell,

She didn't know naught cause she'd never been taught,

Oh, hark to my story . . ."

I didn't let him finish his silly old song. I didn't care that I was discovered. I yelled at him, "You stop that, Tolliver," and I jumped down out of that tree and run over to him.

He grinned, singing up high like a woman, "Oh, hark to my story of Bonnie Bluebell."

He was twict as tall as I, and though he looked skinny enough for the wind to blow away, he was strong. I didn't care. I pounded on him. "You stop that right this minute. If'n you don't, I'll fix you so's you . . ."

He held me off. "You'll do what?" He begun louder:

"She run with the hounds and she run with the hare . . ."

All at onct I realized what I must appear like to the stranger man, my face and hands all gaumed from climbing the tree, and my feet even dirtier, and my old house dress ripped in the arms. I pushed Toll away and said dignified, "That ain't no ballut-song. You're just making that up."

Orville yelled at me, "Git home, Bluebell."

"You make him stop that fool singing."

"Git home." Orville got on his

feet and started down the step towards me.

I didn't move far, I just backed up a bit. "I come over to fetch Grampaw. When I seed you had company—"

"Git home and git the supper."

"Supper's ready." The stew pot had been on all afternoon and I'd mixed the johnnycake afore I sneaked over to see what they was up to.

"Dish it up," Orville said. "I'll fetch Paw. Git now."

From the look in his eyes I decided might be I'd better git afore he whaled at me. But I knew I wasn't going to have a chanct to warn the pefessor man about them unless I made sure right now that he'd be invited to sup. Orville was too mean and stingy to invite anyone in on his own. "You ast the stranger to supper, Paw?" I said real innocent like. I was still calling him Paw then.

He scowled at me but he had to make the invitation being as I'd brought it up. "You kin sup with us," he told the Pefessor.

"I'd appreciate that."

"I'm a-coming too, Bluebell," Toll said.

I'd knowed he'd invite hisself. "Won't your Maw and Paw feed you no more?" I put my head up high and walked away.

He hollered after me, "You

know dern well Maw and Paw are down to Middle Piney —”

I didn't linger to hear no more from him. Onct I was across the road I scatted down to our cabin. I wanted time to wash up and comb out the tangles of my hair and put on a fresh dress afore the Perfessor arrived. We didn't have company often. First I slammed the johnnycake into the oven and I opened a big jar of my best plum sass. I washed quick but I used soap and I went behind the curtain to pull off that old dress and put on my sprigged blue, the one I wore to wedding frolics and buryings. When Orville and Cephus come in, I was trying to get a comb through my hair, standing out in front of the looking glass I'd hung over the wash bench. The Perfessor wasn't with them.

For a moment I was anxious. "Ain't he a-coming?"

Orville said, "He's follering after us. He's washing up at Toll's." He went over to the wash bench and splattered a little bit of water on his hands. "City fellers are allus hankering after soap and water. I remember when I was in the War." He wasn't talking about the real War but about when they'd fit the Kaiser four years back. "Should think they'd have the skin clean washed off afore they're old

enough to spit."

"It don't seem to hurt them none," I told him.

Cephus had walked to the hearth to place Old Betsey up over the fireplace where he kept her. She was a beautiful long rifle with her silver mountings. He took better care of her than he did of himself. After he'd put her up, he set down in his rocking chair.

Orville went over to him, wiping dirt on the towel.

"What's he want to come up here for?" Cephus asked him.

"What's he want anyhow?"

"It ain't no ballut-book, Paw."

Cephus shook his head from side to side, trying to figger things. Finally he burst out, "The Granny Woman's dead. Ain't no call for him to come up here trying to rise the dead."

Orville said real calm, "Ain't no one's going to riz her up, Pappy. Not till the Last Judgment." He walked back with the towel and hung it on the drying rack. Like he didn't know that nobody but a pig would want to use it again until it was washed and biled. "Be careful what you say, Paw. Don't say nothing the Perfessor can carry tales about." He didn't pay no heed to what I was hearing. "One thing's for sartin, Paw. He was lying when he said he hadn't knowed the Granny

## THE GRANNY WOMAN

Woman was dead. He knowed it all right."

I wouldn't of thought Orville was that smart. He must of been doing a deal of thinking today. Or Toll had been filling his mind up with what for.

"How'd you figger that, Orvy?"

"Figger it yourself. When Toll was down to Middle Piney last week, he told that the Granny Woman was dead. What you tell in Middle Piney runs downhill to Little Piney afore you can blink an eye. And who gits the first word in Little Piney about deaths and so forth? The preacher man, that's who. The preacher man what the Perfessor's been a-visiting with. So he knowed."

Cephus ondded over it. "Reckon you're right, Orvy. What you aim to do about it?"

"We'll give him his vittles and after that —" He thumped his fist and rattled the table. "After that we'll see if he wants to go peaceful back down to Little Piney. If'n he don't . . ."

He didn't finish what he had to say because right then we heard Toll tittering to the Perfessor out on the path. My hair was combed out tolerably well. I was tying it back, with an old piece of blue ribbon the Granny Woman had give me, when Orville come over and put his hand on my arm.

"Don't you let me catch you talking to that there Perfessor man," he said.

"I won't."

"You keep your mouth shet, hear me?"

His hand squeezed until I couldn't help crying out. "You're hurting me!"

"I'll hurt you worse'n that if you don't keep your mouth shet."

The Perfessor and Toll was at the door by then so Orville let go of me. He went to table, set hisself down, and commenced dishing up his plate. "Fetch me some johnny-cake, Bluebell," he hollered at me.

My arm hurt worse'n it had been hit by a stick but I went right ahead tying my ribbon until I made a bow. Toll set down at the table with Orville and begun dishing his plate also. The Perfessor stood waiting.

Orville hollered again. "You hear me, fetch the johnnycake."

I opened the over door. "Some folks wait for the company to set before they commence eating."

It was Toll who took care of the inviting. "Come on, Perfessor, set down and dig in. Bluebell ain't the best cook in the Ozarks but there' allus a-plenty on Old Cephus' table. Come on, Cephus, you're gitting left."

The Perfessor waited to set until Cephus come to the table. He

must of seen by then that Ozark ladies don't eat with the gentlemen. He took the only chair left.

I dished up a big platter of johnnycake and I toted it right over to the Perfessor to make sure he got the best piece. Then I passed him the other dishes real polite, like I'd been larned by the Granny Woman. "Try this rabbit-meat stew, Perfessor. It's real fresh." It was, too. Cephus had skun the rabbit only this morning. "Some wild sallet?" The greens had stewed just long enough, not too long to be bitter. "Have some plum sass too, it goes good with johnnycake."

"Plum sass!" Toll exclaimed greedy-like. "You must of knowed there was company coming."

I ignored him, bringing the pitcher of milk and inquiring, "Can I help you to milk, Perfessor? Or maybe you'd prefer sweet milk?"

Orville grunted with his mouth full, "Leave the Perfessor eat his vittles, Bluebell. Stop urging him." He took another piece of johnnycake and pushed half of it into his mouth. He should have et with the pigs.

The Perfessor give me a big smile. He had the nicest smile you ever did see and he give it right at me, like I was a lady. He held up his glass. "This is just fine,

Bluebell. Everything's fine. I'll bet you are the best cook in the Ozarks."

I retired to the stove, sort of flustered. I knew Toll would be mocking me and the Perfessor later on but I just didn't care. It was worth it being treated like a lady for onct. There wasn't any talk while they was eating, Orville didn't hold with talk at table. But when he'd stuffed hisself to the busting point, he pushed back his chair and come right out with it.

"Seems a mite peculiar the preacher'd be sending you up here now the old woman's gone."

"Seems like he didn't know she was gone," the Perfessor said, filling up his pipe.

"Mighty peculiar he wouldn't know."

"Had she been ill?"

"No, sir!" Toll spoke up. "She was right as rain one day and the next she was dead." He dropped his voice. "Could have been that old screech owl what she heerd outside her door round about that time."

The Perfessor looked up, real interested. "It scared her?"

Toll peered over his shoulder. "Nobody's going to feel easy if he hears a screech owl on his doorstep. It's a sign of death for sure."

"At her age, a fright like that could cause a heart attack." The

## THE GRANNY WOMAN

Perfessor puffed on his pipe.

"Not the Granny Woman! She come out with her old sweeping broom and shooed that owl off in a hurry." Real quick Toll added, "I just happened to be passing by when she done it. Might be she give that old owl a heart attack." He snickered behind his hand.

"I'm sorry I came too late to meet her," the Perfessor said.

"Wouldn't of done you no good," Toll told him. "She couldn't of sung you no balluts. She was crazy as a wild mule."

I wanted to shout out that she was not, but I was afeared if I said anything Orville might tell me to git.

"She was crazy all right," Orville yawned out loud. "Reckon you'll want to be gitting back to Middle Piney. It's a far walk. Even going downhill."

"I don't think I'll go back to-night," the Perfessor said. "As long as I'm here I might as well have a look at her cabin."

Orville started to rise up but Toll had a hold of his arm. "Seems like you won't take our word there ain't no ballut books there," Toll said.

"I'd sort of like to look around for myself." The Perfessor got up from the table then, moving slow, like the menfolks was strange dogs what might spring at him if he

moved rapid. He wasn't no more than a step away when Toll was aside him.

"If'n I was you, I'd consider it real careful afore going inside her cabin. It mightn't be safe."

The Perfessor wasn't afeared. He looked straight at Toll. "Why not?"

Toll almost whispered it. "You might be witched."

This sure enough surprised the Perfessor. His mouth went open and he had to grab for his pipe. "You mean you think she was a witch?"

Cephus hadn't said a word up till then. Now he started sing-singing real loud, the way he used to do afore the Granny Woman died. Though we-uns was used to it, it always made me jump. It almost made the Perfessor jump out of his skin.

"She witched the cow out of her milk! She witched away my little girl, my little Rosebud! She witched my old hound dog! Howling into the woods he went and he never come back no more."

Orville said, "Now, Paw —"

"She won't lay no more spells on me and mine," Old Cephus declared. "She's dead. Dead and buried deep."

The Perfessor seemed sorry for Cephus. He turned away from him and he asked Toll, "Do you

honestly believe she was a witch?"

Toll nodded his head solemn and slow. "She was a real Granny Woman, Perfessor. Not the kind you hear tell of nowadays, the kind that births the babies. A *real Granny Woman*."

I was surprised that the Perfessor knew what Toll was talking about but he did. He said kind of to hisself, "The old kind. The witch."

I couldn't keep quiet no more. I cried out, "She wa'nt no witch!"

"She was witching you," Orville hollered back at me. "You just didn't know it."

Toll reached inside his shirt and hung out the carved hickory nut on a string which he always wore. "You see that?" he said to the Perfessor. "Onct when I was a little shaver, the Granny Woman tried to take aholt of me in the woods. I skun home so fast you couldn't see my dust and my maw tied this to me. So's that old witch would never put a spell on me."

"If she's dead," the Perfessor asked him, "why do you still wear it?"

Toll stuck it back under his shirt. "It don't do no harm," he muttered.

Old Cephus burst out loud again, "There ain't but one way to kill a witch! With a silver bullet!"

Orville come quick to him, help-

ing him up from the chair. "Now, Paw, no use gitting het up. She cain't witch you no more." He headed Cephus toward the hearth. "Git him his snuff stick, Bluebell."

When he had his snuff stick, Old Cephus would almost always quieten down. But this time he kept right speaking. "She was the purtiest girl in the Pineys. I promised her maw I'd care for her."

Toll said offside, "He gits to wandering some, Perfessor. He was mighty partial to Rosebud. She was his youngest. She run off to the city." He snickered, "He claims it was the Granny Woman witched her away but I don't see as how you can blame her for that."

The Perfessor picked up his hat from the bench. "I'm obliged for the supper." He looked at me and sort of made a bow. "I've never had a better one in the Ozarks, Miss Bluebell."

When he turned round to the door, Orville was in his way. "Where you going at?"

"Like I told you, I'm going to the Granny Woman's cabin. I've never been afraid of witches. And I'm not trespassing. I have permission from Deputy Clegg to visit it." He took a folded piece of paper out of his pocket and passed it to Orville.

Orville studied it when he passed

## THE GRANNY WOMAN

it to me. "Speak it out loud, Bluebell. You've had more book larning than we-uns."

I read it oral, like he told me. I had to go slow on the big words but I sounded them out like the teacher had larned me at the school house. "To whom it may concern: This gives permission for Professor Richard James to visit the Granny Woman's cabin at Tall Piney. Signed, Deputy Jim Clegg."

Orville and Toll never said no word. I reckon they was too overcome right then. The Perfessor took back the paper from me and said, "Goodnight, Miss Bluebell. Goodnight, Old Cephus. Goodnight, Orville and Toll."

With that he walked plumb out the door, Orville moving out of his way like in a daze. When he was gone, Orville sunk down in a chair. "Jim Clegg had no business writing them words on the paper. He'd no business letting a furriner rummage and root through the Granny Woman's belongings."

Old Cephus didn't appear to be listening but he heerd. He set his mouth tight. "You aim to let him do that, Orvy?"

Orville said, "No, Paw." He walked to the corner where he kept his rifle and he took it up.

Toll run over to him. "Look here, Orvy! Scaring him out is one thing but you got no call to take a gun

after him. We don't want no trouble with the law."

"If Jim Clegg wants to let a furriner snoop around our property, I reckon it'll be his fault if trouble comes of it."

"I ain't talking about Deppity Jim's law," Toll argufied. "I'm talking about city law, Orville. This here feller's a college perfessor from the University. If you was to harm him . . ."

"Leave me be, Toll. I know what I'm at." I'd never seen Orville so mean and determined.

"Wait a minute, Orvy." Toll hung on his arm. "We got to talk this over. He ain't going to run away. He's going to snoop through that there cabin first. But he ain't going to do no harm there."

Orville didn't put down his rifle but he did set hissself down again. "How do you know he ain't?"

"There's nothing there for him to find out. So ain't it best to let him do his snooping there? Instead of certain other places?"

Orville wasn't convinced. "That property's ourn now. He's got no call to set foot on our property."

I'd been working at the dishes while they was talking. I had to warn the Perfessor man that Orville was coming after him with a load of buckshot. But I didn't know how I was going to get away to do it. Old Cephus give



me my chanct. All at onct he reared up from his rocking chair and reached for his Old Betsey. His voice was like thunder. "It takes a silver bullet to kill a witch!"

Toll and Orville both hurried over to calm him. I took up the dish pan of water, just in case they should ask where I was going, and I skun on outside. I dumped the water and I run like a hare through the trees towards the special path to the cabin that only the Granny Woman and I ever used. The menfolk's knowed about it but they never set foot on it. They called it the Witch's Path.

I got to the edge of the clearing before the Perfessor did. I could hear him coming, strangers cain't move soft-footed through the brush like we'ns can. And I could smell his pipe. It was dark of the moon but I didn't want to step out into the open for fear Orville and Toll might already have set out. When the Perfessor was nearby, I whispered, "Perfessor man!"

He jumped like I was a bobcat. "Who is it?"

I stepped out where he could see me.

"What are you doing here?"

"I come to warn you. Orville's got his rifle. He means to stop you."

He sort of smiled. "I'm not afraid, Bluebell."

"But you got to be afraid!" I told him. "Orville won't let nobody up there. Not even me."

He said, meaning to be kind, "Then you better get back to the cabin before your Paw misses you. I wouldn't want any trouble to come to you from me."

"He ain't my Paw." I up and told him, like I'd never told nobody before. "He states he is but he ain't. My Paw was a Joplin man."

He seemed real surprised. "Then you're Rosebud's daughter."

"What if I am? It ain't true all them lies they tell about her. She didn't run off to the city. The Granny Woman helped her to git away. She saved up her yarb money to help her. Afore she died she was saving her yarb money for me to get away too."

"And so they killed her."

I couldn't explain it all to him then, there wasn't time. "She died natural. In her bed."

"Then what are they afraid of, Bluebell? Why don't they want me to go to her cabin?"

I told 'him part of the truth. "They promised Cephus. He's afeered of stirring her up. He's afeered she might come back."

"Is that it?" He puffed on his pipe and then he smiled at me again. "Well, I'm not afraid of ghosts or ghoulies or sorkinses.

## THE GRANNY WOMAN

You scat home now, Bluebell. I don't want you following me to the cabin, just in case trouble should develop."

He set off. The only way I could of stopped him was to run after him, and I was scairt they'd be missing me if I was away longer. I run all the way home. After I'd caught my breath, I picked up the dishpan and come back in.

"Where you been?" Orvy asked right away.

"I been out back," I said. I carried the pan over to where I kept it by the stove. Then I noticed that Toll was loading a rifle too. I rushed over to him. "What you doing with that gun, Tolliver Sor-kin?"

"Orvy and me aim to do a little hunting tonight."

I could scarce believe my ears. Instead of him talking Orville around, it was the other way.

"You're going to the Granny Woman's cabin!"

"It's nary of your business where we're going." Orville got up on his feet. "You stay put and tend to your knitting. And see to it that Grampaw don't foller us."

"You cain't shoot the Perfessor! He don't know nothing about what you done." I clamped my hand over my mouth but I'd said it.

Orville come advancing to me

and I backed up fast, nigh to Old Cephus by the fire.

"You been spying on us."

"No, I ain't. Swear to God, I ain't!"

"You swear to a lie, you'll burn in hellfire."

"I ain't swearing to no lie!"

Orville didn't stop for Grampaw being there. He grabbed my wrist and pulled me out to him. "You follered us to the grave."

"I didn't!" I screamed it because he was hurting me bad. "I swear —"

"Leave her be," Toll shouted over my screaming. "We're wasting time. You can take keer of her later."

Orville give me a shove as he let go. I fell down to the floor. He stumped out the door after Toll. Every bone in my body was bruised. When I leaned on my wrist trying to get up, it felt like it was broken though it wa'nt.

Cephus asked, "Where they going? Why don't they want me to go with them?"

I was mad enough to tell him, "They're going hunting."

"Whyn't they wait for me? I can outhunt both of them." He commenced to rise up from his chair.

"It's night times, Grampaw." I managed to push myself up from the floor, favoring my bad wrist. "You cain't hunt at night no more.

You don't see no good."

"I can see further than both of them together. Me and my old hound dog—" He remembered and sank back sorrowing. "My old hound dog. He never come back. She witched him away."

"She didn't have naught to do with it, Grampaw. It was Orville's meanness druv him away."

"It was her done it." He was starting to meander into the past again. "If'n I'd knowed she was a witch, she couldn't of witched me with her daughter like she done. When I first seen Amarylly, she didn't look like no witch's brat. She had yellowy hair and rosebud in her cheeks. Rosebud! That's the name she give our own little one." He come back from his meandering. "She witched Rosebud away from me."

"My maw." I don't know why I said it to him then, I never had before.

"Who's been telling you sech things?"

"The Granny Woman told me."

"What else did she tell you?"

"Nothing wrong. She said you was the strongest man in the Pineys onct. You stood so straight and tall, there wa'n't a man could match up to you."

He recollected, "I was felling a big old pine tree when she and her child come on me. They was

gathering yarbs."

"After her child was dead, you took Rosebud away from the Granny Woman."

"I wa'n't going to let my little Rosebud grow up a witch's child. My old woman never knowed why I took the little one." Without any warning, he stood up, roaring mad. He towered over me. "What else did she tell you? How to dry up the old cow? How to sour the milk?"

"No!" I tried to inch away. I'd never seed him like this before.

"Did she tell you how to witch-ride a man all night through the brambles? Did she tell you how to set a pure young gal to lally-gagging in the woods? Did she tell you how she witched Rosebud into running away from her own Paw? Did she tell you how to drive a man's faithful old hound howling into the night?"

I kept saying No and No and inching but I couldn't get clear to make it to the door. When he reached to take down Old Betsey, I tried to stop him. But he brushed me aside, not mean like Orville, just like I was nothing, a pine branch in his path.

"She didn't know I was a witch-killer like my pappy afore me. She didn't know he larned me to kill witches same as him. You got to have a silver gun and a silver bul-

## THE GRANNY WOMAN

let to kill a witch.”

“No, Grampaw, no!” I screamed it at him. He had that rifle pointed right to my heart. Somehow he’d made hisself believe she’d passed her witching on to me, that I was a witch child. And then I remembered. “You got no silver bullet,” I hollered. “You used it on the Granny Woman.”

Slowly he lowered the rifle. The spirit went out of him. “It takes a long time to git enough silver to make a bullet.”

“Set down, Grampaw,” I said to him kindly. “I swear she didn’t larn me no witching. She was good to me.”

He stood there holding fast to the long rifle. “Nigh on to fifteen years it took me to git enough silver. Pure silver it’s got to be.”

I freshened up his snuff stick and held it out to him. “Just rest yourself, Grampaw. Rock a bit.”

Instead of setting down, he started to the door. I run after him. “No, Grampaw. Orvy don’t want you to foller him. It’s dark of the moon.” You see, I knowed his intent. He was going after his siver bullet.

He paid me no heed. He kept right on walking. I didn’t hardly wait until he was out of sight. I tore out of there and over to the Witch’s Path. The only chanct I had was to get the Perfessor to

protect me. I knew what Old Cephus meant to do. And Orville and Toll wouldn’t stop him if’n they could. They’d be a-feared he was right.

I didn’t reckon Orville and Toll would be at the Granny Woman’s cabin yet. First they’d have gone down to the stump, where their mountain dew was hid out, to get some courage in them. They was shy of her cabin even in daylight.

I run like I never run before and when I come to the cabin I didn’t knock on the door, I busted right in. The Perfessor man looked up real surprised to see me. He’d lit her table lamp and he was rummaging through her old horse-hair trunk. He’d already took out the face fan she’d carried back in Virginny when she was a girl. And the silk and satin baby bonnet, so tiny you wouldn’t think it would fit poppet, but it had been my maw’s. He was holding her papers, the ones she kept tied with a blue ribbon, when I busted in.

He said, “I told you not to come here, Bluebell.”

“I had to. Old Cephus is out git-ting him a silver bullet to kill me with.”

“To kill you?” His eyes most popped out of his head. “Why would he want to kill you?”

“Because . . .” I didn’t want to tell him. “Because he thinks she

made me into a witch.”

Just then I heerd someone outside the door and I run over and crouched down behind the Perfessor. Maybe I was daft thinking he could protect me without no gun nor nothing, but I did think so. I reckon it was because he wa'nt afraid. He didn't even put down the papers.

I closed my eyes when the door started to open. And I heerd him say, “Come in, Jim.” So I opened up my eyes and there was Deputy Jim Clegg closing the door.

Deputy Jim said, “Looks like you got you some company, Rick.” Deputy Jim was as big as Orville but he wa'nt nothing like him otherwise. He was clean and strong and I never in my life seed him do a mean thing to man or beast. He was born and raised right here in the Ozarks but he'd gone to school up at Columbia and knowed how to talk good. He said to me, “What you doing here, Bluebell?”

I told him, “Orville and Toll are hunting the Perfessor man and Old Cephus is hunting me. He's got in his mind that the Granny Woman made a witch of me.”

“So he's going to kill you like he killed the Granny Woman?”

The Perfessor spoke up. “Bluebell says she died natural, in her bed.”

Deputy Jim said, “A witch killer doesn't have to kill you to make you die, Rick.”

Because he understood, I told him, “Orvy stuck the pins in the dishrag and burnt it. Toll trapped the screech owl to set outside her door. Old Cephus moulded the silver bullet and feathered it into the tree. And she died.”

The Perfessor looked across at Deputy Jim. Deputy Jim put his hand in his pocket and brought out what looked like a ball of silver. He said, “I found the silver bullet. In the tree, not in her heart.”

“You don't have to put the bullet in a witch's heart,” I told them. “You can peel the bark off the tree and sketch her shape there. Then you can feather the bullet into her on the tree.”

Deputy Jim put the bullet back into his pocket. “Thanks to you keeping them busy, Rick, we found the grave, down by Piney Run. And we didn't have any interruptions at the exhumation. Doc's taking her down to Little Piney for an autopsy but it looks like she died what you'd call natural. So I was wrong. I'm going down to their cabin now. Want to come?”

I didn't know much what he was talking about but I knowed I didn't want to go back to the

## THE GRANNY WOMAN

cabin again. Not even with Deputy Jim and the Perffessor for protection. I was readying to say so when we heard Orville roaring outside, "Come out of there Perffessor. If'n you don't . . ." He shot off his gun for a warning.

Deputy Jim walked over and swung open the door wide. When Orville and Toll saw who it was, they let their rifles down. Deputy Jim asked them, "Could it be you're hunting witches?"

Orville said, "We come to protect our property."

"It's not your property," Deputy Jim said. "It's Bluebell's. By direct descent from the Granny Woman." He shook his head and sighed. "Seems like there ought to be something I could arrest you for, Orvy, but blamed if I know what it could be this time. You might better watch your Paw closer, however, before he gets in some trouble I might have to arrest him for."

You mightn't think Orville set store by anything, but he did by his Paw. "I will," he vowed. Then he noticed me and he hollered, "Where is Paw? You was supposed to be caring for him, Bluebell."

"I couldn't hold him," I said. "He took old Betsey and he—"

They didn't wait for me to finish. Orville and Toll both set out running down the hill, hollering,

"Paw" and "Old Cephus."

Deputy Jim said, "Come on."

I hung back until the Perffessor took me by the hand. "You needn't be afraid, Bluebell. Jim and I will take care of you."

By my path we got to the cabin almost as soon as Orville and Toll. Old Cephus was already back inside. He was tearing up the almanac and scattering the writing around on the floor. He already had the feathers spread around in the fireplace and under the windows and on the doorsill. When he saw us all standing there, he thundered, "She's riz up! There ain't no time to make a fire ring, we got to git her shet out of here afore she comes trying to sneak in. Help me, Orvy." He pushed the book into Orville's hands. "Git the dishrag, Tolliver, and stick them pins in it for the burning. They's up on Bluebell's shelf in the matchbox."

"Them pins been burnt onct, Cephus," Toll said. "The time the dog run off."

"They's all we have, we'll have to make use of them again."

Toll was about to do like Cephus said when Deputy Jim spoke up. "By the time that old witch picks up all these feathers and reads all that writing, it'll be cockcrow and she can't do you no harm tonight, Cephus." He dipped his hand in his pocket like he had afore and

brought out the silver bullet on his palm.

Cephus picked it out of his hand, looked at the markings and he shook his head like he couldn't believe it. "No wonder she riz up," he whispered. "The silver bullet come out of her heart." He set down heavy in the rocking chair. "I'm too old. I've lost my powers to kill witches."

Deputy Jim said, "You feather it back into the tree tomorrow, Old Cephus. Maybe it'll go deep enough this time." He turned round to me. "Get your things together, Bluebell."

"What for?" Toll spoke up though it wasn't his business.

"She's coming down to Little Piney with us," Deputy Jim told him. "I'll find a place for her to board and maybe fix it up for her to go back to school. It's better she stays off of Tall Piney for a time."

Orville asked, "And who's going to cook for me and Paw while she's gone away?"

"If you weren't so mean, Orvy," Deputy Jim answered him, "you could find a wife to cook for you."

That was how it come about I went down to Little Piney for my education, not that it took on me much. I didn't go back to Tall Piney until after Toll and me was married. Onct Toll got away from Orville's influence, he stopped being so mean. Fact is, Orville wasn't so dirty and mean hisself after the Widder Claggett married up with him. She wouldn't put up with a pig in her cabin.

Old Cephus was dead by then, peaceful. He fell asleep in his rocking chair one afternoon and never woke up. The Perfessor bought his Old Betsey off'n Orville and give it to the Historical Society. You can see it up at their museum.

The Granny Woman was buried again, this time on the hill nearby her cabin, where Toll and me live. The Perfessor put up a headstone for her: Mary Virginia Piper, born in Roanoke, Virginia, 1823; died on Tall Piney, Missouri, 1924.

The silver bullet is still in the tree by Piney Run where Old Cephus feathered it twict. Nobody in the Pineys would dast prize it out.



When Alfred Hitchcock brought Robert Bloch's blood-freezing *Psycho* to the screen a few seasons back the public reaction was fabulous. The film became one of the biggest money-makers in cinema history—and Bloch, the versatile veteran who had been rapping out stories since January of 1935 (when his first pro effort was published in *Weird Tales*) suddenly found that he was “an overnight success.” In 1960 he moved from Weyauwega, Wisconsin to Hollywood, where he has become an extremely busy scripter for most of the leading TV shows (and for various film studios). Bob has always been a clever, prolific purveyor of fantasy, suspense and of sf yarns which now total, “something over 500.” Add to this seven mystery novels and 39 radio scripts (for his own show, *Stay Tuned for Terror*) and one begins to get the overall picture. Bloch won a “Hugo” at the World Science Fiction Convention for one of his stories — but his most famous short remains the oft-anthologized chiller *Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper*. As a youth, Bob dreamed of becoming a vaudeville comic, and his special gift for verbal comedy has won him a place (alongside Anthony Boucher and Forrest Ackerman) as “most in demand” for toastmaster at regional and world sf conventions. A fanatic student of the silent film era, Bloch can regale you by the hour with anecdotes from Hollywood's Yesterday — and he seems to know, by heart, the cast of every silent ever produced. For years, Bob earned his bread-and-circus money in an advertising agency, but quit to full-time it at the typewriter in 1954. As a dedicated fan of H. P. Lovecraft, Bob imitated the style of the master for many years — then began creating his own unique brand of terror. For *GAMMA 2*, he introduces the Yorl, a race of aliens who seem to favor fun and games — so long as the rules they play by are definitely their own.

## THE OLD COLLEGE TRY

*Robert Bloch*

Administrator Raymond's head was a hive of hornets. He could feel them buzzing in his brain, and before opening his eyes he held out his hand.

The Yorl, who had probably been crouching at his bedside for the past hour, thrust a glass of Aspergin into his shaking fingers. Administrator Raymond gulped



it down, and gradually his fingers ceased twitching. The buzzing died away inside his skull and he was able to open his eyes.

The blue-skinned little Yorl smiled at him and said, "Goo morning, Minstrata," then bowed as he offered Raymond his undergarments.

Raymond wondered just how much longer the Yorl would continue to bow if he knew that this was the last day. The new Administrator was arriving, and soon Raymond would go home — back to Vega and civilization. It would be good to see a normal world again — a world where grass was an honest pink and the birds snarled sweetly all the day.

Yet he rather regretted leaving Yorla. He even regretted leaving the Yorls. After five years on Yorla, Administrator Raymond was oddly fond of them.

Puffing a trifle, Raymond struggled into his uniform.

"Ship has land!" Another Yorl came scuttling in, as usual, without bothering to knock. He grinned up at Raymond. "Bringa pinky."

"Pinky". That's what the Yorls called humans. He must be referring to the new Administrator.

"You go back, tell him I'll be right down," Raymond instructed. The Yorl messenger withdrew, and the other Yorl gave Raymond a

shave, a shoeshine, and another glass of Aspergin, in that order.

Then Raymond waddled downstairs to greet the new Administrator.

He found him standing on his hands in the center of the floor.

"Greetings," he called, from his upside-down position. "You must be Raymond, eh? I'm Philip."

"Pleased to meet you," Raymond said, wondering if he ought to advance and shake Philip by the foot.

"Excuse the informality," Philip said. "Just trying to get back a little circulation. Long trip, and the decompression effect is a bother."

Raymond nodded, staring at the newcomer. Philip upside-down or Philip horizontal was still a remarkably handsome young man with a superabundance of muscles. His smile radiated enthusiastic vitality.

Philip bounded to his feet, healthily flushed, and held out his hand to Raymond. His grip was as hearty as his voice.

"Good to see you," he said. "By the way, Captain Rand sends regrets. There was a slight mishap when we landed — something went wrong with the auxiliary grav-mech. I don't understand the technical side, but I'm afraid he and the crew are in for about a week

## THE OLD COLLEGE TRY

of repairs here before they can take off on a return flight."

"A week?"

Philip shrugged. "I know how you feel," he said. "But speaking selfishly, I'm glad of the delay. In a week you can brief me on this post."

Raymond turned and beckoned to his waiting Yorl. "Two Aspergins, hup-hup!"

As the Yorl nodded and backed out of the room, Philip shook his head. "Nothing for me, thanks. Never touch the stuff."

"Better learn," Raymond advised. "This is a fever-planet."

"I'll manage," Philip said, confidently. "They gave me all the new shots before I left. Besides, I've never been sick a day in my life." He paused, waiting until the Yorl had disappeared, then lowered his voice. "Odd creatures, aren't they?"

"You get used to them," Raymond said. "They make wonderful servants. There's a post staff here of twenty — they'll bathe you, dress you, brush your teeth for you if you like. And they actually enjoy working for a pinky. That's what they call us, you know. It's easier than slaving in the mines. You'll find them faithful and loyal if you treat them decently. Once you get used to the blue skins and the language, and accept their

customs —"

Philip sat down, cracking his knuckles. "Their customs," he said. "Do you know how they met me when the ship landed? They came running out waving their spears. And on the tip of each spear was a head."

"They meant to do you honor," Raymond explained. "I told them a new Administrator would be arriving. So they got up a group to welcome you and brought out their trophies for display."

"Trophies? You mean they're actually head-hunters?"

"Of course not. They prize heads, and preserve them, but they don't go around killing one another just to collect more."

"Then where do the heads come from?"

"Well, as you know, most of the Yorl work in our mines. The labor is hard and they don't particularly enjoy it, but they like our trade-goods. So much so that when the Yorl chiefs made their agreements with Interplan, they set up a quota. Every Yorl who signs up for mining is obliged to produce a set amount of ore. If a Yorl fails to meet his quota, if he's caught shirking — his companions merely chop off his head."

"I should think something would be done about policing them."

"Meaning I should have done

something as Administrator?"

Philip flushed but made no effort to deny the words.

Raymond sighed. "Maybe I felt the same way when I arrived here, five years ago. Since then I've learned a lot. They have their own laws. Remember, Interplan sent us here to administrate. It is not our duty to superimpose our own concepts or customs on this planet. Besides, the system works. We want what the mines produce. The Yorls see that we get it. They eliminate their own slackers and misfits, weed out their own criminals."

"But it's not right! In the name of common humanity —"

Raymond sighed again. "The Yorls are not humans. They are *humanoid*. That's the one thing you must never forget."

A Yorl bowed his way into the room.

"Affanoon, Ministrata," he said.

Philip glanced at Raymond, who nodded briefly. "That's right, it is afternoon. You're going to have to accustom yourself to the shorter days here." He turned and confronted the Yorl. "What is it?"

"You come long *torga*, this night, we hold *koodoo*, your honna."

"He's inviting us down to the village here for a party," Raymond explained.

"You come long?"

"We'll be there."

"Yaya!" The Yorl grinned happily. "Much fun!"

It may have been much fun according to Yorl standards, and it may have been much fun for Raymond, but Philip didn't enjoy the *koodoo* a bit.

He sat there on the dias, sweltering in the heat of the warm night, and watched the dancers with a strained smile on his face. The pounding of the drums made his head ache. Then there had been the banquet, and the nauseous concoctions he had to pretend to sample. Raymond didn't seem to mind — but then, he kept washing down his food with Aspergin.

Philip didn't like the setup at all. They *were* savages, and no amount of talking would change the fact. Dancing in a huge circle of spears set up in the sand—with each spear surmounted by the preserved and grinning head of a Yorl, the grins on the faces of the living dancers seemed even worse.

Now the dancers had separated into two groups; male and female. They formed two lines, facing one another, and the drums beat in a quickening tempo. The lines advanced, converged, and then the drums went frantic. And now the dance was no longer a dance. It was a mass orgy. Why, they were actually —

## THE OLD COLLEGE TRY

"Raymond!" Philip whispered. "Look! Aren't you going to stop them?"

"I told you they have their own customs. This is being done in our honor."

"Disgusting!" Philip rose abruptly.

"Natural." Raymond blinked. "Where are you going?"

"Back to my quarters. I'm afraid I'm not up to this sort of thing."

He moved away. The older man didn't catch up to him until they reached the Administration Building.

"Come back," Raymond wheezed. "You can't do this. You're insulting them by walking out."

"Insulting them? What did you expect me to do, get down there and wallow with them?"

"You're angry? Now look, son, let me explain a few things to you about —"

"Never mind. I've heard some of your explanations. And I'm afraid the Company reports are right. Interplan gave me specific orders to come out here and clean up the situation —"

"Situation? What situation?"

Philip hesitated, then took a deep breath. "I'm sorry I mentioned it, but perhaps it's better that you know just where you stand. They know about you, Raymond. They know how you've been

running this operation, and they don't approve of it any more than I do. Lording it over the natives like one of those colonial governors in prehistoric days back on Earth.

"In five years you've made no attempt to educate them, no attempt to institute reforms, no attempt to provide them with decent government, decent standards of living. Instead of setting an example for them, you've merely sunk to their level."

"Now wait a minute —"

"I'm *not* waiting a minute! Starting tomorrow, I'll take over. Officially. You'll stay here until Captain Rand completes his work on the ship, but from now on I'm in charge."

"It isn't that simple. I know the Yorls, I understand them. You can't change them overnight." Raymond blinked at him with his reddened eyes. "They're entitled to their own way of life, their liberty."

"Liberty isn't license."

"You don't understand."

"Oh, yes I do, only too well. Administration and Aspergin don't mix. I advise you to go to bed and sleep it off."

Philip turned on his heel and marched down the corridor to his room.

He wasn't worried. He'd told off Raymond, and now he'd get to

work on the Yorls. Tomorrow was the time to start. And the first and most important thing to do was to put an end to the headchopping. No more heads on pikes.

Tomorrow, then.

Raymond was somewhat agreeably surprised to see Philip join him at the breakfast table. He was even more surprised to note that the young man appeared in a conciliatory mood.

"I don't want you to misunderstand me," Philip told him. "I know as well as you do that there is no sense in trying to run roughshod over the feelings of the natives. The answer lies in the psychological approach. It's all a matter of channelizing their aggressions."

"Huh?" Raymond blinked.

"You tell me the Yorl only take heads of slackers, wrong-doers, inefficient workers. So I infer that they're always on the lookout for someone who breaks the rules."

"That's right. Every Yorl keeps a close watch on the activities of his fellow-workers. It's a sort of wholesale espionage system, you might say."

"In other words, they compete with one another to detect possible victims."

"You might say that."

Philip nodded. "Now, if I can provide harmless substitute out-

lets for their competitive instincts, I'll soon have them functioning normally."

"How?" Raymond murmured.

Philip smiled again. "Wait and see," he said.

Raymond waited, and three days later, he saw.

To be specific, it was three evenings later when Philip came to his office and invited him down to the *torga*. It was unusually hot, and Raymond chose to be transported in a litter, borne by four Yorls.

He couldn't imagine where the younger man got his energy from, but there he was, hopping around like one possessed, making last-minute arrangements in the big clearing before the huts. He kept jumping in and out of the ring—

*Ring.*

"Wait a minute," Raymond murmured. "Don't tell me you're planning a *boxing* match?"

"Exactly!" Philip beamed happily. "I've conferred with the villagers here and they seem quite excited. They donated their services to put up the ring, and I've had the females weaving gloves out of *ritan*. There were no end of volunteers for contestants, after I explained the procedure. I've coached the two we finally selected, and I think they'll put on a great show. See, they're assem-

## THE OLD COLLEGE TRY

bling right now.”

And they were. The blue-skinned little humanoids had gathered on all four sides of the improvised ring, squatting on the ground and staring up expectantly as the Yorl fighters made their way to their respective corners. Philip, clad in a sweat-shirt and shorts, climbed through the strands of the *porga* serving as ropes. He was obviously serving as referee, and a whistle dangled from a cord around his neck. He conferred briefly with each of the contestants, and the little blue boxers nodded and grinned up at him in turn.

Then there was a roll of drums and Philip came forward to the center of the ring, lifting his hands for silence. He spoke very briefly about the rules of the coming contest, and the virtues of the manly art of self-defense. This, he declared, would be a clean fight, demonstrating the finest principles of sportsmanship. And now, at the drum-signal —

It came.

Philip stepped back.

The Yorls rushed out from their respective corners.

The crowd yelled.

The Yorls exchanged expert blows.

The crowd screamed.

The taller Yorl hit his opponent below the belt.

Philip stepped forward hastily.

The smaller Yorl brought his knee up and kicked the other fighter in the chin.

Philip blew his whistle.

The Yorls paid no attention. Perhaps they couldn't even hear the whistle above the shrieks of the audience. At any rate, they went into a clinch. Both of them were kicking at one another's groins. They had shed their gloves.

Philip waved, frantically, then tried to separate them. The Yorls put their heads down and kicked harder. Then, suddenly, they were rolling around on the floor of the ring. The smaller Yorl ended up on top of his opponent. He got his hands around the windwipe and squeezed.

“Stop!” Philip shouted. “You're killing him!”

The little Yorl on top nodded, grinning happily. He released one hand, then dug his fingers into his victim's eyes.

And then Raymond climbed into the ring. He helped Philip pull the Yorl off the prostrate body of his opponent, and he said something to quiet the crowd and disperse them.

Afterwards he walked Philip back to Administration in the darkness.

“But I don't understand,” Philip kept saying, “I don't understand!”

I offered them a logical outlet for sublimation —”

“Maybe they don’t *want* to sublimate,” Raymond said. “Maybe they can’t.”

“But the principles of psychology —”

“—apply to human beings,” Raymond finished for him. “Not necessarily to Yorls.”

“I’m not licked yet,” Philip declared. “I know the idea is sound. Sport is the best substitute for actual combat. It always works.”

They entered the office. Raymond turned to him. “Can’t you realize the Yorls don’t believe in substitutes? Why should they, when they can have the real thing?”

“The *real* thing,” Philip murmured. “Of course! That’s the answer! Nobody accepts a substitute when the real thing is available. But if the real thing is not available any longer, then perhaps they will learn to cooperate.”

“If you’ve got any wild ideas,” said Raymond, “I advise you to forget them.”

Philip shook his head. “No wild ideas. Just common sense. You did me a great favor tonight, Raymond. I won’t forget it.”

He turned and headed for his room. Raymond headed for the Aspergin.

It was almost two hours later

when Raymond finally sought his own bed. He was pleasantly tired, pleasantly tipsy, and pleasantly unaware of the faint glow and the faint cries from outside his window.

Not until the Yorl came running in did he open his eyes and sit up.

“What’s the matter?” he muttered.

“You come,” the Yorl panted. “Come to *torga*, fast!”

“Why?”

The Yorl’s blue-veined eyeballs rolled. “Otha Ministrata there. He burn heads!”

“Damn!” Raymond rose, thrusting out his feet as the Yorl brought his shoes. He fumbled in the rear of a drawer, looking for the needle he never carried. It felt cold and heavy in his hand as he followed the Yorl down the path, running in the direction of the *torga*.

The faint glow had flared into flame now, and the cries rose to a chattering crescendo as Raymond entered the clearing.

The Yorl had told the truth.

Philip had waited until the village was quiet, then crept from hut to hut. He’d gathered the spears, harvested the heads, heaped them like ripe melons in a central pile at the end of the clearing, and ignited them. They were blazing furiously now — but not half as furiously as the Yorls them-

## THE OLD COLLEGE TRY

selves.

Philip stood before the fire, needler in hand, facing them defiantly. The Yorls confronted him in a body, screeching and howling, waving their spears. And they were edging forward—

“Get back!” Philip shouted. “I’m not going to harm you! This is for your own good, don’t you see? It is wrong to take heads. It is wrong to kill.”

Raymond made out the words vaguely through the tumult. He doubted if the Yorls could hear or understand, and even if they did, it meant nothing to them. Because they kept inching forward, closer and closer . . .

A spear whizzed past Philip’s head.

He didn’t run. He faced the Yorl who had hurled the spear; faced the weaponless little blue humanoid and pressed the tip of his needler.

There was a faint crackling sound and the silvery flash of the energy-arc. The Yorl fell, shriveling and blackening before he hit the ground.

A great sigh arose from the crowd, and then a hundred arms were raised, a hundred spears went back.

And halted.

Halted, as the pyre of heads hissed suddenly, then disappeared

in a black billow.

Raymond had tossed water on the fire.

Everyone turned as he stepped forward and grasped Philip by the arm. They watched as he took the needler from Philip’s hand and hurled it into the center of the dying blaze. They watched as he tossed his own weapon on the ground.

Raymond raised his arms over his head.

“I am truly sorry,” he murmured. “A wrong has been done, but it shall never be repeated. We ask to go in peace.”

Silently, he led Philip away into the darkness.

It was already afternoon of the following day when Philip reentered the office. Raymond looked up expectantly.

“Started your packing?” he asked, casually.

“I’m not quitting. Why should I?”

“You mortally offended the Yorls. You violated the great taboo. You killed one of their leaders.”

Philip shook his head again. “It was self-defense,” he said. “As for what I did, it was right.”

“According to your standards, yes. But the Yorls—”

“Look at him!”

Philip levelled his finger at the



corner. A Yorl servant crouched there, his blue face ashen, his eyes bulging in terror as Philip stared at him.

Philip smiled. "Don't you see? He's afraid of me now. They all are, after last night. I didn't realize it at the time, but I'd done the one thing necessary. By putting an end to this head fetishism, by destroying their trophies, I proved that a human is stronger than their whole barbaric culture."

"But they hate you now —"

"Nonsense! They hated me last night, and I'm quite sure that after we left they got together and prayed for my destruction. I don't pretend to understand their superstitions, but I'll bet they expected their gods to destroy me with a bolt of flame. So when I went down to the village today, it came as quite a shock to see me alive and healthy."

"You went back to the village again?"

"I've just come from there." Philip glanced carelessly at the Yorl, who cringed. "That's the reaction I got from all of them. Nobody dared to harm me, nobody dared to speak. I summoned them out and laid down the law. From now on, no more taking of heads. The mines will be operated efficiently on the basis of my orders, and on the threat of my punish-

ment."

Raymond scratched his head. "But you were the one who objected to my colonialism, as you called it! I thought you didn't like this business of having servants, or ordering them around."

"I don't," Philip answered. "Not when it's just a matter of selfish personal comfort. But this is different. We're dealing with fundamentals here. In order to bring civilization and sanity one must issue orders and enforce them."

Raymond sighed. "What about the sports?" he asked, softly. "I suppose this isn't important any more under the new regime?"

Philip smiled. "If you're indulging in sarcasm, spare the effort," he replied. "It so happens that I've no intention of abandoning the program. The natives will need outlets for aggression. And as I said then, once their old outlets are gone, they will embrace the new much more willingly. As they are doing now."

"Now?"

"Yes. I issued instructions to the villagers. They are laying out a football field."

"Football?"

"Of course. I really should have thought of it first, instead of this silly boxing business. Football is the natural sport. Calls for team-participation, allows substitute ac-

## THE OLD COLLEGE TRY

tivity to a much greater number at one time. It's the ideal sublimation — a rough body-contact sport, and it's a great vicarious outlet for the spectators, too. I'll organize their teams and instruct them. They're bright enough, in their way. A few skull-practice sessions, a little actual training, and you'll see. By tomorrow I expect we can raise the goal-posts."

"Please, you're making a mistake. I can't stand by and watch you do this."

"Not necessary." Philip laughed again. "I keep forgetting you won't be around to observe the results. The ship leaves in three days." He turned. "Well, I'll not keep you. I expect you'll want to get on with your packing."

Raymond didn't want to get on with it, but he did. During the next two days he saw nothing of Philip. If he was organizing and coaching his teams, there was no sign. Raymond made no effort to visit the *torga* or to inspect the playing field behind it. He packed, and he drank incredible amounts of Aspergin.

On the night before the day of departure, Raymond suddenly felt very old, and very tired. He leaned back in his chair, hands folded over his fat paunch.

And it was there that the Yorl found him.

"Goo evening, Ministrata. You come now?"

"Come where?"

"See game."

"Game? You mean you're playing football already?"

"Tha ri'. Foo ball game now. Your honna."

"All right. Just for a little while." Raymond rose, fighting fatigue and the dizzying effects of the Aspergin. He didn't want to go, but it was the last night, and the Yorls would be disappointed. They were like children, really — they always wanted to share their pleasures with him.

Maybe it was a good idea to show up. Give credit where credit was due. If Philip could actually organize a football game in just three days, he deserved some recognition.

The Yorls had heaped fuel oil all about the playing field, and the blazing fires illuminated the scene. The drums pounded in joyous excitement, and the blue-skinned audience cavorted in frantic enthusiasm as several minor chieftains danced before them, waving spears in a Yorla version of cheer-leading.

The two teams were already on the field, engaged in a furious scrimmage. There was no hint of compulsion about their movements, not the slightest vestige of

constraint amongst the spectators.

Raymond sighed. Philip had been right, and he was wrong. The evidence of his own eyes furnished the final proof. Once a game was substituted for reality, the Yorls conformed, just as humans did. And from now on, the rest would be easy. In five years Philip would have them all working in the mines and paying taxes. They'd become a civilized community, with jails and orphanages and asylums.

Somehow, he'd never believed it would work out this way.

A player on one of the teams was getting ready to kick the ball. Raymond tried to locate Philip on the field. He must be acting as referee.

Raymond squinted through the

firelight, but he couldn't see him. All he could see was the ball, sailing over the goal-posts. And the crowd roared.

The crowd roared, and Raymond sighed again, and he turned back up the path to the Administration Building. He was tired, but he'd have to unpack. And he'd have to write a report to Interplan, explaining that he was right after all and that Philip was wrong. He'd have to explain that progress was not coming to Yorla. They didn't understand about sublimation, or the necessity of fighting over useless objects. They would play football, yes, but only for a real trophy, like the one he had just seen soaring over the goal-posts.

It was Philip's head . . .



In GAMMA 1 we introduced John Tomerlin to *sf/fantasy* readers — and we will have more tart Tomerlin tales in future issues. Continuing our policy of bringing fresh new talent to our readers, we herewith present Francesca Marques, making her fictional debut in our pages with a vignette of strong emotional impact. Born in New York City, Mrs. Marques has lived in London, Cambridge and Vera Cruz. (She was also a disc jockey in Mexico City some years back.) She speaks fluent Spanish as well as “a smattering of other languages,” has studied Modern Dance at UCLA and, for eight years, has practiced Yoga. Her hobby is photography. “I live quietly in Los Angeles,” she tells us, “in an apartment with my three children, two turtles, a salamander, a chameleon and a boa constrictor.” Mrs. Marques took courses in Child Psychology for three years at Los Angeles City College — and her knowledge of children is movingly reflected in this memorable short story.

## MICHAEL

### *Francesca Marques*

“The voices are coming for me tomorrow,” Michael said.

“Oh, Michael,” Chrysti cried excitedly, “are you sure? Are you really sure this time? Did you tell your mother?”

“Yes, but I told her before. I *keep* telling her, but she doesn’t believe me. You know about the voices, Chrysti; but they don’t hear any voices, so they think I made it up. They want to send me away, so I have to leave first.”

“I know,” Chrysti said sadly. “My mother talks to your mother

about it. About sending you away, I mean, to a big hospital where they lock you in. It’s a terrible place, Michael. It’s not beautiful like where we’re going.” She hesitated. “You *are* going to take me, aren’t you?”

“Of course,” Michael said, with five-year-old certainty, “I promised didn’t I? We’ll have such fun there, Chrysti. It’s just like the voices say. We can stay up all night, and it won’t hurt when you fall down or people say things about you, and nobody laughs because you’re

different."

Chrysti closed her eyes tightly and thought about all the things Michael had told her, about the other place where you were never lonely and no one yelled when you knocked things over accidentally. Often she had lain awake in the cool of her bedroom trying to picture a great star appearing suddenly on the horizon, coming down out of the night sky to land in her back yard and pick them up and carry them away. She hoped it would be a blue star; blue was her mother's favorite color.

"I've got to go now," Michael said gravely. "I've got to get ready."

For all of his five years, it seemed, Michael had been getting ready. Ever since Chrysti was seven.

Chrysti entered the house quietly. She heard the clink of coffee cups in the kitchen and Ruthie, Michael's mother, saying, "Honestly, I hated to do it, Sara, but we've tried everything. Every doctor, psychiatrist, private school. Jack hardly comes home any more. I never get any sleep because Michael keeps me up all night with his stories about voices from the sky." She sighed heavily. "I know he's retarded and I try to be patient, Sara, but sometimes I think I'm losing my mind, too."

"No handicapped child is easy to live with," Chrysti's mother agreed. "Believe me, you're doing the best for the child by sending him away to the hospital. They have the facilities there to care for him."

Chrysti stood in the room quietly, fists clenched, tears of anger welling in her eyes. "No," she screamed at them. "No, you can't send Michael away! Just because he's different doesn't mean you have to lock him up. He wants to go back where everyone is just like him."

She ran, crying, from the room.

"You see," Ruthie sighed. "She's beginning to believe it, too. We're sending Michael away none too soon."

That night, Chrysti cried herself to sleep. She awakened hours later to the sound of someone in her room. She rose to her elbows.

"Who's there?"

"Don't be afraid," a familiar voice said. "It's me. Michael."

She clutched his arm gratefully. "Oh, Michael, I'm so glad you're all right. I heard your mother say they were going to send you away."

"I know," Michael said gravely. "That's — that's why I've got to leave right now. Tonight."

Chrysti swung her legs from the bed. "The star is here?"

## MICHAEL

"Yes," Michael said. "And it's blue, Chrysti, just the way you wanted it. But they came just for me this time."

Chrysti let the words sink in. "Just — just for *you*. But —"

"I'm sorry, Chrysti."

"But, Michael, I can't stand being left here alone. You promised you'd take me with you."

"I can't. I'm sorry." He moved away across the room. "But I'll send it back for you, Chrysti. I will."

Chrysti closed her eyes tightly, fighting back her disappointment. "All right, Michael," she said quietly. "Send the blue star back for me. I'll — I'll wait."

She felt the silence of the darkness around her, and she knew that he was gone.

The next morning her mother told her that some men had come for Michael and taken him away to the hospital.

Chrysti smiled to herself, knowing this wasn't true, but she let her mother think she believed it. She knew that Michael had gone in the blue star to some distant world where a handicapped child was not really handicapped. One day he would come back for her.

So Chrysti waited, as patiently as Michael had waited, by her bedroom window in the still of night, listening for the sound of voices coming out of the sky. They *would* come for her, and she would know when they arrived — for surely even a blind child would be able to recognize a blue star.



When American-International released *The Raven*, with script by Richard Matheson, fantasy film fans were happy to discover that three of the screen's Favorite Monsters, Boris Karloff, Peter Lorre and Vincent Price, were all turned loose in the same picture. This was Matheson's idea. As a veteran fan of horror movies, dating back to the days of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, Matheson took special delight in scripting a vehicle in which three of his old favorites could star. Now, in *Comedy of Terrors*, his latest effort for A-I, Matheson has added a part for Basil Rathbone, another past master of fantasy — which should provide first rate screen entertainment in the popular Matheson manner. When he isn't scripting for A-I or for Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone*, Dick continues to fashion his unusual fiction for book and magazine markets. A new collection of his stories (his first since the best-selling *Shock!* in 1961) is due any month now from Dell, and while we're all waiting, here's a grim, thought-provoking sample of the "monstrous mind of Matheson."

## DEUS EX MACHINA

*Richard Matheson*

It began when he cut himself on a razor.

Until then, Robert Carter was typical. He was 34, an accountant with a railroad firm. He lived in Brooklyn with his wife, Helen, and their two daughters Mary, 10, and Ruth. Ruth was five and not tall enough to reach the bathroom sink. A box for her to stand on was kept under the sink. Robert Carter shifted his feet as he leaned in toward the mirror to shave his throat, stumbled on the box and fell. As he did, his arms flailed out

for balance, his grip clamping on the straight razor. He grunted as his knee banged on the tile floor. His forehead hit the sink. And his throat was driven against the hair-thin edge of the razor.

He lay sprawled and gasping on the floor. Out in the hall, he heard running feet.

"Daddy?" asked Mary.

He said nothing because he was staring at his reflection, at the wound on his throat. Vision seemed composed of overlays. In one, he saw blood running. In the other —

## DEUS EX MACHINA

"Daddy?" Her voice grew urgent.

"I'm all right," he said. The overlays had parted now.

It was oil.

Carter heard his daughter walk back to the bedroom as he watched the reddish-brown oil pulse from his neck and spatter on the floor.

Suddenly, with a convulsive shudder, he pulled a towel off its rack and pressed it to the wound. There was no pain. He drew the towel away and, in the moment before bubbling oil obscured the wound again, he saw red-cased wires as thin as threads.

Robert Carter staggered back, his eyes round with shock. Reaction made him jerk away the towel again. Wires still; and metal.

He was a machine!

Robert Carter looked around the bathroom dazedly. The details of reality crowded him in — the sink, the mirror-faced cabinet, the wooden bowl of shaving soap, its edge still frothed, the brush dripping snowy lather, the bottle of green lotion. All real.

Tight-faced, he wrapped the wound with jerking motions and pushed to his feet.

The face he saw in the mirror looked the same. He leaned in close, searching for some sign of difference. He prodded at the

sponginess of his cheeks, ran a forefinger along the length of his jawbone. He pressed at the softness of his throat caked with drying lather. Nothing was different.

"No!" He twisted away from the mirror and stared at the wall through a blur of tears. Tears? He reached up and touched the corner of an eye.

It was a drop of oil on his finger.

Reaction hit him violently. He began to shake without control. Downstairs, he could hear Helen moving in the kitchen. In their room, he could hear the girls talking as they dressed. It was like any other morning — all of them preparing for another day. Yet it wasn't just another day. The night before he'd been a businessman, a father, a husband, a man. This morning —

"Bob?"

He twitched as Helen called up from the foot of the stairs. His lips moved a little as if he were about to answer her.

"Almost seven-fifteen," she said, and he heard her start back for the kitchen. "Hurry up, Mary!" she called before the kitchen door swung shut behind her.

It was then that Robert Carter had his first premonition. Abruptly, he was on his knees, mopping at the oil with another towel. He wiped until the floor was spotless.



He cleaned off the smeared razor blade. Then he opened the hamper and pushed the towel to the bottom of the clothes pile.

He jumped as they banged against the door.

"Daddy, I have to get in!" they said.

"Wait a second," he heard himself reply. He looked into the mirror. Lather. He wiped it off. There was still bluish-dark beard on his face. Or was it wire?

"Daddy, I'm *late*," said Mary.

"All right." His voice was very calm as he drew the neck of his robe over the cut on his throat, flattening the makeshift bandage so it wouldn't be seen. He drew in a deep breath — could it be called breath? — and opened the door.

"I have to wash first," said Mary, pushing to the sink. "I have to go to school."

Ruth pouted. "Well, I have a lot of work to do," she said.

"That's enough," he told them. The words were leftovers from the yesterdays when he was their human father. "Behave," he said.

"Well, I have to wash first," said Mary, twisting the *hot* faucet.

Carter stood looking down at his children.

"What's that, Daddy?" asked Ruth.

He twitched in surprise. She was looking at the drops of oil on

the side of the bathtub. He'd missed them.

"I cut myself," he said. If he wiped them away fast enough they wouldn't see that they weren't drops of blood. He mopped at them with a piece of tissue paper and dropped it into the toilet, flushing it away.

"Is it a bad cut?" asked Mary, soaping at her cheeks.

"No," he said. He couldn't bear to look at them. He walked quickly into the hall.

"Bob, breakfast!"

"All right," he mumbled.

"*Bob?*"

"I'll be right down," he said.

Helen, Helen . . .

Robert Carter stood in front of the bedroom mirror looking at his body, a host of impenetrables rushing over him. Tonsils out, appendix out, dental work, vaccination, injections, blood tests, x-rays. The entire background against which he had acted out his seemingly mortal drama—a background of blood, of tissue, muscles, glands and hormones, arteries, veins —

No answer. He dressed with quick, erratic motions, trying not to think. He took off the towel and placed a large band-aid against the wound on his throat.

"Bob, come *on!*" she called.

He finished knotting his tie as he had knotted it thousands of

## DEUS EX MACHINA

times before. He was dressed now. He looked like a man. He stared at his reflection in the mirror and saw how, exactly, he looked like a man.

Bracing himself, he turned and went out into the hall. He descended the stairs and walked across the dining room. He'd made up his mind. He wasn't going to tell her.

"There you are," she said. She looked him over. "Where did you cut yourself?"

"What?"

"The girls said you cut yourself. Where?"

"On my neck. It's fine now."

"Well, let me see."

"It's all right, Helen."

She looked at him curiously.

"What's the matter?"

"*Nothing*," he said. "I'm late, that's all."

She peered at his neck, where the bandage was slightly visible above his shirt collar.

"It's still bleeding," she said.

Carter jolted. He reached up to touch his wound. The band-aid was stained with a large spot of oil. He looked up at Helen, startled. The second premonition came. He had to leave; *now*.

He left the kitchen and got his suit coat from the closet by the front door.

She'd seen *blood*.

His shoes made a fast, clicking sound on the sidewalk as he fled his house. It was a cold morning, grey and overcast. It was probably going to rain in a while. He shivered. He felt chilly. It was absurd now that he knew what he was; but he felt chilly.

*She'd seen blood.* Somehow, that terrified him even more than knowing he was a machine. That it was oil staining the bandage was painfully obvious. Blood didn't look like that, it didn't smell like that. Yet she'd seen blood. Why?

Hatless, blonde hair ruffling slightly in the breeze, Robert Carter walked along the street, trying to think. He was a robot; there was that to begin with. He had not been born then — or, if there had ever been a human Robert Carter, he was now replaced. But why? *Why?*

He moved down the subway steps, lost in thought. People milled about him. People with explicable lives, people who knew that they were flesh and blood and did not have to think about it.

On the subway platform, he passed a newsstand and, saw the headlines in a morning paper. THREE DIE IN HEAD-ON CRASH. There was a photograph. Mangled automobiles, inert, partly covered bodies on a dark highway. Streams of blood. Carter

thought, with a shudder, of himself lying in the photograph, a stream of oil running from his body.

He stood at the edge of the platform staring at the tracks. Was it possible that his human self had been replaced by a robot? Who would go to such trouble? And, having gone to it, who would allow it to be so easily discovered? A cut, a nick, a nosebleed even, and the fraud was revealed. Unless that blow on his head had jarred something loose. Maybe if he had cut himself without that blow, he would have seen only blood and tissue.

As he thought, unconsciously, he took a penny from his trouser pocket and slipped it into a gum machine. He pulled at the knob and the gum thumped down. He had it half unwrapped before it struck him. Chew gum now? He grimaced, visualizing a turn of gears in his head, levers attached to curved bars attached to artificial teeth; all moving in response to a synaptic impulse.

He shoved the gum into his pocket. The station was trembling with the approach of a train. Carter's eyes turned to the left. Far in the distance, he saw the red and green eyes of the Manhattan express. He turned back front. Replaced when? Last night, the night

before, last year? No, it was impossible to believe.

The train rushed by him with a blur of windows and doors. He felt the warmish, stale wind rush over him. He could smell it. His eyes blinked to avoid the swirl of dust. All this in seconds. As a machine, his reactions were so close to being human that it was incredible.

The train screeched to a halt in front of him. He moved over and entered the car with the pushing crowd. He stood by a pole, his left hand gripping it for balance. The doors slid shut again, the train rolled forward. Where was he going? he wondered suddenly. Surely not to work. Where then? To think, he told himself. He had to think.

That was when he found himself staring at a man standing near him.

The man had a bandage on his left hand and the bandage was stained with oil.

That sense of being frozen again — of his brain petrified with shock, his body still and numbed.

*He wasn't the only one.*

The neon sign above the door read EMERGENCY. Robert Carter's hand shook as he reached for the handle and pulled open the door.

It took no more than a moment to find out. There had been a traf-

## DEUS EX MACHINA

fic accident — a man driving to work, a flat tire, a truck. Robert Carter stood in the hallway staring in at the man on the table. He was being bandaged. There was a deep cut over his eye and oil was running down his cheek and dripping onto his suit.

"You'll have to go in the waiting room."

"What?" Carter started at the sound of the nurse's voice.

"I say you'll have to —"

She stopped as he turned away suddenly and pushed out into the April morning.

Carter walked along the sidewalk slowly, barely able to hear the sounds of the city.

There were other robots then — God only knew how many. They walked among men and were never known. Even if they were hurt they weren't known. That was the insane part. That man, covered with oil. Yet no one had noticed it except him.

Robert Carter stopped. He felt so heavy, so weak. He had to sit down and rest a while.

The bar had only one customer, a man sitting at the far end of the counter, drinking beer and reading a newspaper. Carter pushed up onto a leather stool and hooked his feet tiredly around its legs. He sat there, shoulders slumped, staring at the counter's dark, glossy

wood.

Pain, confusion, dread and apprehension all mixed and writhed in him. Was there a solution? Or was he just to wander like this, hopeless? Already it seemed a month since he'd left his house. But then it wasn't his house anymore.

Or was it? He sat up slowly. If there were others like him, could Helen and the girls be in that number? The idea repelled and appealed at once. He wanted them back desperately — yet how could he feel the same toward them if he knew that they, too, were wire and metal and electric current? How could he tell them about it since, if they were robots, they, obviously, didn't know it?

His left hand thumped down heavily on the bar. God, he was so tired. If only he could rest.

The bartender came out of the back room. "What'll it be?" he asked.

"Scotch on the rocks," said Robert Carter, automatically.

Sitting alone and quiet as the bartender made the drink, it came to him. *How could he drink?* Liquid would rust metal, short out circuits. Carter sat there, tightening fearfully, watching the bartender pour. A wave of terror broke across him as the bartender came back and put the glass on

the counter.

No, this wouldn't rust him. Not this.

Robert Carter shuddered and stared down into the glass while the bartender walked off to make change for a five-dollar bill. *Oil*. He felt like screaming. A glass of oil.

"*Oh, my God . . .*" Carter slipped off the stool and stumbled for the door.

Outside, the street seemed to move about him. What's happening to me? he thought. He leaned weakly against a plate glass window, blinking dizzily.

His eyes focused. Inside the cafeteria, a man and woman were sitting, eating. Robert Carter gaped at them.

*Plates of grease. Cups of oil.*

People walked around him, making him an island in their swirling midst. How many of them? he thought. Dear God, *how many of them?*

What about agriculture? What about grain fields, vegetable patches, fruit orchards? What about beef and lamb and pork? What about processing, canning, baking? No, he had to go back, to retrench, to recapture simple possibility. He'd struck his head and was losing contact with reality. Things were still as they had always been. It was *him*.

Robert Carter began to smell the city.

It was a smell of hot oils and machinery turning; the smell of a great, unseen factory. His head snapped around, his face a mask of terror. Dear God, *how many?* He tried to run but he couldn't. He could hardly move at all.

Robert Carter cried out.

He was running down.

He moved across the hotel lobby very slowly, with a halting, mechanical motion.

"A room," he said.

The clerk eyed him suspiciously, this man with the ruffled hair, the strange and haunted look in his eye. He was given a pen to sign his name into the register.

*Robert Carter*, he wrote; very slowly, as if he had forgotten how to spell it.

In the room, Carter locked the door and slumped down on the bed. He sat there staring at his hands. Running down; like a clock. A clock that never knew its builder nor its fate.

One last possibility — wild, fantastic, yet all he could manage now.

If Earth were being taken over. If each person were being replaced by duplicates. Doctors would be first, undertakers, policemen, any one who would come in contact with exposed bodies. And

## DEUS EX MACHINA

they would be conditioned to see nothing. He, as an accountant would be high on the list. He was part of the basic commerce system. He was —

Robert Carter closed his eyes. How stupid, he thought. How stupid and impossible.

It took him minutes just to stand. Lethargically, he took out an envelope and a piece of paper from a desk drawer. For a moment his eye was caught by the Gideon Bible in the drawer. Written by robots? he thought. The idea repelled him. No, there must have been humans *then*. This had to be a contemporary horror.

He drew out his fountain pen and tried to write a letter to Helen.

As he fumbled, he reached into his pocket for the gum. It was a habit. Just as he was going to put it in his mouth, though, he became conscious of it. It wasn't gum. It was a piece of solid grease.

It fell from his hand. The pen slipped from his failing grip and dropped to the rug and he knew he wouldn't have the strength to reach down and pick it up again.

*The gum. The drink in the bar. The food in the cafeteria.* His eyes raised, impelled.

*And what was beginning to rain from the sky?*

The truth crushed down on him.

There was not a human being in the world.

There never had been.

## DEUS EX MACHINA

they would be conditioned to see nothing. He, as an accountant would be high on the list. He was part of the basic commerce system. He was —

Robert Carter closed his eyes. How stupid, he thought. How stupid and impossible.

It took him minutes just to stand. Lethargically, he took out an envelope and a piece of paper from a desk drawer. For a moment his eye was caught by the Gideon Bible in the drawer. Written by robots? he thought. The idea repelled him. No, there must have been humans *then*. This had to be a contemporary horror.

He drew out his fountain pen and tried to write a letter to Helen.

As he fumbled, he reached into his pocket for the gum. It was a habit. Just as he was going to put it in his mouth, though, he became conscious of it. It wasn't gum. It was a piece of solid grease.

It fell from his hand. The pen slipped from his failing grip and dropped to the rug and he knew he wouldn't have the strength to reach down and pick it up again.

*The gum. The drink in the bar. The food in the cafeteria.* His eyes raised, impelled.

*And what was beginning to rain from the sky?*

The truth crushed down on him.

There was not a human being in the world.

There never had been.

William Faulkner died in Oxford, Mississippi on July 6, 1962. He was, at 64, one of the greats of modern literature, recipient of the Nobel Prize in 1950, at Stockholm (where he delivered his famed "Man Will Endure" acceptance address). His books (more than two dozen of them including *Sanctuary*, *The Wild Palms*, *Intruder in th Dust* and *The Reivers*) are all world famous; he was a true giant among his contemporaries, and his complex, richly-woven sagas of Yoknapatawpha County (beginning with *Sartoris*) stand as classic reflections of life in the South. In 1925, at the age of 27, a year before his first novel was released, Faulkner began to have his short sketches printed in the New Orleans *Times Picayune*. He had resigned his job as postmaster in Mississippi to devote himself to poetry and fiction, and moved into the Vieux Carre section of New Orleans to join a group of hard-striving young artists led by Sherwood Anderson. Faulkner's first sketch appeared in February of that year in the *Picayune* — and on May 31, 1925, his brief parable, *The Kid Learns*, was printed. In reviving this very early example of young Faulkner's prose, we at GAMMA 2 feel that this sketch is of special interest — bearing in mind that it was also William Faulkner who later wrote the often-reprinted fantasy classic, *A Rose for Emily*.

## THE KID LEARNS

*William Faulkner*

Competition is everywhere; competition makes the world go round. Not love, as some say. Who would want a woman nobody else wanted? Not me. And not you. And not Johnny. Same way about money. If nobody wanted the stuff, it wouldn't be worth fighting for. But more than this is being good in your own line, whether it is

selling aluminum or ladies' underwear or running whiskey, or what. Be good, or die.

"Listen," said Johnny, tilted back against the wall in his chair, "a man ain't only good in our business because he'd get his otherwise, he's good because he wants to be a little better than the best, see?"



## THE KID LEARNS

"Sure," said his friend Otto, sitting beside him, not moving.

"Anybody can keep from getting bumped off. All you gotta do is get took on a street gang or as a soda squirt. What counts is being as good as you can — being good as any of 'em. Getting yours or not getting yours just shows how good you are or how good you ought to of been."

"Sure," agreed his friend Otto, tilting forward his brief derby and spitting.

"Listen, I ain't got nothing against the Wop, see; but he sets hisself up as being good and I sets myself up as being good, and some day we got to prove between us which is the best."

"Yeh," said Otto, rolling a slender cigarette and flicking a match on his thumb nail, "but take your time. You're young, see; and he's an old head at this. Take your time. Get some age onto you and I'm playing you on the nose at any odds. They wasn't no one ever done a better job in town than the way you took that stuff away from him last week, but get some age onto you before you brace him, see? I'm for you. You know damn well."

"Sure," said Johnny in his turn. "I ain't no fool. Gimme five years though, and it'll be Johnny Gray, with not even the bulls to remem-

ber the Wop. Five years, see?"

"That's the kid. They ain't nothing to complain, the way we done lately. Let her ride as she lays, and when the time comes we'll clean 'em all."

"And he's right," thought Johnny, walking down the street. "Take time, and get yourself good. They ain't nobody good from the jump: you got to learn to be good. I ain't no fool, I got sense enough to lay off the Wop until the time comes. And when it does — good-night."

He looked up and his entrails became briefly cold — not with fear, but with the passionate knowledge of what was some day to be. Here was the Wop in an identical belted coat, and Johnny felt a sharp envy in spite of himself. They passed; Johnny nodded, but the other only jerked a casual, patronizing finger at him. Too proud to look back, he could see in his mind the swagger of the other's revealed shoulders and the suggestion of a bulge over his hip. Some day! Johnny swore beneath his breath, and he ached for that day.

Then he saw her.

Down the street she came, swinging her flat young body with all the awkward grace of youth, swinging her thin young arms; beneath her hat he saw hair neither

brown nor gold, and gray eyes. Clean as a colt she swung past him, and turning to follow her with his eyes and all the vague longing of his own youth, he saw the Wop step gracefully out and accost her.

Saw her recoil, and saw the Wop put his hand on her arm. And Johnny knew that that thing he had wanted to wait for until his goodness was better had already come. The Wop had prisoned both her arms when he thrust between them, but he released his grasp in sheer surprise on recognizing Johnny.

"Beat it," commanded Johnny coldly.

"Why, you poor fish, whatayou mean? You talking to me?"

"Beat it, I said," Johnny repeated.

"You little—" The older man's eyes grew suddenly red, like a rat's. "Don't you know who I am?" He thrust Johnny suddenly aside and again grasped the girl's arm. The back of her hand was pressed against her mouth and she was immovable with fear. When he touched her she screamed. Johnny leaped and struck the Wop on his unguarded jaw, and she fled down the street, wailing. Johnny's pistol was out and he stood over the felled man as Otto ran up.

"My God!" Otto shouted, "you've

done it now!" He dragged a weighted bit of leather from his pocket. "I don't dast croak him here. I'll put him out good, and you beat it, get out of town, quick!" He tapped the still groggy man lightly and ran. "Beat it quick, for God's sakes!" he cried over his shoulder. But Johnny had already gone after the girl, and a policeman, running heavily, appeared.

Before a darkened alleyway he overtook her. She had stopped, leaning against the wall with her face in the crook of her arm, gasping and crying. When he touched her she screamed again, whirling and falling. He caught her and supported her.

"It ain't him, it's me," he told her obscurely. "There, there; it's all right. I laid him out."

She clung to him, sobbing; and poor Johnny gazed about him, trapped. Cheest, what can you do with a weeping girl?

"Now, now, baby," he repeated, patting her back awkwardly, as he would a dog's, "its all right. He won't bother you. Tell me where you live, and I'll take you home."

"O-o-o-h, he sc-scared me s-o," she wailed, clinging to him. Poor kid, she didn't know that he was the one to be scared, that his was the life that was about to take a dark and unknown corner, for better or worse, only the gods knew.

## THE KID LEARNS

There is still time to get out of town, though, caution told him. Otto is right; he knows best. Leave her and beat it, you fool! Leave her, and him back yonder? Youth replied. Not by your grandmother's false teeth, I won't.

He felt her pliant young body shudder with fear, felt her choked weeping.

"There, there, kid," he repeated inanely. He didn't know what to say to 'em, even. But he must get her away from here. The Wop would be about recovering now, and he'd be looking for him. He held her closer and her trembling gradually died away; and looking about him he almost shouted with relief. Here was old Ryan the cop's house, that had known him boy and lad for fifteen years. The very place.

"Mrs. Ryan knows me, she'll look after you until I come back for you."

She clasped him sharply in her thin arms. "No, no, don't leave me! I'm so scared!"

"Why, just for a minute, honey," he reassured her, "just until I find where he went, see? We don't wanta stumble on him again."

"No, no, no, he'll hurt you!" Her wet salty face was against him. "You mustn't. You mustn't!"

"Sure, just a while, baby. I won't be no time." She moaned against

Johnny's face and he kissed her cold mouth, and it was as though dawn had come among the trees where the birds were singing. They looked at each other a moment.

"Must you?" she said in a changed voice, and she allowed herself to be led to the dark door; and they clung to each other until footsteps came along the passage within the house. She put her arms around Johnny's neck again.

"Hurry back," she whispered, "and oh, be careful. I'm so afraid!"

"Baby!"

"Sweetheart!"

The door opened upon Mrs. Ryan; there was a brief explanation, and with her damp kiss yet on his face, Johnny ducked quickly from the alleyway.

Here were flying remote stars above, but below were flashing lights and paved streets, and all the city smells that he loved. He could go away for a while and then come back, and things—lights and streets and smells—would be the same. "No!" he swore. "I've got a girl now. I'd rather be bumped off than have her know I run." But, ah, if this could have been put off a while! How sweet she is! Is this love, I wonder? he thought, or is it being afraid, makes me want to run back to her and risk letting things work them-

selves out instead of doing it myself? Anyway, I done it for her: I wasn't double-crossing the boys. I had to do it: anyone can see that.

"Well, I ain't as good as I wanted, but I can be as good as I can." He looked again at the flying stars, his pistol loose in his pocket, and smelled again the smells of food and gasoline that he loved; and one stepped quickly from out a doorway.

Why, say, here she was again beside him, with her young body all shining and her hair that wasn't brown and wasn't gold and her eyes the color of sleep; but she was somehow different at the same time.

"Mary?" said Johnny, tentatively.

"Little sister Death," corrected the shining one, taking his hand.



COMING SOON —



## A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE MOON

an anthology of humorous science-fiction and fantasy stories, edited by the Gamma people, and featuring stories by Ray Bradbury, Charles Beaumont, Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch, and Anthony Boucher.



Watch for it on your local newstands!

The variegated background of Jack Matcha provides ample grist for a blurb-writer's mill. Matcha worked on a high school paper with Paddy Chayefsky, went on to obtain degrees at New York City College and Columbia University, became a reporter for the Puerto Rico *World Journal* (having won a San Juan amateur hour contest he had been assigned to cover for the paper by doing several voice impersonations), joined the Baltimore *Morning Sun*, transferred to the editorial staff of the Paris edition of the New York *Herald Tribune*, worked in Munich, Germany as an information officer for the U.S. Department of Defense and in Geneva, Switzerland, with an immigration agency. One of his plays, *Reunion in Munich*, won first prize in a Europe-wide Army playwriting contest, and another play, *The Kingmakers*, performed in Los Angeles by the Rainbow Players, was reviewed (in the *Times*) as "possessing all the major ingredients for theatrical voltage." Matcha's first novel, *Prowler in the Night* (Gold Medal, '59), won a nod from sf/mystery critic Anthony Boucher who remarked in part: ". . . Matcha knows how to treat a sensational subject with easy, quiet naturalism." Jack enjoys chess, is a dedicated theater buff — and will do his gusty impersonation of Maurice Chevalier "at the drop of my hat, or anyone else's." Matcha has recently devoted himself to publishing, but with *King's Jester*, he enters the ranks of GAMMA contributors with this neat example of a heckling court jester involved in the no-nonsense world of big business.

## KING'S JESTER

*Jack Matcha*

*The Fool: That lord that counseled thee  
To give away thy land,  
Come place him here by me,  
Do thou for him stand;  
The sweet and bitter fool  
Will presently appear;  
The one in motley here,  
The other found out there.*

*Act I, King Lear*

The wild idea concerning Feste had come to Steven King during a session with his analyst.

King had said jokingly that what he really needed in his business was a court jester to keep him amused and distracted. To his surprise, the analyst had seized on the idea, told him it was a sound one. The doctor agreed that the delightful nonsense a jester could invent would lessen the severe tension King was under.

His public relations man liked the idea. The jester might even be used to enliven dull stockholders' meetings. The contract with Feste was signed, and the fool was hired.

And there was no doubt that Feste had amused everyone at first with his jokes and antics. Often the fool would sit in a corner of the executive dining room and send them into peals of laughter with a wisecrack or a clever stunt. As the weeks passed, however, Feste grew restless and his humor became cruel and malicious. His jibes were sharper and he developed a knack for imitating and caricaturing everyone. The jester's antics had become a nightmare for them all, but King suffered most because he felt, all too keenly, the knifeblade of the fool's public contempt.

The jester had to go. For the

hundredth time in two months, the ugly dwarf had embarrassed King before important clients. The stupid japes and capers that made the hairs stand on the back of his neck had also cost him dearly in money and priceless friendships.

It was no longer a question of merely tolerating the jester's sadistic needling. Feste had begun to take over his job. Often King's own receptionist would look startled to see him entering the building, so certain was she that he was already barking orders upstairs. When King reached his suite, Feste would be leaning back in his chair and issuing orders in King's own voice, imitating it perfectly. It was impossible to predict what the fool would do next. Once, at King's home, he had tossed fifty pounds of gelatin into his pool. The guests found themselves swimming in Jello. On another occasion, the dwarf had ordered a soufflé grand marnier, the chef's favorite, at the luxurious Four Seasons restaurant in New York. Digging into it with his fingers, throwing gobs of the sweet stuff at the waiter, Feste had screamed that he was being poisoned. His shrill cries had turned the quiet, aristocratic dining room to chaos. At the end of the fray, when they had been thrown out, the frog-voiced buffoon had

The variegated background of Jack Matcha provides ample grist for a blurb-writer's mill. Matcha worked on a high school paper with Paddy Chayefsky, went on to obtain degrees at New York City College and Columbia University, became a reporter for the Puerto Rico *World Journal* (having won a San Juan amateur hour contest he had been assigned to cover for the paper by doing several voice impersonations), joined the Baltimore *Morning Sun*, transferred to the editorial staff of the Paris edition of the New York *Herald Tribune*, worked in Munich, Germany as an information officer for the U.S. Department of Defense and in Geneva, Switzerland, with an immigration agency. One of his plays, *Reunion in Munich*, won first prize in a Europe-wide Army playwriting contest, and another play, *The Kingmakers*, performed in Los Angeles by the Rainbow Players, was reviewed (in the *Times*) as "possessing all the major ingredients for theatrical voltage." Matcha's first novel, *Prowler in the Night* (Gold Medal, '59), won a nod from sf/mystery critic Anthony Boucher who remarked in part: ". . . Matcha knows how to treat a sensational subject with easy, quiet naturalism." Jack enjoys chess, is a dedicated theater buff — and will do his gusty impersonation of Maurice Chevalier "at the drop of my hat, or anyone else's." Matcha has recently devoted himself to publishing, but with *King's Jester*, he enters the ranks of GAMMA contributors with this neat example of a heckling court jester involved in the no-nonsense world of big business.

## KING'S JESTER

*Jack Matcha*

*The Fool: That lord that counseled thee  
To give away thy land,  
Come place him here by me,  
Do thou for him stand;  
The sweet and bitter fool  
Will presently appear;  
The one in motley here,  
The other found out there.*

*Act I, King Lear*

The wild idea concerning Feste had come to Steven King during a session with his analyst.

King had said jokingly that what he really needed in his business was a court jester to keep him amused and distracted. To his surprise, the analyst had seized on the idea, told him it was a sound one. The doctor agreed that the delightful nonsense a jester could invent would lessen the severe tension King was under.

His public relations man liked the idea. The jester might even be used to enliven dull stockholders' meetings. The contract with Feste was signed, and the fool was hired.

And there was no doubt that Feste had amused everyone at first with his jokes and antics. Often the fool would sit in a corner of the executive dining room and send them into peals of laughter with a wisecrack or a clever stunt. As the weeks passed, however, Feste grew restless and his humor became cruel and malicious. His jibes were sharper and he developed a knack for imitating and caricaturing everyone. The jester's antics had become a nightmare for them all, but King suffered most because he felt, all too keenly, the knifeblade of the fool's public contempt.

The jester had to go. For the

hundredth time in two months, the ugly dwarf had embarrassed King before important clients. The stupid japes and capers that made the hairs stand on the back of his neck had also cost him dearly in money and priceless friendships.

It was no longer a question of merely tolerating the jester's sadistic needling. Feste had begun to take over his job. Often King's own receptionist would look startled to see him entering the building, so certain was she that he was already barking orders upstairs. When King reached his suite, Feste would be leaning back in his chair and issuing orders in King's own voice, imitating it perfectly. It was impossible to predict what the fool would do next. Once, at King's home, he had tossed fifty pounds of gelatin into his pool. The guests found themselves swimming in Jello. On another occasion, the dwarf had ordered a soufflé grand marnier, the chef's favorite, at the luxurious Four Seasons restaurant in New York. Digging into it with his fingers, throwing gobs of the sweet stuff at the waiter, Feste had screamed that he was being poisoned. His shrill cries had turned the quiet, aristocratic dining room to chaos. At the end of the fray, when they had been thrown out, the frog-voiced buffoon had



## KING'S JESTER

gawked and laughed, leaping up and clapping his hands as he watched King's crimson face.

At the office, normal work became impossible. Wrapped snugly in the diplomatic immunity his contract gave him, the dwarf felt free to bait and insult his master at will. And if his sadistic thrusts drew blood, he shrieked with delight.

On the afternoon after the incident at the Four Seasons, King's vice-president in charge of public relations called. He had to speak to King urgently. About the jester.

King found the PR man popping yellow pills into his mouth. "I'm handing you my resignation, Steve," he said. "I just can't take it anymore."

"What's Feste done now?"

"Yesterday, just about closing time, he called the Seattle plant and ordered them to switch the print in the technical manuals for the engines going to Munich from German to Japanese. *That* couldn't have been you, could it?"

"Of course not!"

"Well, they swear it was you calling. Then, this morning, he joined the tour of the Larchmont Women's Club at the plant next door and kept jabbing at their backsides with those electric sticks the American Legionnaires use at conventions. They just give you a

mild shock but they sound like hell and the ladies nearly jumped out the window. I want to quit, Steve."

"Just hold on, Mac, and I'll see what I can do." King returned furiously to his office, ignoring the executives who wanted to talk to him about the jester. Once again, the fool was sitting in King's swivel chair, imitating him on the phone.

"In the future, I will accept only *perfect* carbons from anyone. If I get a smudged carbon, I'll fire the girl responsible," the dwarf said in King's own crisp, authoritative voice. "And no one may smoke in my presence without first obtaining my permission."

King seized the phone. "Ignore those orders," he shouted.

The jester smiled coyly. "You'd like to give such orders, wouldn't you? You'd like to be treated like an oriental potentate. Isn't that why you hired me? To give you a feeling of power?"

"You don't know anything about me," King snapped. "You're just an idiot, a fool."

"That is a matter of opinion," said the jester. Standing next to King, he opened his arms to an unseen audience.

"Which twin is the phony?" he croaked in the pretentious tones of a television commercial.

The dwarf began to laugh. The little bells on his cap jangled merrily. King glared at the jester's vulpine face with its grotesque nose and the huge dewlaps under the eyes.

"I'll give you three times what I still owe you on your contract if you'll leave," King said.

"It has four months to go," the jester said blandly. "By the way, what is green and yellow and hangs from trees?"

King winced. More of the dwarf's ugliness, he thought. "All right, what is green and yellow and hangs from trees?"

"A dead girl scout!" the dwarf shrieked with delight. "What's the difference between a crippled virgin and a spavined mare?"

"I don't know and I don't care." King's hands were trembling. "Listen. I'll offer *four* times what your contract calls for!"

Feste grinned, shaking his head slowly.

The buzzer rang on King's desk. At first he could not recognize the sobbing voice; then he realized it was his secretary. She was babbling incoherently into the intercom.

"Will you please calm down, Mary, and tell me what's happened?"

"The women's rest room is full of red ants," she sobbed. "They're

crawling over everything."

Behind him, King heard a raucous laugh.

"Just call the custodian, Mary," King said. "He'll take care of it."

He turned angrily to the dwarf.

"What is it you want?"

"Want?" Feste said coyly. "Nothing. I'm just trying to distract you. That's what our contract calls for, doesn't it?"

"Yes, damn it, but it does *not* say that you have to do it by telling a South American general who might have bought a million dollars worth of equipment that he looks like a Mexican pimp. Or asking my fiancée to go away with you. Or following me around night and day. You *never* leave me alone. You're in my room when I wake up, you're in my office all day. I'm sick and tired of that filthy, croaking voice of yours. What do you really want from me?"

"Just to distract you," Feste said quietly.

King's hands continued to tremble; he knew he must take another tranquilizer. In the past few weeks he had begun to eat them like candy. He walked to the cooler at the other end of the room. As he reached for a paper cup, he froze.

There was a gila monster in the water!

The dwarf laughed. "It's not very pretty, is it?"

## KING'S JESTER

King shuddered. "How did you get that enormous horror through the small nozzle of the cooler?"

"The same way you get an enormous ship through the neck of a bottle," the dwarf replied.

Before King could respond, the phone rang again. This time it was a senator on the appropriations committee.

"Hello, Senator Blackwell," King said. "I've been waiting for your call. Are we all set on the order for the new aircraft?"

"We are *not*," Blackwell said curtly. "What the hell's got into you, King? If you want to cut your throat with this committee, you might at least warn me first."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Telling the chairman his wife walks like a gimp-legged buffalo and that you'd like to go camping with his teen-aged daughter. Don't bother to deny this, damn it. I was in the office. I recognized your voice."

"King, as far as this committee is concerned, you couldn't sell us gold-plated jets at a dime a throw!" He hung up.

King turned from the dead phone to confront the dwarf, but Feste had vanished.

Angrily, King dialed his attorney.

"Bart," he said without intro-

duction, "I've got to get rid of him. No *maybes*. I've got to get rid of him. If he stays here any longer, I don't know what will happen. Isn't there *any* way we can break that contract?"

"It's airtight, Steve. I've gone over it a dozen times. I warned you not to sign it."

"But he's ruining my business. I've had to replace ten key people on my staff, and others are threatening to quit. Because of Feste, I've lost a dozen big contracts. I can't go anywhere to talk to anybody. The idiot's right alongside me wherever I go in those damned baggy pants and that cap with bells."

"Clause seven in the contract gives him the right to follow you around," the attorney said.

"He's destroyed all the ties I had with the Senate Appropriations Committee. He even insulted the chairman's wife."

"Clause six covers that, Steve."

"What about putting red ants in the ladies' room?" King shouted. "Or propositioning my fiancée or putting poisonous lizards in the water cooler?"

"If you'll read clauses in the contract," the lawyer said with maddening calm, "You'll see . . ."

"Stop quoting that damned contract! I need help. Can't we get him out for malfeasance, incom-

petence or non-performance — whatever you lawyers call it?”

“I don’t see how, Steve. He’s supposed to distract you with pranks and jokes and insults. Isn’t that what he’s been doing?”

“But there must be *some* way to get rid of him. I’ve reached the limit of my endurance. I just cannot go through this for another four months. I won’t have any business left. Or any sanity either. Do you understand me? I’ll be as mad as he is.”

“There’s no legal way I can break that contract, unless — Wait a minute. Can you prove he’s mad?”

“Do you *need* any proof? Just look at the record.”

“That won’t work, Steve. That’s covered by the contract. What do you actually know about him personally? About his background?”

“I don’t know anything,” King said. “I called this agency two months ago and told them I wanted to hire a court jester. Someone who would keep me amused. They said they’d send a man out.”

“Didn’t they give you any information about who they were sending?”

King tried to remember. So much had happened since his conversation with the agency. “No, all they said was that it was a pretty unusual request but that

they could fill it.”

“He may have a criminal record,” the attorney said. “He may even be wanted by the police somewhere. Steve, phone the agency again and get all the information on him you can.”

“All right. I’ll call you back.”

King hung up and checked his desk calendar. He had jotted down the name of the woman he had spoken to: a Mrs. Burke.

She didn’t recall King at first. Then when he explained about the jester, she remembered everything.

“I thought you were joking,” she told him. “We get a few strange calls now and then, and — I just — I was sure you were *joking*. You sounded a little . . .” Mrs. Burke paused delicately. “Well, as if you were calling from a cocktail party and joking. When you asked for a court jester complete with bells and jokes and a bag of tricks. . . . Well, you can imagine . . .”

“But you *sent* someone,” King said. “A dwarf named Feste. He came in the next morning.”

“But, Mr. King, we did *not* send anyone. That’s what I’m trying to tell you.”

“Then who sent Feste? He said he had come in answer to my request. Could someone else in your agency have sent him?”

## KING'S JESTER

"Absolutely not."

"This is ridiculous!" shouted King, slamming down the phone. The noise brought the jester back into the room. Suddenly the sound of his bells reminded King of the alarm of a rattlesnake. The smile on the dwarf's face mocked King.

"Who are you?" King asked softly.

"Feste," the dwarf said.

"The agency says they never sent you here. Who sent you to me?"

The dwarf's croaking laugh answered him.

King clenched his fists, prepared to drive them into the buffalo's ugly face. But as he lurched at him, the fool leaped away. Bells ringing, Feste danced out of the room.

It was while he was finishing his third double Scotch at the bar downstairs that the plan came to King. There was no other way, he decided. It might take weeks or even months of legal maneuvering to dislodge the jester.

It had now become a matter of survival. King was convinced that unless the dwarf were eliminated he would lose his business, his fiancée and his friends. He was sure he was already losing his sanity. Once the plan was formulated, he felt much calmer.

King returned to find the jester

seated at his desk, as usual. "I'd like to alopogize to you, Feste," he said.

"Look, I know I've been getting jumpy about all your stunts, but I've been under a lot of pressure. Let's go to dinner tonight. I have to relax. Then we'll have a talk. OK?"

"Certainly, Chief," the dwarf answered.

"Let's go to the Four Seasons. You like it there, dont you?"

The dwarf looked pleased. His smile actually seemed friendly.

He kept up his outward show of good spirits the rest of the day. He did not react when Feste ordered all the stenographers in the vast building to come to work the next day in low-cut candy-striped dresses and the men in Maurice Chevalier boaters. When a birthday cake the size of a wagonwheel was delivered to his dinner table and three Hungarian violinists in tails sawed violently at fiddles next to his ear, he didn't lose his temper.

"Let's go back to the office and have a talk," said King. "I have some work to do on that missile report, anyhow."

Feste agreed, trailing behind him, doglike.

As he crossed the threshold of his office, he bumped into an immense object. It almost knocked

him out. Staggering to his knees, he rose groggily and fumbled for the light switch. The light flooding the office disclosed a gargantuan balloon nearly as big as the room itself.

King cursed under his breath and moved around the balloon. As he did, the dwarf pricked it with a pin and the resulting explosion sent him reeling against the wall. He stood there, deafened by the blast.

The jester perched on King's desk. "Well," he said, "just what is it you wanted to talk about?"

"First, let's get some air in here," said King weakly. He locked the door, then opened the window. From the fiftieth floor, the view of Manhattan was breathtaking.

"You can see all the way to Central Park from here," King said. "Looks like a fairyland with all those lights, and the towers beyond it."

The dwarf waddled over to the window and looked out.

"Now you answer this one, Fool," King said mockingly. "Why was George Washington buried on the side of a hill?"

"I have no idea," the jester replied. His back was turned to King as he stared out at the distant lights. "Why *was* George Washington buried on the side of a hill?"

"Because he was *dead!*" yelled King as he rushed at the dwarf. But he was not quick enough. With a giggle, the fool leaped out of the way and King slammed his head into the wall.

He was awakened slowly by a voice that sounded familiar, though he could not place it. The voice kept repeating a question, but the terrible ache in King's head made it difficult for him to concentrate. The voice droned on, maddeningly familiar. When King finally opened his eyes, he gasped.

Sitting in his swivel chair was — *himself*.

"How do you feel, Chief?" King heard the figure who looked exactly like him ask. He stared in disbelief.

King saw his own face looking solicitously down at him. "I don't think you did much damage. Just soiled your clothes and tore off a few bells, but that can be fixed easily. Now let's see, what was it we wanted to talk about?"

King slowly looked down at his clothing. He was wearing the jester's costume! On his head bells tinkled faintly. He put a sweating hand to his face, touching the grotesque nose and dewlaps and watted throat . . .

Now, at last, King knew who the jester really was.

He was Steven King.

The closest William Shakespeare ever came to science fiction (until now) was in the pages of Kingsley Amis' controversial tome, *New Maps of Hell*. Mr. Amis ventured the startling opinion that Shakespeare's *The Tempest* could actually qualify as sf — since it was complete with a mad scientist (Prospero), a mutant (Caliban) and an anthropomorphised mobile scanner (Ariel). We at GAMMA 2 are going Mr. Amis one better in presenting this Shakespearian tour of the Solar system. Assisting the Bard, is Ib Melchior, son of the famed Metropolitan Opera star, Lauritz Melchior. A cryptography analysis expert, television director, screenwriter and magazine contributor, Ib Melchior has written for the *New York Post* as well as for various sf markets. Of this present effort, he says: "For some two hundred years scholars have been trying to uncover secret messages in Shakespeare's work. The Baconites insist that Francis Bacon really wrote the plays. Others claim to have found cryptographic messages concerning the whereabouts of certain vanished manuscripts. Yet, it is obvious that I have found the real key to the Bard's work, gleaned from a series of passages scattered throughout his plays and sonnets. These passages conclusively prove that William Shakespeare *came from the future*, perhaps to Elizabethan England as a Time Student — and was somehow stranded there. The lines I have selected accurately describe a trip through the Solar system and clearly reflect the Bard's longing to escape from this earth, back to his own time."

To which we add: if you don't believe Mr. Melchior — see for yourself!

## HERE'S SPORT INDEED!

*William Shakespeare*  
*assisted by*  
*Ib Melchior*

Shall I abide in this dull world?	A&C*
There is nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon,	A&C
Therefore devise with me how we may fly,	AYLI
With ships made cities,	A&C

---

\* — A key to these lines follows.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

A space for further travel. A&C  
 Then must thou needs find new heaven, new earth! A&C  
 We'll to our ships, A&C  
 Which ten times faster glide than the sun's beams. R&J

From South to West on wings roaring aloft,  
 Lessened herself, and in the beams of the sun so vanished; Cym  
 To be called into a huge sphere and  
 not to be seen to move in't. A&C

Here's sport indeed! How heavy weighs my Lord!  
 Our strength is all gone into heaviness. A&C

Hail thou fair heaven . . .  
 arched so high that giants may jet through! Cym

The Moon being clouded presently is missed, RofL  
 Our terrene Moon is now eclipsed — A&C  
 Now the fleeting Moon no planet is of mine. A&C  
 Look, as the fair and fiery-pointed Sun,  
 Rising from forth a cloud bereave our sight. RofL

My Lord, do you see these Meteors? 1stH4  
 It is some Meteor that the Sun exhales. R&J

Mercury should fetch you up; A&C  
 Yonder Venus in her glimmering sphere. — MND  
 Venus, where we see the fancy outwork nature, A&C  
 This world to me is like a lasting storm. Per  
 The other way's Mars. A&C  
 Now, Mars, I prithee, make us quick in work! Cor  
 Look, how a bright star shooteth from the sky,  
 So glides he in the night from Venus. A&C  
 Let all the number of the stars give light to thy fair way, A&C  
 The spots of heaven more fiery by night's blackness. A&C

Mars, his true moving, even as in the heavens,  
 And Meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven; R2  
 Sometime, diverted, their poor balls are tied to the orb'd earth. LC



## HERE'S SPORT INDEED!

Approach rich Ceres —	Temp
Eros apace — Eros, I come — Eros, ho!	A&C
Give warning to the world that I am fled from this vile world!	Son LXXI
Here is my space!	A&C
This huge stage presenteth naught but shows, Whereon the stars in secret influence comment.	Son XV
Great Jupiter appeared to me . . . with other sprightly shows, In his fire doth quake with cold, and in that cold, Hot-burning fire doth dwell these contraries,	Cym RofL
That I might see what the old world could say to this compound wonder of your frame!	Son LIX
Though Venus govern your desire — Saturn is dominator over mine,	T.And
That heavy Saturn!	Son XCVIII
The ring is won.	Cym
Like ivory globes circled with blue, A pair of maiden worlds unconquered, The fire and cracks of sulphurous roaring, The most mighty Neptune!	RofL
O'er Neptune's back with ships made cities, We shall fly anon.	Temp A&C A&C
And moody Pluto winks,	RofL
Beyond all limit of what else in the world.	Temp
Then, when you come to Pluto's region, Which like a jewel, hung in ghastly night, Does chase the ebbing Neptune and does fly him when he comes back;	And Son XXV Temp
Let Neptune hear we bid a loud farewell to these great fellows.	A&C
In winged speed no motion shall I know, Prithee, do not turn me about; my stomach is not content!	Son LI Temp
Put off my helmet!	A&C
What are you that fly me thus?	Cym

I've got two world by't!  
 Mars' hot minion is returned again,  
 At length the Sun — gazing upon the Earth.  
 In my stars I am above thee!

Cym  
 Temp  
 CofE  
 12thN

Oh indistinguished Space!  
 Let the world rank me in register,  
 A master-leaver and a fugitive!  
 My foot did stand upon the  
     furthest earth removed from thee.  
*Is there any ship puts forth tonight?ppp*

KL

Son XLIV  
 CofE



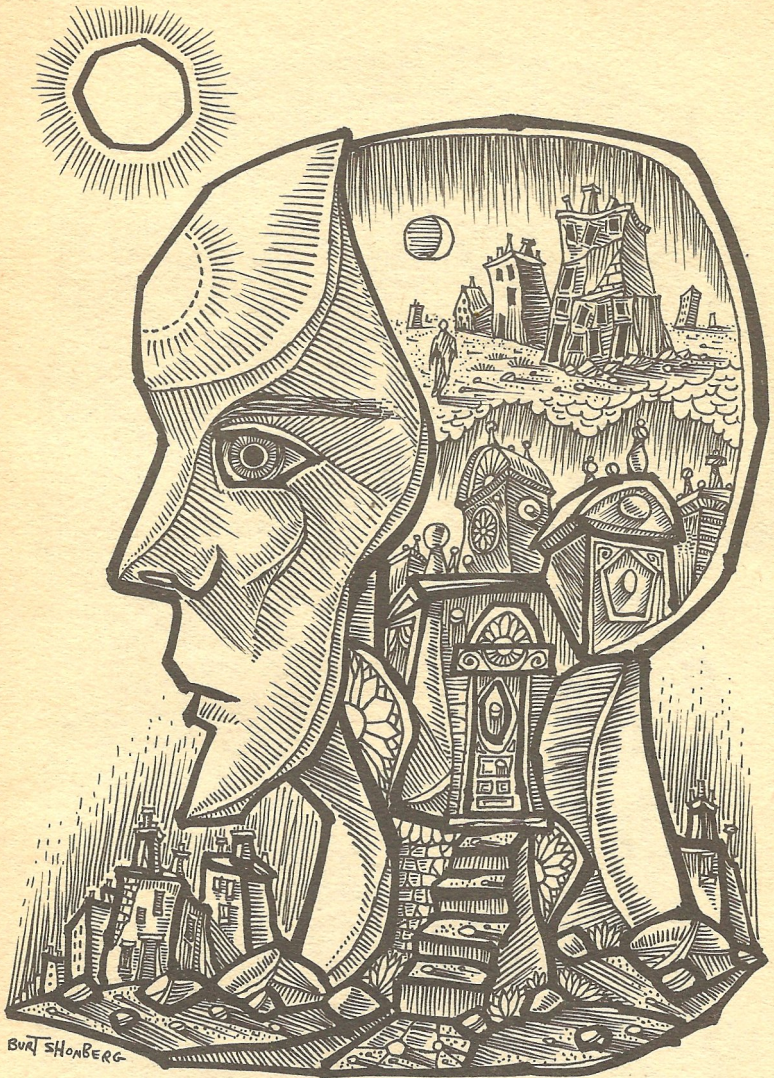
## A KEY TO THE LINES

- C of E — Comedy of Errors  
 A and C — Antony and Cleopatra  
 AYLI — As You Like It  
 R and J — Romeo and Juliet  
 Cym — Cymbeline  
 R of L — The Rape of Lucrece  
 1st H4 — First Part of Henry IV  
 MND — Midsummer Night's Dream  
 Per — Pericles  
 Cor — Coriolanus  
 T. And — Titus Andronicus  
 R2 — Richard II  
 LC — A Lover's Complaint  
 Temp — The Tempest  
 12th N — Twelfth Night  
 KL — King Lear  
 Son — refers to Sonnet, with the number listed in each instance.

When Vincent Price portrayed an evil, demented painter whose baroque creations figured prominently in American-International's *House of Usher* the real man behind the brush was Burt Shonberg, a young (he's 30) California artist whose unique work has been seen in some of the leading men's magazines, on Capitol Record covers and in various L.A. restaurants and nightclubs (The Sea Witch, The Purple Onion, etc.). As a muralist, he is in constant demand, and many of his best paintings hang in private collections around the nation. Hailing from Massachusetts, Shonberg studied at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and at Los Angeles Art Center. He was a radio operator in the Army, and turned to freelance art as a career upon his discharge. The haunting, bizarre Shonberg approach to creative painting is completely original, and we are proud to reproduce a special portfolio of his work, done just for GAMMA 2.

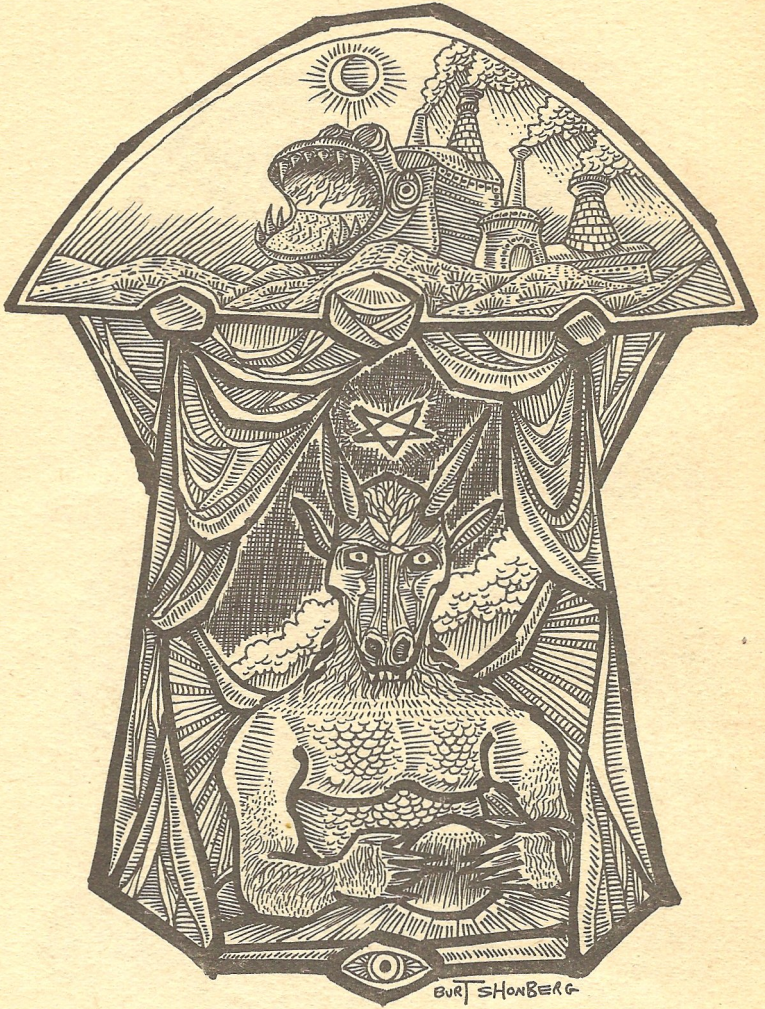
## PORTFOLIO

*Burt Shonberg*













## EVERYBODY OUT THERE LIKES US . . .

*From sf fans, general readers, editors, authors, newspaper reviewers and magazine critics praise for GAMMA I continues to pour into our office. Here's a sample of the kind of response our first issue is getting across the nation:*

"The format is handsome and readable, the editorial standard gratifyingly high . . . GAMMA, in addition to being an entertaining magazine, is one of the first authentic media of the new fiction coming out of California geographically and intellectually."

Robert R. Kirsch

Book Editor, *Los Angeles Times*

". . . stuffed with goodies . . . a delight." *Denver Post*

"The magazine is top notch." Rod Serling

"A beautiful job . . . I am proud to be in the first issue."

Ray Bradbury

"A BIG bargain for sf fans!" *The Provincetown Advocate*

"With an all-star contributors' list, GAMMA . . . has set *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* standards in its initial publication."

*New York Herald Tribune — Books*

"Extremely interesting." Anthony Boucher

"A real contribution to sf. I congratulate you on the high standards and the high aim." Kurt Singer, General Manager, Singer Features

"For those who like sharp, short fiction . . . GAMMA is off to an excellent start." *The Rangefinder*

"An all-star triumph!" Don Hutchinson, Toronto, Canada

"GAMMA is a very good-looking magazine — and the line-up of names is impressive." August Derleth

"A terrific job . . . imaginative and provocative . . . GAMMA should be a great success." John Lawlor

Technical Editor, Petersen Publications

"Sf has been dying ever since Sputnik, when it became increasingly difficult to separate science-fiction from science-fact, but I've recently seen a new publication called GAMMA and was delightfully surprised to see that it was full of a new vigor." John Nebel

Host of NYC's *Long John Nebel Show*

## . . . YOU'LL LIKE US, TOO!

Wise people subscribe. They don't have to go through hail, sleet and driving snow to get their copies of Gamma. They let the postman do all the hard work and they get all the enjoyment. Let us add your name to the growing list of Gamma fans and make sure you don't miss a single issue. (And be a sport and buy your weary postman a subscription for his birthday.)

### GAMMA

Star Press, Inc.

Suite 205, 10523 Burbank Blvd.

North Hollywood, Calif.

Start my subscription with GAMMA 3. I have enclosed:

- \$2.75 for six issues  
 \$5.00 for twelve issues

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

IF YOU MISSED OUT ON GAMMA 1, don't despair. There are still back copies available of this collector's item, which contains stories by Tennessee Williams, Ray Bradbury, Charles Beaumont, Richard Matheson, etc. Order directly from the publisher, enclosing fifty cents.

London-born, in 1914, William Temple is best known in sf circles for his superb novel, *Four-Sided Triangle*, which he completed during various campaigns in North Africa, Sicily and Italy during the war years (1940-45). At this time, when Temple was with the British Army, the manuscript was twice lost in battle, but was regained on each occasion. Back in London, Temple shared a flat with another now-famous sf writer, Arthur C. Clarke, and served as an official on the London Stock Exchange. With the publication of his next novel, *The Dangerous Edge*, Temple became a full-time writer. GAMMA 2 brings one of his most suspenseful science fiction tales to American readers for the first time. We believe you'll enjoy this tense adventure in space, wherein a British rocket crew attempt to kidnap a female alien from Pluto. (And for the latest Temple sf novel, see the Ace edition of *The Three Suns of Amara*.)

## THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

*William F. Temple*

It seemed to me I was taking part in some incredible ballet, slow and symbolic, paradoxically based on a lightning incident of the legendary past: a Scottish border raid.

The chieftain's young daughter stood with her back to us, alone, unsuspecting, half a mile from her village. Phillips and I converged gradually on her from behind, silent as the near-opaque mist which surrounded us.

We weren't moving in slow mo-

tion because we feared that she might detect us: there was no chance of that. In fact, we were making all possible speed, but our alloy space-suits were heavy even under the lesser gravity of Pluto. The alloy had to be really thick, for the dense atmosphere encompassing us was more than half composed of an acid gas which ate away metal as fast as sulphuric acid dissolves zinc.

Moreover, we had to be thoroughly insulated against the in-

tense cold of this sunless place.

It was one of those mad miracles of Nature that the girl needed no protection at all against either the cold or the corrosive atmosphere. Completely naked, she was at ease in her own element.

It was another miracle that, however different her internal structure, and with the certainty that her body cells were of a type beyond the knowledge, almost beyond the credence of modern biochemistry, her shape was humanoid. And very feminine. Her skin was smooth and white. She might have been a marble Greek goddess.

We reached her together and lifted her gently, trying not to hurt her with our metallic fingers. She was rigid and it was indeed as though we were carrying a marble statue back to the ship.

We followed the narrowing beam of the searchlight to its source on the hull of the *Icarus*, and waited at the door of Lock Two. There was a disturbance in the chemical-thick atmosphere around the ship. In the dim reflected light, it was streaming like inhaled smoke through an orifice in the hull: the pump's sucking mouth.

We examined our captive. This unknown Plutonian girl, whom we'd playfully styled "the chief-

tain's daughter, Pocahontas," had slightly changed her position. Her elbows, which had been pressed against her sides, were now a couple of inches from them.

Her hair was long and black, and she certainly had two human-seeming eyes, a nose and a mouth, but it was hard to discern details out of the direct shaft of light.

Then the pump ceased, its orifice closed like an iris lens, the atmosphere slowed in its swirling. The glass-lined storage tank was full to capacity with compressed Plutonian atmosphere.

In the ship, Captain Shervington pulled a lever, and the circular, safe-like door of Lock Two swung open. Like the rest of the hull, it was already deeply scarred with erosion. Whole patches were blistering and bubbling like paint under a blow-torch. We slid the stiff body through into the receptacle behind. It was like loading a frozen carcass into the refrigerator of a meat van.

The door closed on it and we made our entry through the other lock, into our own atmosphere. The air-lock door had scarce shut behind us when the *Icarus* began to take off, the Captain having left the pump and lock controls for the pilot's seat.

We had come some 3600 million miles to Pluto to spend ten

## THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

minutes there, get what we'd come for — and return home.

Two ships had been there before us. They had lingered too long. Neither returned.

The first reported the startling news that bleak Pluto was inhabited. It had landed on the outskirts of a community of some kind. The ships searchlights, enfeebled by the dark mist, just revealed the rough shapes of a group of smallish houses but nothing of their structure. They could have been the primitive huts of savages — or the ultra-modern dwellings of a highly-civilized race.

The natives, humanoid and naked, did not come running. They seemed either unperturbed or petrified. They seemed almost like statues. But not quite. The statues *were* moving, with infinitesimal speed, towards the ship.

So reported the captain after watching them for half an hour. It was his last report. His radio went dead. It was presumed that the acid atmosphere had eaten through the antenna and probably also fatally holed the hull.

The second ship didn't wait around. It sampled the atmosphere, got a rough idea of its nature and what it was doing to the ship, and took off again in a hurry. The skipper's last interference-distorted words were: "Main jets erratic,

ship difficult to control. This atmosphere seems to have eaten chunks out of the vents. Side squirts pushing us off balance. I'm afraid that we can't —"

The rest was silence.

We, the crew of the third ship. *Icarus*, were at least forewarned. We knew we'd have no time to stop and attempt communication with the Plutonians, especially as it was apparent that the tempo of a Plutonian's life compared with a human's was like a snail's compared with a fruit-fly's.

The only way for humans to contact Plutonian life was to capture a specimen of it and take it home to study at leisure . . . if it could be kept alive long enough. That was our mission.

We stewed in our suits as the *Icarus* fought to climb out of the Plutonian gravity pit, trying not to wonder too much about the condition of *our* vents. But they held. We reached the required speed and began the long coast home. It was a relief to shed both weight and the suits.

Phillips, biologist, biochemist, and medico, was now the most responsible man of the trio, as he had always been the most accomplished. The bigwigs of the Institute of Planetary Biology, in the faraway Cromwell Road, wanted to examine a living, functional Plu-

tonian, not merely to dissect a corpse.

Captain Shervington, his own highest hurdle successfully jumped, could afford indulgence when he saw anxiety creasing Phillips' sweaty brow.

"Don't worry, Phillips, we'll keep her in good shape. . . . It is a woman?"

Phillips nodded so nearly imperceptibly that I felt confirmation necessary. I said: "It's a woman, all right, skipper, and she's certainly in good shape."

"Let's have a closer look," said Shervington.

He moved, but the conscience-taut Phillips anticipated him, hauling himself down the rungs, hand under hand, to the lower deck where the girl floated weightlessly in the clearplast container, Lock Two. Her outline was faintly blurred by the misty atmosphere which had entered with her.

Phillips glanced at her, then busied himself with the pumps regulating the flow of fresh atmosphere from the supply stored under pressure in the big tank. Considering her extremely slow rate of respiration, there should be more than a sufficient supply to keep her alive during the six weeks voyage home. The big problem was that nobody knew what Plutonians ate or drank — or even

if they did.

The Captain and I looked her over carefully. With her long hair afloat, her eyes staring wide, she looked like Ophelia drowning.

Now that we could see her features properly, there was nothing really unhuman about them. The pupils of her eyes were unusually large, as though dilated by digitalis, but that was necessary for light-gathering on her dark home planet.

After long seconds, the skipper said quietly: "She's beautiful."

Captain Shervington mused: "I wonder what's in her mind and whether we'll ever contact it."

There was no more time for wondering: we had our immediate jobs to do. I, navigator and signaler, had to report to Earth via the moon-base link and take our bearings. Shervington had to check the ship's space-worthiness after its acid bath. Phillips had to study his charge.

The cosmic interference was bad, and Earth sounded like an ancient Edison phonograph. But I managed to get the report over, and later the faint cracked voice of Shepherd, boss of the project, filtered through: "Well done, *Icarus!*"

I looked through a porthole at the dusky receding bulk of Pluto. At about this distance, on the approach, we had regarded it ap-

## THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

prehensively, and the Captain had quoted wryly: "The undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns."

But now we were returning and the fear which had accumulated through long anticipation was rapidly dissolving. My spirit felt almost as airy as my body, and Shervington's report that the ship had escaped with negligible damage made my relief complete.

Fame and honor were the prospects now.

We returned to Pocahontas. Phillips was having a field day with the various remotely controlled clinical gadgets with which the clearplast container had been fitted by long-sighted scientists. He'd successfully clamped the pulse meter on her wrist and its indicator was registering a full swing every half-minute.

"That appears to mean she's living about forty times slower than we are," said Phillips. "At least, organically. It doesn't necessarily mean her thought processes are correspondingly slower, although, of course, they must be slower than ours."

Men had long known that in sub-zero temperatures life processes were incredibly sluggish. How the Plutonians and ourselves were ever to get mentally in step was another problem, but obviously

the initiative rested with us, the quicker-witted. If only a Plutonian could be kept alive under laboratory conditions on Earth, a way could surely be found.

Plutonian speech must be so slow as to be unintelligible to a human ear, each syllable perhaps minutes long. But if it were tape-recorded, and the playback speeded up to suit the comprehension of our lingual experts, and if their efforts at response were accordingly slowed down . . . there remained possibilities.

Phillips was currently fiddling with the blood-sampler. It was like an outsize hypodermic syringe swivelling freely on a bearing set in the clearplast. He was directing the needle-sharp point at Pocahontas' upper arm. An inch from where he was probing, on the white flesh, was a yellowish blob.

I indicated. "What's that?"

Phillips replied irritably: "A pinprick — I missed the main vein. It doesn't follow because her pulse is in the normal place her whole artery system corresponds to ours. Just give me a chance — I haven't even located her heart yet."

"Her blood is yellow?" asked the Captain, eyebrows raised.

"What color did you expect it to be — blue?" snapped Phillips, still having trouble manipulating the sampler.

Phillips found his mark, and drew off a tubeful of amber fluid — apparently it turned bright yellow only after congealment. He set it aside, then hauled himself across to the atmospheric tank, carrying a flask with a screw top. Just where the pipe left the tank for the container, there was a manually-controlled valve with an open outlet. Phillips screwed the flask into the outlet and turned the valve's handwheel.

The flask filled with the foggy atmosphere of Pluto. Phillips shut off the valve, stoppering the flask adroitly, and said: "These two samples will keep me busy for a bit. I'll see you later. Keep an eye on Pocahontas."

"Right," said Shervington. Phillips retired to his "stinks corner" up above. If he could successfully analyze the atmosphere, I would radio the formula to the Institute and they'd synthesize volumes of it in readiness for Pocahontas' arrival. He didn't expect to get far with the blood, working alone under no-gravity conditions, but he hoped at least to make a start in understanding Plutonian metabolism. A team could carry on from there, much faster, on Earth.

Six weeks without sustenance could kill a human. But that was the equivalent of only one day for Plutonian. Perhaps in less than an-

other Plutonian day, some satisfactory food could be prepared.

"Nevertheless," said Captain Shervington, after voicing this, "kidnapping a girl and starving her for two days is a bit rough. I hope we learn enough Plutonian to say we're sorry. Just her bad luck she happened to be out for a walk on her own when we landed."

"Good luck for us," I said. "The Institute wanted a female preferably, to get a fuller idea of the reproduction system."

"Maybe she just lays eggs, Graham."

"Maybe. You know, until I saw that yellow blood . . ." I trailed off.

The skipper looked at me quizzically. "You thought she wasn't so very different from us? You fancied, perhaps, some kind of Edgar Rice Burroughs romantic affair with her if she could be stepped up to our tempo?"

I grinned, and veered away. "I'd better test the radio link again."

The link was all right: the usual mixtures of words, crackles and repeat requests. I came back later, and we spent some time just watching the figure in the container. Pocahontas gradually changed her position to a more reposeful one, though her hands were beginning to clench. Her eyes became half closed and she seemed nearly



## THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

asleep.

"Her old man's going to wonder what the devil's happened to her," commented Shervington, and yawned. I yawned, too. I was beginning to feel pretty tired and surmised it was the unwinding after the peak of nervous tension. I rubbed my eyes: they were smarting a bit.

"I think—" began Shervington, relaxedly, then broke suddenly into a fit of coughing.

"Got a silly tickle in my throat," he said, hoarsely, afterwards.

I felt a similar irritation, began to cough, and my eyes streamed tears.

"Something's got into the atmosphere here," said the skipper, glancing around. Then: "Look at the valve! The damn fool!"

I looked at the valve on the tank of Plutonian atmosphere. It looked vaguely swimmy and it wasn't just because of my watering eyes: there was a faint mist hovering round the thing. The skipper cursed and dived at it, holding his nose. He spun the handwheel a turn or two and blundered back.

I felt heat prickle on my face, which might have been the sweat of fright or the touch of the escaped acid gas.

Phillips drifted down the ladder, carrying a notebook. "I've got this far, anyway. Shove it through the

ether, Graham. . . . What's that queer smell in here?"

The skipper controlled his anger. "You didn't shut that valve properly. Some of the poisonous stuff leaked out."

Phillips stared at the valve. "I *did* shut it—tight."

Shervington shrugged and said nothing. I asked: "Is that the atmospheric formula, Phil—you analyzed it all right?"

"Eh? Oh, yes. It's deadly stuff. Can't understand how Pocahontas can flourish in it. A real lungful of it would kill any man—unpleasantly. Just this page, Graham—get it right."

I took the notebook to my signals niche on the upper deck. I looked at the page of chemical symbols and knew it would be a headache to "get it right" via the current ion-blasted reception. I felt even more tired.

However, I was spared that particular headache. The moment I pressed the mike button, the set went dead. No transmission, no reception. Obviously no power. I examined the leads from the power unit: they were in order. I removed the top of the set, peered into the ordered multitude of transistors. Down below them, in a near-inaccessible corner, a screw terminal had somehow worked loose and the end of the relevant

power lead had become disconnected and drifted away.

I said something violent and idiotic, and hunted out a long, thin screwdriver. It had the tough razor edge necessary to deal with that slotted terminal. I finished again in the tool chest, and then:

"Graham!" A double-voiced shout, urgent with alarm, came from below. I dropped everything and thrust myself down the rungs, clumsily, because my muscles seemed to have lost strength. The tang of the acid gas hit me like smelling salts. Shervington and Phillips were both fiercely gripping the handwheel of the valve which was obviously leaking again.

"Get the big wrench," panted the skipper, red-faced with strain.

I got it. He and Phillips thrust it between the handwheel spokes and jammed the head under a wall bracket.

"That'll hold it," said Shervington, jerkily.

"What's going on?" I asked.

The skipper mopped his forehead. "We've caught a Tartar. Pocahontas is trying to kill us, that's all."

I stared at him, then at Pocahontas. Her eyes were quite closed now; so also were her hands, clenched into little fists.

"It must be psycho-kinesis," said Phillips. "The handwheel can't be

turning itself — there's no reason why it should: no vibration or anything. It undoes itself slowly but with tremendous power. It took two of us all this time to shut the valve again and keep it that way."

"It's taken a lot out of me," said the skipper. "I feel weak as hell."

"So do I," said Phillips.

"Me too," I said. "And I haven't been exerting myself. Do you think she could be tapping our strength in some way?"

The skipper shrugged, "Frankly, I don't know what to think."

"I believe you're right, Graham," said Phillips. "In some mediumistic way she's drawing off some of our energy and using it against us. Judging from her physique, unaided she wouldn't be able to turn that wheel against the resistance of any one of us."

"I've been in some peculiar situations in my time," declared the skipper, "but nothing to match this. Seems we've got to fight ourselves in order to stop ourselves from killing ourselves. Put the know-alls at the Institute in the picture, Graham — perhaps they can come up with a few helpful suggestions: they talk as if they have all the answers."

"The radio is out of order, protem." I told Shervington why.

"Bad maintenance," he grunted.

## THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

"Or psycho-kinesis," I joked, with a feeble grin, which became feebler when we all suddenly realized it might be no joke, at that.

"Get it fixed, anyhow," said Captain Shervington.

I started to go, then impelled myself to the handwheel and hammered with my fist at the wrench. I'd spotted that it was being slowly withdrawn by an invisible hand. The other two had to help me before we could force it back in place.

Breathing heavily, the skipper said: "This is becoming impossible. The damn valve's got to be watched every minute. How can any of us sleep, knowing that she's trying to flood the ship with poison gas? Phillips, can't you do something to make her unconscious? Drug her or something?"

Phillips scratched his head. "From the look of her she might be unconscious right now—or maybe in a state of trance. P.K. is a subconscious force. She mightn't even be aware of what her mind is doing. It may just be the natural sense of self-preservation functioning automatically."

"Nonsense!" said Shervington, emphatically. "She's not merely trying to save herself—she's deliberately trying to murder us!"

"Let's be fair," I said. "She didn't ask to be snatched away

from her home, her people, never to see her own planet again, condemned probably to die—for I think the odds are against our being able to keep her alive for very long."

Nobody had an opportunity to comment on that view. For the side jets of the ship began firing, swinging her round so that the sudden radial force pressed us tightly against one wall. Then the balancing jets steadied her and we were coasting along tail-first.

"Who the—" began the skipper, and then the main drive jets began blasting, decelerating *Icarus*, making the ceiling our floor and pinning us to it under several g. The ship gradually lost impetus. Presently, we were able to crawl, painfully and with swimming senses, towards the upper deck—which seemed like the lower deck at first, but became lessening so—and towards the control console.

Before we could reach it, the deceleration was completed and acceleration in the reverse direction had begun. The upper deck was again "above" us, and the ship was hurtling nose-foremost back towards Pluto.

When we got to the console, we could do nothing effective to change the situation. We still couldn't regain control of the ship. Admittedly, we had been weak-

ened and were slow and our brains were spinning, and only the Captain was an expert on the console. But even if we were properly fit, defeat would have been difficult to avoid when switches, levers, and stud buttons wouldn't retain their position for more than two seconds after we'd taken our fingers off them.

A mind employing many streamers of force, the Captain's own technical know-how, and our stolen strength, brushed our combined residual effort aside.

The tables had been turned. We were now the kidnapped, Pluto-bound.

We gave up and looked at each other's white faces.

"I'll pump her full of morphia," said Phillips, unsteadily.

"It's too late for experiments," said Shervington, rather shrill with nerve-strain. "This P.K. effect seems to be working at the speed of thought, and thought works a hell of a sight faster than organic processes. The morphia may take days to do its job — that's if it affects her at all. By then we'll all be dead. We've got to kill her first."

"No!" I exclaimed, shocked.

"Absolutely not!" exclaimed Phillips. "The Institute —"

"To hell with the Institute! *Their* skins are safe."

"She's *my* responsibility," said

Phillips, tightly. "I've got to have a living specimen —"

"Face the facts, you fool!" shouted the skipper. "We're not taking her back now — she's taking *us* back. To our deaths. It's her life or ours."

Phillips was leaning with his back against my signals desk. His knees were bent slightly under the steady acceleration. He held his head, and muttered: "Let me think. There must be another way. Give me time."

"Time!" The skipper echoed it thunderously.

And at that moment, Phillips' need for time ceased. Together with his life. Silently, with eyes and mouth wide open, he pitched forward, face down on the deck. The handle of my long, thin screwdriver protruded from under his left shoulder blade. The rest of the tool had skewered his heart.

I looked at him with horror. And then with sudden fear. The screwdriver was beginning to pull itself slowly from the wound.

"Out of here — quick!" snapped Shervington.

We scrambled madly down to the lower deck. Just as we hit it, the main drive cut out and there wasn't any more "down." Our leading strings broken, we reeled around like drunks.

I saw the wrench disengage it-

## THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

self from the handwheel and float loosely in the air. Immediately, the handwheel resumed its slow, inexorable unwinding. I wallowed over to it somehow and clung on. But my feet failed to find any purchase and the wheel began to turn me with it.

"Skip! Give me a hand here."

"Hold it a minute," he said, thickly.

I was holding it, but it wasn't doing any good. I was revolving like a joint of meat on a spit over a fire. But I saw what he was after and kept my mouth shut.

He reached it — the lever operating the door of Lock Two. He yanked it over, surprisingly meeting no opposition.

The circular door at the end of the container swung open. The Plutonian atmosphere, which had been held under considerable pressure, squirted out into the vacuum of space, carrying the drifting, weightless, alien girl with it.

Feet first, the beautiful body passed from our sight. Then Shervington closed the door behind it. He hung onto the lever, afraid that she would try to force the door of Lock Two open again. But she made no measurable attempt. Possibly she knew, drifting and slowly dying in space from asphyxiation, that even if the door were re-opened, there could be no way

back for her.

But she didn't quit trying to kill us.

She couldn't use any of the dead Phillips' strength against us. And she must be using some of her own strength to fight off death. But the handwheel maintained its slow spin.

And that wasn't all.

The bloodstained screwdriver came floating slowly down from the upper deck. It stopped, and hung in the air like the dagger in Lady Macbeth's vision. Then it leveled itself and came at me, point foremost.

I cried out.

Shervington swore and dived after it, groping clumsily. Luckily, it moved slowly enough for me to grab it with one hand. It was sticky, slippery — horrible. And seemed to have a life of its own. I tried to shove it aside but the thing came boring back at me as relentlessly as a guided missile.

The wheel kept unwinding.

Shervington, swearing continuously, was floundering about, grabbing handfuls of nothing.

Then Shervington got it with both hands. "Leave it to me," he gasped. I was glad to, and while he wrestled with it, I fought with the handwheel. My grip on it was like having my finger on the dying girl's pulse. I could feel the oppo-

sition gradually weakening.

Altogether, from the moment she was flung into space, it must have taken her all of ten minutes to die. If she hadn't divided her ebbing strength, she might yet have beaten us.

The screwdriver became inanimate, the wheel came to a standstill.

"Thanks, skipper," I said, presently. "We were wrong, and you were right — perfectly right — to kill her."

He looked at me, and said nothing. He began to turn the ship about. I assisted.

Afterwards, we brought Phillips' body from the upper deck. There could be no option; Phillips would have to leave us via Lock Two.

When it was done, Shervington stared expressionlessly through a port at the shadowy bulk of Pluto, now beginning to recede.

I heard him mutter: "The undiscovered country. . . . So it shall remain. Forever."



## CHASE

is America's Newest and Most Exciting Crime Fiction Magazine.

Published by the editors of Gamma, its first issues will contain names

familiar to the mystery and suspense fiction aficionado: Mickey

Spillane, Dell Shannon, Robert Bloch, Robert Turner, Dorothy B. Hughes,

Day Keene, Stuart Palmer, Henry Farrell, and Ian Fleming.

For exciting, suspenseful reading, don't miss it!

During the course of the interview which follows, Robert Sheckley answers a number of serious questions about his work, the science fiction field and his own personal background. His zany, Mad Hatter sense of humor, which is so much a part of Bob, has little chance to blossom, and such shaggy Sheckleyisms as "Are you still using that greasy kid stuff on your soul?" must, of necessity, fall by the wayside. (We are reminded of Bob's reaction when we told him we planned on doing a future interview with Robert Heinlein. "Who is this Heinlein fellow? I knew a Big Eddy Heinlein once, third-string shortstop for the Orioles. Then there was Showboat Charley-Bill Heinlein, famed for his collection of early Texas manhole covers. Gad, how the memories move and cluster in the bright red flames of the cherrywood fire . . .") But Sheckley's sense of "calculated madness" is very evident in his books, and we urgently recommend such collections as *Untouched By Human Hands*, *Notions Unlimited*, *Shards of Space*, etc. They prove our point. Thus far, since 1954, nine books have appeared in the sf/fantasy field under the Sheckley byline — and all of them are (as Anthony Boucher puts it) "delightfully fresh in concept, development and writing." And Bob's "Stephen Dain" spy thrillers, *Calibre 50*, *Dead Run*, *Live Gold*, etc. have earned an equally strong reputation with suspense addicts. Aside from the sf and suspense fields, Sheckley's work has been seen in *Esquire*, *Playboy*, *Collier's*, *Bluebook* and *Today's Woman*. Headquartered in NYC's Greenwich Village, Robert Sheckley ranges the globe in search of new story material; we consider ourselves lucky to have pinned down the fast-moving Mr. S. long enough for this revealing interview.

## THE GAMMA INTERVIEW:

*Robert Sheckley*

GAMMA: Let's start right out by discussing the state of today's science fiction. As a writer who has specialized in sf over the last decade just how do you evaluate the

field?

SHECKLEY: When I first began writing sf, in the early fifties, I found the field tremendously exciting and challenging, seemingly

unlimited in its potential. Now, this is a sort of statement usually made about sf by its boosters — but I no longer believe it. The formal limits, such as those one finds in the western or mystery field, are not so evident, yet they are still there. Sf is much more related to those forms than it is to the general literary scene. In sf, the feeling of extraordinary potential is usually felt by outsiders; the implicit limits and boundaries are felt by the insiders, the writers and editors in the field. The veterans know that most, if not all, of sf is a series of careful variations around stock themes. Sf is comfortably liberal, but rarely revolutionary. It uses the jargon of science, but only infrequently the substance. When it gets literary it is often “precious.” Bold experimentation, in the world of sf, is the weary old notion of dispensing with plot. Frank sex, in sf, is the hypothetical study of the love life of a parthenogenetic female. And most satire in the field is a hearty swing at a straw figure.

GAMMA: Sounds like you’ve gone sour on science fiction. Is this the case?

SHECKLEY: No — I’m just being realistic about it. Please remember the *context* of my statements. I’m comparing sf with what I believe it could be, but against other cate-

gory forms, such as the mystery, sf is a hundred years ahead. Yet it fails to live up to its pretensions; the sort of experimentation which sf pretends to carry out is simply never done. You can find it *outside* the field, in the novels of Hawkes, Pynchon and Heller. Reviewers recognize this. They simply ignore the field, or stick it over in the corner with the mysteries and the westerns. And I agree with them. Sf scores high on hope, low on nerve.

GAMMA: Who’s to blame for this “lack of nerve”?

SHECKLEY: The people who publish and write it, of course. Sf seems to be a haven for skilled, artistically-inclined people who are satisfied with a low level of aspiration. Sf writers dream of truth and splendor, then sit down and turn out a silly little story about a robot who’s lost his best friend. Story completed and published, the people involved gather to congratulate each other and to sneer at the indifferent world which just doesn’t give a damn about their fragile little notions. At its best — and it *can* be very exciting — sf provides good reading. But it does not do what it *thinks* it does. Yet, on the whole, it is more interesting than most fiction being written today. Its greatest fault is that it maintains so



## THE GAMMA INTERVIEW:

many deadly illusions about itself.

GAMMA: You have a reputation as an extremely fast and prolific writer. How do you manage to turn out so many salable words?

SHECKLEY: I don't think I'm a particularly fast writer. I wrote a lot more in the early days of my career. But I was under extreme pressure to write fast, send my work out, and get going on something else. It seemed impossible, for one thing, to support me and mine on the rates which the sf magazines paid. No matter how fast I wrote, I barely kept my debts within manageable limits. Also, I *wanted* to write fast; I was tremendously exhilarated that first year or so by actually doing stories that editors were buying. My agent (at a time when I had only sold two stories) told me that he would sell *every word* of sf that I wrote. And he did, too! It was rough, of course, that first year, doing one or two stories a week — but I was young enough to want it rough. I felt that writing should be difficult; that a real writer was a man who worked himself into a state of exhaustion, caught a few hour's sleep, then charged back to work. Actually, I never paid much attention to output as such; the important thing for me was to be working.

GAMMA: Wasn't 1953 your big-

gest year with regard to published stories?

SHECKLEY: Probably—because it was sf's biggest. Forty magazines, as I recall, were out that year, and I had stuff in most of them, maybe 30 short stories and novell-ettes in all. Under my own name and pen names such as Finn O'Donovan.

GAMMA: Just how many stories *have* you published, to date?

SHECKLEY: About 130, plus eight novels — including a new detective novel which should be out by the time this issue of GAMMA is.

GAMMA: Which brings us to your *non-sf* output. Are you moving away from science fiction toward, say, the suspense field?

SHECKLEY: Not really. I'm doing this series of "Steve Dain" novels for Bantam. Spy stuff, with an international flavor. Lots of fun, but I don't think of it as a field to replace sf.

GAMMA: Then what kind of writing *do* you want to try?

SHECKLEY: I still enjoy doing sf. The free form of *Journey Beyond Tomorrow*, for example, was very enjoyable; I learned a lot doing it. But most writers want to experiment. I did one "serious" novel, *Man in the Water*, which almost came off as I'd planned it — and I have a yen toward biography, toward history, but I may never get

around to a book of non-fiction because fiction fascinates me so much more. Right now I'm on a novel which fits into no particular category. In the main, I just write what interests me the most.

GAMMA: Many writers hold a variety of odd jobs before settling down to full-time production. Is this true with regard to your own background?

SHECKLEY: Definitely. I've had my share of odd jobs—some pretty wild—but I always felt that I'd be a writer. Even from childhood. In grade school I was turning out poetry and short plays.

GAMMA: Let's trace the pattern. When and where born?

SHECKLEY: July 16, 1928, in Brooklyn. Grew up in New Jersey. My father is still in the insurance business; my mother taught school in Canada before her marriage. They both wanted me to choose the type of work in which I'd be happy—but felt that free-lance writing was a very chancey way to earn a living. And, of course, they were right!

GAMMA: What influenced you toward writing, as a youth?

SHECKLEY: The Oz books were certainly an influence; so was Milne. Then, a little later, Burroughs, Wells, Lovecraft, Kipling, Victor Hugo. . . . When I majored in English at New York University

I got hooked on Hemingway, Kafka and Conrad. And on most of the sf writers. Particularly Henry Kuttner. At NYU I took a creative writing course, given by Irwin Shaw—wrote a trunkful of stories.

GAMMA: Did you have any fiction accepted at college?

SHECKLEY: Yes. Two stories appeared in my senior year. I was writing sf, fantasy, detective, light love—anything I got an idea for. One of the two published stories in college was a fantasy, which won an award that season. Made my first sale about eight months after graduation (in the fall of 1952) to Bill Hamling for *Imagination*. A fantasy. Next two sales were sf—which got me going in that direction as a professional.

GAMMA: What about those wild jobs? You didn't support yourself solely by writing, did you?

SHECKLEY: Not for a while. Right after college I worked in an aircraft plant as an assistant technical metallurgist. That meant I X-rayed jet engine parts! Stayed with this for five months. Before that, in high school, I worked as guitarist in various dance bands. Did this in the army, too. Other jobs: intermittent farm work (from which I developed a hearty hatred of cows), man of all labor for Carnation milk, pretzel salesman, assistant landscape gardener, char-

## THE GAMMA INTERVIEW:

ter sailboat operator, boardman in a hand-painted necktie studio, warehouseman, machine operator in a cold wave powder factory, night man in a bar. . . . I hitchhiked from California back to New Jersey, where I joined the army. They sent me to Korea for 15 months.

GAMMA: Did you do any writing there?

SHECKLEY: Nothing but letters. And not too many of those. This was back in 1946-48, between wars. Spent my first six months as a border guard on the 38th parallel. We'd meet these Russians guarding their side of the line — and some of them carried submarine guns. This sort of armament made the more impressionable among us quite nervous. We were expecting war to break out in Korea — and we used to speculate just how far they'd push us back the first day. Eventually I was transferred to Seoul to work in a regimental dance band, playing my guitar. I was also helping with the company newspaper and acting as payroll clerk. In rank, I progressed proudly up to pfc, then was knocked down to private, then progressed again to pfc. Even as a pfc I was never haughty to those unfortunates below me.

GAMMA: We've heard that you lived and wrote a great deal at

sea. True or false?

SHECKLEY: True, I guess I'd qualify as the only sf writer to have sailed singlehanded from Florida to NY and back. I fell in love with sailboats at a tender age; used to dream of cruising the Dangerous Archipelago. My first boat was an 18' fin keel day sailer, which I kept for three years. Took it all over Long Island Sound. Sold it, and then lost my head competely and bought a 31' cruising sloop; a magnificent performer which only required endless money and work to keep it going. This was when I singlehanded it down the Intracoastal Waterway to Florida, stayed there six months, then sailed back. Spent many splendid hours on the water, a few bad ones — fighting an exhausting succession of engine failures. That was the last boat I owned. After that, I crewed for friends and occasionally hired out as mate. Had a ball helping bring a 38' ketch from St. Thomas to New York.

GAMMA: Don't you ever want to have your own boat again?

SHECKLEY: Sure, but not unless I can live within five minutes walk of the dock. You really can't own a boat and live in the Village.

GAMMA: You've lived in Spain, too, haven't you?

SHECKLEY: Yes, in Ibiza, one of

the Balearic Islands. This was during the summer and early fall of 1960. At that time Ibiza was a very inexpensive place and very pleasant. The island was filled with expatriate American writers . . . I wrote well and happily there, and a deep sense of peace descended on me for several months. Then I got restless again.

GAMMA: Your wife, Ziva, shares this itch to keep moving, doesn't she?

SHECKLEY: Sure does. I met her through Phil Klass (known to sf as William Tenn). Her background is zionistic and humanistic. She's worked at various editorial posts. Once answered letters from lovelorn teenagers for a national magazine. She's listening to me right now, so I dare not reveal that she is eight feet tall and speaks only an archaic branch of Hebrew.

GAMMA: Bob, we've heard that the Italian film company, Titanus, has purchased your story, *Seventh Victim*, as a starring vehicle for Marcello Mastroianni. How do you feel about working for movies and/or TV?

SHECKLEY: Ambivalent. Film seems a very exciting form, but it would call for a great deal of my time and energy, which would be at the expense of my fiction. I've sold, or optioned, four other stories

aside from *Seventh Victim*, but don't plan to script any of them. In fact, a friend in Chicago told me that *Man in the Water* was recently filmed in Key West. This may be true; it *was* bought some while back. As for television, my only experience in this medium was with the early *Captain Video*. I did one series for them, 15 half-hour shows. The pay was lousy, and the pressure (a script a day!) was intense. I can't say I enjoyed it much.

GAMMA: What other interests have you, aside from travel?

SHECKLEY: Well, the guitar. I played swing for many years, then became interested in flamenco and classical guitar. Then there's chess, which I've been hung on for years. More recently, bridge. Photography, off and on. And — reading. I devour ten books a week, fiction, philosophy, mysteries, war journals, biographies. All grist for the literary mill.

GAMMA: Among your own stories, which is your favorite?

SHECKLEY: *The Prize of Peril*, from *F&SF*. I have others, but this one comes first, I'd say. And I'm happy to see that a lot of my readers seem to favor it too. In *Prize* there was less discrepancy between the original intent and the final execution.

GAMMA: A final question: as a

## THE GAMMA INTERVIEW:

creative writer, are you satisfied with your progress over the last dozen years?

SHECKLEY: Well, I'm not *unsatisfied*. I've written what I *wanted* to write. If I'd wanted to have a serious go in any other direction I would have had a shot at it. I have no regrets about having made my name in science fiction; the field has, for the most part, been good

to me. Whether I'll ever leave it entirely is open to doubt.

GAMMA: What's next on the Sheckley schedule?

SHECKLEY: Tel Aviv. We're leaving right away. I'll pick up some background material for a new Steve Dain thriller over there. Then . . . Rome, London . . . who knows where? It's a small world!



---

## ATTENTION SF FANS!

Watch for IMPACT 20, William F. Nolan's exciting new book of stories due soon from Paperback Library. Here are twenty tales which sting and shock the senses, a unique blend of science fiction, fantasy, suspense, satire and terror. From horror to high comedy, from the wacky to the wonderful . . . you'll meet the last man under Los Angeles, a Bug-Eyed Monster who reads Plato, a female demon who collects human souls, a wife who can be switched on and off, a pair of mis-matched honeymooners in the jungles of Venus . . . all from the free-wheeling imagination of WILLIAM F. NOLAN, whose fiction has been called:

"*Wonderfully mad . . . unclassifiable.*" Anthony Boucher,  
New York Times

"*Fascinating . . . beautifully written.*" Rod Serling

"*Strange . . . off-beat.*" Writer's Digest

"*Remarkable.*" Alfred Hitchcock

With a special Introduction by RAY BRADBURY.

Here's a book no sf/fantasy/suspense fan will want to miss!

. . . On sale in November, 1963, at 50¢ per copy

---

The current activities of Charles E. Fritch seem to be evenly divided between editing and writing. In addition to his work at GAMMA, he is co-editing a new crime magazine, *Chase*, with Jack Matcha and has undertaken the editorship of two original paperback anthologies, dealing with humorous science fiction and fantasy in one hand and with crime/detective stories on the other. He is, at the same time, working on an sf novel and new short fiction such as this story in GAMMA 2. He'll soon be leaving for Europe, where he hopes to cross the path of Robert Sheckley in Rome (see this issue's *GAMMA Interview*). Upon his return, Fritch plans on launching yet another magazine in addition to tackling some anthologies. A collection of his short stories, *Much Ado About Plenty*, is also in the planning stage. "As an editor I must be able to defend myself against writers," he says. "Therefore, I am now taking a class in Judo and Karate. The next time a rejection-crazed writer storms into the office I'll be able to flip him out the window with very little exertion. Of course, if it's a female writer I may have to utilize some special holds."

## CASTAWAY

*Charles E. Fritch*

He didn't know how long he had been there. It may have been years, or even centuries. In this world of eternal day there was no way of telling the passage of time. The spaceship's chronometer was dead, as the spaceship itself was dead, as someday he would be dead. The rocket had crashed on this oxygen planet, breathed its last mechanical sigh and died.

Jordan — that was his name; that much he knew. He'd forgotten a

great many things during the long years, but those things didn't matter. Jordan was his name, and he clung to the identity with the grasp of a dying man.

A dying man, he thought. How long? How long?

Between the twin suns the planet rotated slowly, warmed and illuminated first by one sun and then by the other. There was no need for clothing, for the air was warm and there was no one on

## CASTAWAY

the planet except him; besides, all clothing had crumbled into dust long ago. How long? Months, years, decades? It seemed like centuries.

For her felt different. Ageless and yet aging. He found himself growing old without the discomforts of growing old. After a while, he didn't even mind being alone. It was a terrible thing at first, being alone. If only the radio had worked, even if only the receiver, so he could hear a human voice; but the twin suns blocked communication. And after a while, after a long while, he forgot about it.

He remembered the crash and the darkness that followed. He had stirred his eyelids, opened them and gazed into the yellow sky he would come to hate. He felt the wind caress him with a gentle hand. He felt the soft green-furred ground beneath him. I'm alive, he thought.

It was a pleasant thought, but unexpected. He recalled approaching this planet with his spaceship wobbling, bursting spasmodic jets of flame through torn tubes, frantically working controls that wouldn't respond as they should. What had caused it he would never know; some defective wire perhaps or worn insulation or any of a thousand reasons. It didn't

matter. The jet tubes blew, forcing him toward the twin suns, toward the single planet between the twin suns. His heart held no hope; he had expected to die.

But he was alive. He remembered sitting up and feeling his bones and stretching and wondering at this miracle. Fifty yards away the spaceship lay, a broken metal hulk that should have been his coffin. Great gaping wounds stood from it like evil sores, and mechanical veins sprouted lifeless from the holes. It was a miracle he had lived through it. A second miracle that the planet contained an atmosphere he could breathe without discomfort.

But greater miracles were forthcoming.

He took small handweapons from the spaceship and explored the planet. It was very much like his Earth, but much smaller, about one-fourth he figured, although the gravity was similar. There was green grass and there were evergreen trees and there were small ponds and rivers which reflected the sky and the great yellow suns and there was even a small ocean. He stood at the edge of this ocean and wondered what lay beyond. Years — or was it decades? — later he found out. He wandered across the face of the planet, occasionally building crude but serviceable

rafts to navigate bodies of water, and found the world the same as it was where he had crashed. There were no intelligent creatures to be found. Except for the animals, he was alone.

There were animals which looked like squirrels, others which resembled deer, the waters held a multicolored fish not too unlike those of Earth. This offered some consolation. He even made friends with one squirrel-like animal, calling it "Friday," although he didn't know what day it was he'd crashed or found the creature.

He used the spaceship for his base of operations, though he spent all his time out of doors. If any spaceships flew near the planet they might see the crashed rocket and investigate; that was his hope. Often he shaded his eyes from the glare of the sun and gazed into the bright sky, searching for a gleam of metal, but he found none. Slowly, his own rocket rusted, turning a dull coppery color.

Food was everywhere, fruits and berries which could be had for the reaching, and small animals could easily be caught. But he wasn't hungry. At first this puzzled him. After the crash he'd taken inventory of his rations aboard the spaceship, mentally calculating how long they'd last.

After several days — or what he considered to be several days — he tried to force rations down his throat, thinking he would starve if he didn't. But the food was repugnant, and he felt worse for having tried to eat it.

He went to shave and found his beard was not growing. He looked into the cracked mirror aboard the spaceship at his smooth young features. I'm twenty-four now, he thought; how old will I be when I'm rescued — or will I spend the rest of my life here?

At that thought, he angrily picked up a stool and smashed his only mirror into fragments. He had cause to regret that, for later when he looked into ponds of clear water that bore his reflection he tried to see what lines lay in his features to calculate how long he had been on this planet. After a while, he forgot about it.

After a while, he forgot about most things. Most things, but not all. At first, he strained and fretted and cursed and glanced a thousand times at the empty sky. But after a while, calmness returned, his mind grew placid and reasonably content. But one thing remained to torment him.

One thing, Space. Its cool reaches out there just beyond that sun, out in that yellowness that becomes black as the backest vel-



## CASTAWAY

vet, with the stars like blazing diamonds. He was twenty-four, and all of space lay before him like a great challenge, like a beckoning finger, inviting.

"No one could ever know what it meant to me," he told Friday. "No one. It was almost an obsession. I remember when I was in my 'teens, the way I used to stand and stare at the stars. I'd spend the whole night just standing there and watching the stars and planets and the galaxies whirling about the heavens, looking at the universe as though it were a great celestial circus. And I'd say to myself, 'Someday, I'm going out there. Someday I'm going out there and take apart some of those flaming pinwheels and see what they're made of. I'll go farther than anyone has ever gone before, and then farther than that. I'll discover suns and worlds no one has ever known existed, and I'll find out if the universe is round after all, and if it is I'll find out what's on the outside of it.'"

Jordan laughed. The laugh was not bitter, but it was disillusioned. Friday sat on a nearby rock contemplating the Earthman with large round eyes that looked almost thoughtful.

"It was a good dream, Friday, but only a dream. You'll probably never know how I felt about it.

This is your world, your planet. You can climb the highest tree on it and look down on the world and know you've accomplished what you've set out to do. And yet sometimes I wonder if even you don't sit up there in the highest tree and look up at the sun and wonder about it and wonder about what may be beyond."

He sighed. "It's a strange longing, and one not easily forgotten. I don't see how I'll ever forget it." He looked up and shrugged. "And yet I haven't seen a star or the night sky in—how long has it been? It's always day here, there's always a sun in the sky. The universe outside could have been destroyed, with all the stars and the planets and the galaxies extinguished like so many candles. I may never know."

Friday looked up at him sympathetically. Jordan laughed and reached out to pet the animal, but it scampered warily away and took up a fresh position nearby.

"You're a good friend," Jordan said. "I must have told you the story of my life at least a dozen times now, but always you act as though you're interested; not many friends would be so patient."

It was good to have someone to talk to. Jordan was grateful. And then, suddenly—or *was* it suddenly?—the time came when the

animal was gone. Jordan found him dead a short distance from the animal's tree home; it was as though Friday wanted to see the Earthman once more but didn't make it.

Jordan cried unashamedly over the body of his friend, remembering the pleasant times they'd spent together, with the Earthman tossing a nut or a berry for the animal to scamper for, or perhaps just talk out the things that troubled him or the things that pleased him, with Friday sitting quietly by, pretending interest and occasionally making some small chattering noise that made Jordan smile.

But death was real and death was unpleasant and death came without regard for friendship. Someday, I too will die, he thought, and then my dreams and my desires will not even be memory.

He buried Friday beneath the tree that was his home, and then stood for a moment, eyes misted, staring at the grave. A sudden chattering brought his eyes upward, to the crotch of a tree, where another animal squatted on haunches and regarded him with frank curiosity.

"Friday," Jordan breathed.

No, that was impossible. There were differences, even among the

animals, and as he looked, he could detect them. A subtle difference in the placement of colors on the fur, a different tapering to the ears and the bushy tail, an individual idiosyncrasy even in the automatic twitching of the nose.

Jordan turned away sadly and went back to the rocket. The spaceship was a skeleton now, rusted and almost toppling beneath its own weight. He didn't look at it. He sat down on a rock in the sunlight.

The animal leaped upon a nearby rock, as Friday used to do, and regarded the Earthman.

Jordan felt a lump in his throat. "I wonder if you knew Friday," he said to the animal. "Maybe you were even relatives. Perhaps a cousin. That's it, you look like you might be a cousin. Friday used to sit there just the way you're doing, and I used to tell him about the other worlds in this great big universe. Funny, he never complained about being limited to this planet. I wish I could be as content."

In the days that followed — days, was it, or weeks or months? — Jordan grew to like the small furry animal. He called it Friday; he knew that Friday wouldn't mind, and at times it seemed to the Earthman that Friday actually lived in this animal.

"That's the advantage of a fam-

## CASTAWAY

ily," Jordan said. "Through offspring you achieve immortality, passing a part of yourself on from generation to generation, so that in a sense you actually live on after death. But what of my death?"

He didn't like to think of that. Not because he was afraid of it, because he wasn't. But there were so many things he had wanted to do, so many places out there in the universe to see, so many that it would take a million million lifetimes to see only a small part of it. Out there the world would go on, of course, without him, and the stars would still be there without ever knowing he was alive.

But he couldn't help but wonder at the cruelty of it. At least, he thought, there should be night.

But there wasn't; there wasn't the slightest inkling that such a thing could exist. The planet rotated at an even pace between the two suns. When one sun was not in the sky, the other was; when one left, the other appeared. And there was no twilight period, no brief instant when a faint pinpoint of starlight might pierce the atmosphere. Yet Jordan never forgot to look for it.

During all the years — how many? he wondered — no spaceship came. It was his one hope, for only then could he see the night

again and the stars shining through it. His own spaceship was red dust now. It takes a long time for metal to become dust, he remembered. How long? Years. Decades.

He looked into the quiet pools of water at his reflection gazing back at him. It was an ancient face, wrinkled and incredibly old. He looked at his hands, and at his naked body, and found them the color and texture of burned leather, with the bones showing through.

Dozens of Fridays had sat upon the rocks and patiently listened to his story. He had forgotten many things, but he never forgot the blackness of space and the stars that might have shared his destiny. He buried each animal tenderly, weeping for the friend he had lost. And each time Friday came reincarnated to listen to him, to keep him company during the long lonely vigil.

"I'm an old man," he said. "An old, old man. Before long, I'll be gone."

He walked across the fields and among the trees and down to the ocean, knowing he would soon not be able to do this. He felt a gradual lessening of strength, an overall weakness that slowly crept over him. After a while, he remained in the vicinity of the rocket crash, near the last few fragments that

had not become dust and blown away. And then, his strength gone, he sat beneath a tree near the edge of the clearing.

"And here I'll die," he thought.

Even with it so close, he did not regret death. The only regret he felt was regret at not seeing the stars again. He sat quietly in the shade and thought of the many years that had gone by. If he had required food, he would have starved, for after a while he lacked the strength to move at all. The animal often sat nearby, a quizzical look on its squirrel features, as though wondering why no sound came from the lips of this strange creature that had once talked to it.

Jordan sat there thinking silently to himself. Jordan — that was all that there was left now, the identity, the name, and even that would be gone before long. How long would it be, he wondered, before even consciousness left? How long had it been? It might have been centuries, for space-ships do not crumble into dust easily, and yet he had seen his do just that. He might have lived many lifespans on this strange planet with its eternal sameness; it had made him not need food, had caused his body to grow old without becoming sickly. Like a spaceship collapsing into dust, he thought, with the very atoms of

his body growing old and feeble. And one day — one day it would happen. One day his body could not even be able to keep its grasp on that thin spark of life that lay within it, and then he would die.

He waited.

He waited patiently while the planet rotated on its axis and the twin suns chased each other across the sky. He waited, dying, while the forest grew on around him, and animals came to stare at him and wonder. He waited, and his body grew old and brittle, until it seemed the skin would crack open like a dry riverbed baked in the sun, until it seemed as though his bones were a dry powder within him, as though his blood had ceased to be.

He stared straight ahead, for he had not even the strength to move his eyes. He could not see his body, but he knew it must have withered to near nothingness, for when a gentle breeze came he could feel his body tremble like a leaf in a windstorm, as though it were a pattern of dust that would shatter and fall in a meaningless cloud. He stared straight ahead with eyes that grew weak and weaker, staring at the empty stretch of clearing and the forest that lay beyond, remembering in his mind what was on the other side of that. He sat, not moving

## CASTAWAY

because he could not move, and thought of the stars he would never see.

He waited, while the years passed uncounted.

And one day the spaceship came.

It came down out of the yellow sky, all silver and flame, and settled in the clearing before his eyes. It was a new ship, like a freshly minted coin, sturdy and powerful, with a promise of lightning velocities in its proud lines. Two men descended a ladder to the ground, tall Earthmen in spacesuits.

Jordan's mind cried out in greeting. He tried to open his mouth to speak, but he felt no muscles move at his demand. These men came from the stars, he knew. How long had it been? The spaceship was centuries more advanced than his. In such a craft the light-years of interstellar space would be nothing; the beckoning fingers of the farthest reaches of the universe could be obeyed. These men could take him into space, beyond the blinding glare of the twin suns, and he could have one last look at the stars.

The Earthmen stopped by the rust fragments that was once a spaceship and looked down at it, wondering. They walked cautiously about the clearing, peering this

way and that.

They don't see me, Jordan thought wildly, they don't see me sitting here by the tree. Here. Over here. I've been waiting for you!

But no sound came. His lips didn't even move.

The two Earthmen returned to their spaceship, climbed the ladder. With a tight, sinking feeling, Jordan watched them enter the rocket, saw the airlock door swing shut. His last chance, about to blast off on wings of flame, forever.

He struggled. He tried to raise his arm, a leg, tried to move his lips, his head. He could feel his ancient body shudder gently under the strain, feel the very particles shake from a precarious balance like decayed bricks from an old, old building standing only from habit.

And then, suddenly he was free. He walked, ran, flew to the edge of the forest, into the clearing, to the great silver spaceship. He stood beneath it and shouted, "Here, here I am! Look! Look down here! Don't take off yet! I've been waiting for you! Down here!"

But the rocket grumbled, and great sheets of golden flame swept down over him, blinding him, cutting off all sight of the grass and the trees and the sky and even the

glaring sun overhead.

The spaceship was gone, a dot that became less than a dot and then nothing, a memory, a dream. Sadly, Jordan turned away. At the foot of the tree where he had sat was a meaningless pattern of dust; he looked at it, puzzled for a moment, wondering.

He felt weightless. He felt he could fly. Experimentally, he rose from the ground. He flew. Below him, the forest grew small, the world became a round ball, with rivers and ponds and oceans in one vast panoramic view.

What did it mean? he wondered. What did it mean?

His body must have died. No, that was not it. His body had lasted until death could not touch it. The air must have had something to do with it; he recalled the Earthmen had worn spacesuits. His body had grown old, and older, and then older still. It had grown so old that it had disintegrated at a movement, but that was not really death. And if it did not really die, but merely aged until it could age no longer, until the very fabric became not a fabric at all — what would prevent the mind, the consciousness, from continuing on?

Jordan knew the answer: he was no longer planet bound, no longer prisoner to gravity. He knew it as he left the planet far, far below him wrapped in its haze of atmosphere, as he swept past the nearest golden sun, brushing it with a mental finger. And then he was clear of it.

Night burst upon him like a velvet mantle, cool with ice-crystal patterns of stars. He hung poised for a brief moment, centuries of emotion flooding through him. He whirled excitedly then, looking this way and that.

Here were the stars, and the constellations, and the island universes, and the nebulae that curved and spiraled and stretched in great gaseous bands across the heavens like fiery diamonds in some vast showcase. And here, and here, and here were the others, all of them, all of them waiting.

Softly, he spoke their names as though they were old friends not seen in too long a time. It would take a million million lifetimes to visit only a small number of them, but he had that and more.

"Which way first?" he wondered. "Which way?"

Around him, patiently, the universe waited.

Having just completed two summer teaching courses (in science fiction and the short story) at UCLA and Los Angeles State College, as well as a month at MGM prepping a screen treatment of *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, Charles Beaumont plans a trip to England where he says he'll "go to vintage car races and work on my novel." He will still continue to do outside work for *Twilight Zone*—and his latest screen assignment involves a modernized version of Poe's *Masque of the Red Death*. With co-editor William F. Nolan, Beaumont has just wrapped up his second auto racing anthology (*When Engines Roar*—Bantam, 1964), and hopes that his next hardcover will be "the big one," the novel on which he has been working for some months. In marked contrast to his folk fantasy, *Mourning Song*, which appeared in *GAMMA 1*, Beaumont now offers us a story of a rebel in the future, who defiantly climbs a Very Special Tree.

## SOMETHING IN THE EARTH

*Charles Beaumont*

The old man came into the room and sat down on the edge of the bed and put his hands together. He sat there without moving for several minutes while his wife waited patiently or impatiently: her expression was always the same. Then the old man said, "They're going to kill us."

His wife reached out and touched his wrists. "I'm sorry, dear," she said.

"Kill us every one until we're all gone; rip us up and cut off our legs and our arms, burn us to little black cinders . . . then, forget we ever existed."

"Hateful people!"

"Yes. Tomorrow we'll be dead and gone and that'll be the end of us."

His wife raised herself in the bed and stroked his forehead with damp fingers. "That's a shame," she said.

The old man got up and walked slowly to a window. "I can't understand it," he said slowly.

His wife settled back onto her pillows. "Well, you know, if you'll think back, dear—it *has* been a long time since anybody has come to see us."

The old man said nothing.

"Over a year, I'll bet. Aunt Jeaness was the last, and she came only because I wrote and asked her."

"You — asked her?"

"You looked so sad, dear. I couldn't stand to see you that way."

The old man remembered how he had taken the fat woman out into the forest and showed her every tree, and had her stand quietly so she could hear the insects and the birds. It had been almost like the beautiful days, when the children came from the cities, from miles away, to feel grass and small wet leaves.

The old man tried not to think of these times. He looked at his wife.

"What I mean, dear, is — well, isn't it just possible that they might have their reasons?"

"Of course, yes! They explained very carefully; with graphs and charts and great whole books all bloated with statistics. I told them, 'Why not go and build your houses on Mars, build them on the moon, anywhere!' Impossible: no choice. They must build here; and we must die."

The wife clenched her fists. "Stop saying 'we'! I'm tired of it. Not you, not me! Just — trees."

The old man's eyes widened.

"Do you mean that?"

"I mean it. For a hundred years and more I've lived with you in this place and never a complaint from me, never. Now we've got to leave and I'm glad and —"

"The mountains!" the old man cried. "You didn't care when they took away the mountains! When we watched them dry up the rivers and level the fields and put their cities over all the earth — you've lied!"

"I love you."

"And when the world was turned to stone, all but this little corner, you weren't really glad . . ."

The old man turned and rushed from the room. He ran down the hall of the house and out into the night. He ran until each breath was a sharp pain inside him. Then he stumbled and sat down and tried to think, but he could only cough.

When he breathed again, finally, the thoughts came. They came, and his hands moved across the soft grass, feeling the dying leaves, tracing their slender veins with his fingers.

He rose and walked to where the forest grew thick with tall trees. He walked past the trees, putting out his hands and touching the rough bark surfaces, running his palms along the hardened syrup, caressing the small twigs but taking care not to injure them.



## SOMETHING IN THE EARTH

The ground was soft beneath his feet with the softness of damp tufted grass and fallen leaves.

He walked.

They will murder us, he thought. Eat us with tin teeth and spit us out into flames and we will die, slowly. When we're gone, they will lay over our grave a tomb of steel and stone. And then *they* will live here, and in all the world *there* will not be a blade of grass nor a single tree. And children will be born and raised who will never know the robin's song, whose hands will know only the feel of cold metal.

He walked and tried to disregard his head which throbbed with pain; from time to time he stopped while the smaller creatures flew out of the dark to draw the blood from his neck and arms. And when he stopped he listened, too, for the gentle rustle of other creatures, running away or — the braver ones — edging cautiously closer. From the corners of his eyes he caught the tentative movements. But he made no sign.

They will kill you too, he thought. Once they kept big parks where you might go; the parks are gone, so they will kill you.

Once the old man stooped and picked up a twig not yet saturated with damp, still brittle: he turned the twig over and over in his

hands, remembering.

Now he talked aloud to the trees in the forest. And his voice was soft in the wind that came through the thousand high branches.

The trees seemed to listen — and the voices of all the forest creatures ceased; now there was only the sound of the old man's soft voice.

"Once in the earth," the old man said, "we were everywhere. We stretched across the mountains clear to the deserts and to the very edges of the great waters. And only our friends moved among us, those who loved us because we were their shelter and their food and their life. You —" the old man paused and thumped the bole of a giant sequia — *you* remember. When the vines hung from your arms and the animals ate from you!" He walked to another tree, not a sapling, but one young in the years of trees. "You don't remember. But you've been told! Small boys once climbed upon you, anyway, and swung from those arms!"

The horned moon became visible at last to the old man's eyes. He stared at the cool light.

"Idiot!" he whispered. "You'll be next. You don't believe me? When *we're* gone and their buildings fill the ground, do you think they'll stop? See, look at what they're do-

ing to Mars — poor, tired, dried-up planet. They've just started there: it won't take long before the sands disappear and the red is turned to iron. Wait! You'll see!"

He continued through the wood, tapping the wrinkled twig against his palm. He thought of his wife, and sighed.

I mustn't hate her, he thought. How could I expect a woman from the cities to understand? How could I have hoped? But — I did think she loved us, just a little. . . . When I used to take her out in the mornings, before she grew ill, and be careful to say nothing so she could watch the sun — *our* sun — come up slowly through us, so she could feel us come to life — I thought. . . . Then, in all this world, I am the only one! The only one!

The smaller limbs and branches high above moved in a slow sad dance to the night breezes that sougled over them. Leaves fluttered softly, then, turning over and over, caught by the wind.

The old man stopped a while to rest, for his heart had begun to pound.

She was right. I knew she was. No one has come to us as they used to. Not even the old ones who lived when we were everywhere, who watched us die . . .

The old man looked at his

hands, which had once been young and had turned to parchment and were then made young again by the cities' men and were now beyond the help of their shining tools and glass ribbons. The hands would never be young again; they would only grow older and more wrinkled.

His heart regained its normal beat, and he walked to the edge of the forest, to where the great stone wall rose, then he turned around and started to walk back, another way.

A terrible thought came to him: *And if I had not been born here, where my father lived, perhaps there would be no one — No. No, there had to be one.*

My father kept us alive. Twice they wanted to kill us — he told me — and twice he stopped them.

But he was not alone . . .

What difference? It would have been the same, if he were.

Still — one man against the world. . . . I've asked them. I've told them, showed them, hundreds of times, since I first suspected. I said, You took your machines and stamped the mountains flat for your cities. You drained the rivers and the seas and set your people to live on the dry beds. And when you made food from the air, you ruined the fields, and the cities grew where the grass and

## SOMETHING IN THE EARTH

the wheat and the corn had grown! And you made your water and spread canals under the earth so the deserts could keep your buildings!

I told them. You took even the great forests. The bird and animals, not the ones raised with you who think with you, but the *free* ones — these you slaughtered. Your cities are everywhere; the world is nothing but a vast city. Can't you let alone the one last corner that was not made by your hands! Let the trees go on growing and remembering, let the animals run unafraid — give the air itself a last piece of room, where it can run or rest. It's all that's left!

But they brought out their books of numbers for me to see.

And tomorrow they come for us, with their tractors and their saws and their explosions, to kill us. And there's nothing I can do.

Something happened to the wind.

It came rushing, all of a sudden, down from the sky, straight down, through the branches and upon the old man, chilling him. It caught up the flying creatures, the dark ones and those who were excited points of fire in the night always, and sent them whirling with the dead grass and leaves. The wind came into the old man's ears, into his head.

He listened.

Then, he stopped looking old. His back straightened, and his head ached no longer: it was clear now, clearer than it had ever been.

The old man looked about him, while the wind quieted itself and went away. Then, when he had found what he was looking for, he ran as fast as he could.

It was the tallest tree in the forest. And ancient, hardened long since from wood to marble. But the hard crystal shreds of bark were strong and easily supported the old man as he began to climb.

He climbed quickly, not feeling tired or worried. The heavy thoughts were all gone from him; they left when the wind had whispered; so he climbed with the lightness of a young boy, from hand-hold to hand-hold, up finally to the first fat branch, over this; and the rest was not work at all. It made his thoughts rush back over two hundred years, when he was truly young.

After a little while, the old man had reached the topmost branch.

He looked out across the glowing cities which stretched beyond the end of his vision, in all directions.

Then he laughed, and was proud to see that the twig he had found was still unbroken.

He waited.

"They'll be at us like flies! They'll write ugly letters and scream and put up petitions!" the Undersecretary had said, but he was wrong. He read books.

The President, who lived in the here and now and did not read books, had said, "Ridiculous nonsense!" He was right.

There were a few letters, of course, but all quite insincere, from the older colleges. The strongest of these read:

WE OF THE FACULTY AND STUDENT BODY URGE THE PRESIDENT TO WEIGH THIS MATTER WITH HIS USUAL DISCRETION AND KNOW-HOW BEFORE HE MAKES ANY DEFINITE MOVE.

The others were inconsequential.

"You see, Herman," the President said, "nobody cares. Nobody gives a damn. Do you give a damn, Herman?"

The Undersecretary admitted he didn't.

"There's Markeson though," he said.

"The custodian? Of course. The man was born there. Why shouldn't he want to stay? Human nature. He doesn't realize that every school in the world has a whole building full of the finest reproductions of every tree that ever

existed. *Permanent* reproductions, you couldn't tell from the original. Bugs, too. All kinds."

"You explained this to him?"

"I imagine. I told Jerred to, or somebody. What's the difference? We'll find him another spot. Plenty of work around. APU, WVP, UNF."

"Yes."

The President started to explain that the group planned for the new site would include a subsidiary of U.S. Rockets, but lights flashed and his presence was requested someplace else.

The Undersecretary read his instructions and called up the crews and told them to go out and destroy the last forest on earth.

Some time later the chief engineer of the crew asked audience with the Undersecretary. He was handsome and looked confused.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the chief engineer said, "but something peculiar has happened."

"Yes?" the Undersecretary said.

"About the new site for U.S., sir?"

"Yes, yes?"

"Well, we've run into difficulties."

"Difficulties? What do you mean by difficulties?"

"The trees, sir. They won't saw."

"Of course they won't. They're petrified, old. You knew that."

## SOMETHING IN THE EARTH

"Not all of them. The wooden ones won't saw. We tried drills, and they didn't work."

"You are a man with sixty years of training. You are telling me you failed to cut down a bunch of trees? What about explosives?"

The chief engineer flushed. "We tried all of our equipment, all morning. Planted VO3 under one tree and blew it, and it didn't hurt a leaf. I'm scared."

The Undersecretary said something under his voice, and called upon the President.

"Ridiculous!" the President snorted. The Undersecretary transmitted the message and went to other work.

The chief engineer returned later on, looking worse.

"Well?"

"VO5, Blue Test, Red Test, everything."

"And you failed?"

"May I suggest," the chief engineer said, "that the Undersecretary and the President go back with me and see for themselves?"

They all went to the forest.

The crew of workers were huddled in a group on the other side of the wall, smoking and talking in low frightened tones.

"Now, see here," the President said loudly. "The job has got to be done by tonight. By *tonight!* I've got other crews waiting to put up

the buildings, lay the foundations, fill the inkwells. What have you accomplished?" The President looked around. "Good heavens," he cried angrily. "Here, give me that!" He snatched an axe from the limp hand of a pale man and went over to a small poplar. "Must the President of United World do his own work?" He swung the new axe in a wide arc. The sharp heavy edge smashed against the tree-trunk and then ricocheted back, upsetting the President's unsteady balance.

"I see," he said. "Well, it must be something in the earth. The F-Bomb — that's it. Polluted the earth or something last war. Wait, I'll go talk to the custodian."

The President slapped his hands together and commenced to walk, with other men, for the small cottage hidden in back of round bushes and slender eucalyptus shoots.

He knocked, and the door was opened by an old woman who looked sick. She clutched a bed-sheet to her.

"Madam, I wish to speak with your husband, Mr. Markeson."

"Gerald isn't here. I don't know where he is," the old woman said sadly. "He went away last night and he never came back. All I said was I loved him!" Her eyes were wide with astonishment.

"Yes, yes. Well, where is he? Oh, you don't know. I see. Didn't the men evacuate you before they started?"

"I've never seen him angry before. Will you look for him, please, and bring him back to me? Tell him I want to understand. Tell him I'll try, very hard."

The President paused a moment, then gave instructions that the old woman be taken to a safe place; then he walked back across the leaves and grass, quickly, to where the men were.

They stood silently.

"Ahh — he's gone. Someone look for Markeson. All of you — now."

The men scattered, unhastily. Presently, one of them returned.

"I found him, sir."

"Well, bring him here!"

"I can't, sir. He's up a tree."

"You said, up a tree?"

"Sitting on a branch, sir. He said he didn't want to come down. He wants to talk with you."

They went to the tree.

The old man called down from the dizzy heights. "Go away. Leave us alone!" he called.

"Now, now," called the President.

"You might just as well pack up and leave. Nothing you can do. Nothing in the world."

"What do you mean?"

"There had to be a stop, that's

all. You can't kill us."

The President conferred with friends. Then he shouted: "Listen to reason!"

"Reason! That's what's wrong with you. You're all stuffed full till there's nothing else. If you'd listened to something else you'd have stopped long ago. Then there would be rivers and oceans and mountains!"

"Oh, come down from there. You look foolish, a man your age. We've got work to do and you might get hurt."

The old man laughed long and hard. "Go ahead. Do your work. Try. Try to kill us!"

Three men were dispatched to climb the tree, but they didn't know how or couldn't. No one could climb the tree.

The President said, "We're going to have to blast it all out, Mr. Markeson. Come down or you'll be killed."

The old man pretended to fall, then caught a limb and swung back to his position. He laughed.

An aircar was advised to pick him up, but the aircar crashed into a weeping willow, somehow, and fell to the earth. The same thing happened to others.

The President, who had sat down, took off his coat and applied a handkerchief to his forehead.

## SOMETHING IN THE EARTH

The shrill old voice carried. "Can't you see? They told me — mostly the wind did. Do what you like."

Finally the president said, "See here, Mr. Markeson. We're holding up production. There's a war going on — don't you know that? This center will be essential. Either get out of that — that tree — or take the consequences."

The old man looked at the animals who waited hidden from the men; he looked at the ungrieving forest, at the expectant sky. "Good-bye!" he called.

The President shrugged, and the men walked off and did not return for several hours. They placed glass balls full of pink vapor around the bases of the trees and then left again.

Machines covered the sky. They dropped shields about the city's walls to protect the buildings. The old man watched them intently, feeling not the least bit uncomfortable, though he didn't know what they were doing.

Then, at a given command, the flying machines opened their riveted stomachs and released more glass balls, filled with vapor of yet another color. These looked light and fragile, but they dropped like great weights to the ground, where they burst open, letting the wind take up the colored mists and blow

it through the trees to merge with the mist that had been left before.

The explosion took away the old man's breath. It made him close his eyes tight and hold fast to the branch. But soon the shaking and the noise passed, with the foul smelling smoke, and when he looked, nothing had changed. The trees stood as they had stood, and he could hear the animals and the insects. He nodded, and pressed the twig to the side of his face.

Soon the men came back, blinking, shaking their heads, talking very little and in short words. The President was along, lagging in back.

"See?" shrieked the old man, bouncing.

"Something in the earth," the President mumbled, but not so softly that the old man didn't hear.

Then a new voice came up to the tree. "Gerald!"

The old man saw his wife. She was out of breath and her gown was covered with burrs and sharp rips.

"Sylvan! What is happening?" she cried hysterically.

"I don't know. . . . Something. I've prayed for it, thought about it, but I can't tell you what it is. I don't dare, because it would frighten you. Go with the others, leave me."

The pale woman put her hands

## CHARLES BEAUMONT

to her mouth and ran away.

Soon they were all gone; and when he was alone at last, the old man put his head against the tree-top and fell into a quiet sleep.

He dreamed dreams of the world before the cities had gone mad. He lay on the white sands of a lonely beach, by a river and watched grazing sheep on the other side of the river. It ran fast; and sang through golden fields and deep green forests, and broke into wild brooks and streams within the forests. And in the distance, he could see the mountains in the sun . . .

Then the old man woke. He shivered once and looked across the cities: then he stared with wide open eyes.

He stared at the cities as they broke and crumbled. As the air grew fat with screams of many people. As the roots of giant trees, greater than he had ever seen, came up from the stone and spread and toppled the mighty buildings over. As the water came flooding in through the steel canyons. As the mountains pulled the earth apart and rose and made room for the fields and the forests.



---

### SOON TO BE RELEASED —

a suspenseful paperback anthology

#### A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE MORGUE,

with top favorites in and out of the mystery and science-fiction/fantasy field: Ray Bradbury, Charles Beaumont, Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch, Anthony Boucher, Dell Shannon, Stuart Palmer and many others.

Look for it on your local newsstands.



In November of this year, Paperback Library will release *Impact 20*, William Nolan's first volume of short fiction. A "mixed bag" of science fiction, fantasy, satire and crime-suspense, the book is tagged as "an off-beat collection" — and certainly Nolan's latest story for GAMMA 2 is well off the beaten track. Nolan's writing talent has been showcased in twelve anthologies, including the new Bantam collection, *High Gear*, and Judith Merrill has just selected one of his stories for publication in her eighth annual *The Year's Best S-F*, due from Simon and Schuster late in '63. In a recent address before a creative writing class at UCLA, Nolan stressed the importance of sustained dialogue as a tool with which to build a particular mood. In *I'm Only Lonesome When I'm Lonely* he dramatically demonstrates this point.

## I'M ONLY LONESOME WHEN I'M LONELY

*William F. Nolan*

Bonner couldn't remember who had invited him to the party. He checked the slip of paper again, but it gave him no clue, just a time (8:30) and an apartment number (16 G). But the really damned irritating part of it was he just couldn't remember getting here, or even the address of this building, now that he was inside the elevator.

Obviously, he'd blacked out in the cab on the way over (since he *did* remember getting into a taxi after dinner, in front of that new Greek restaurant). God knows, he hadn't been getting much sleep lately; too many martinis at too

many parties on too many nights. . . . His physician had warned him about the continual drinking, but easing off just wasn't that simple.

The small 16 square above his head blinked green. The doors oiled back silently.

The moment Sidney Bonner stepped into the hall he heard the familiar party sounds: the rising-falling tide of cocktail voices, some vague jazz (Buddy Collette?), semi-hysterical laughter — muted behind the closed door of 16 G. Bonner checked his wrist-watch; only 8:32. And this bash was already in full swing. Well . . .

He paused for a moment to ad-

just his tie, then rang the buzzer.

The door opened. A flushed fat man was standing there. "C'mon in," he said. "Join the party."

Bonner smiled, not recognizing the man. Doesn't matter, he thought; you never know half the people at these things anyway.

He peered into the stifling blue swirl of tobacco smoke, eyes adjusting to the haze. The clatter of ice against glass mixed with a ceaseless, confused jangle of strange voices.

"Grab a drink, fella," said the grinning fat man. "You look *awful*."

"Thanks," Bonner said, moving automatically. He ran his glance swiftly over the smoke-hazed faces. He didn't recognize anybody. The fat man was right; he *did* need a drink. Bonner pushed his way to a bar in one corner of the packed room, where a tall, hollow-cheeked woman, her turkey neck awash in paste jewelry, was preparing an elaborate rum concoction.

"Is the host around?" asked Bonner. He didn't want to admit that he couldn't remember whose party this was.

The turkey-necked woman fixed a curious eye on Bonner. "He's not here now." She smiled without warmth.

Bonner poured himself a Scotch and water.

"You're new, aren't you?" the woman asked him.

"Just got here," said Bonner, sipping the Scotch. It was fine stuff. "How long has this one been going?"

The woman began stirring her drink. "Since before I got here. And I've been here a while."

Bonner nodded and turned to face the room again. Must be somebody here I'd know, he told himself. The Village is a small place — and he knew most of the party crowd.

An attractive girl in her mid-twenties caught Bonner's attention. She was standing near the end of the bar, staring openly at him, her full mouth caught up in a smile. She moved toward him.

"Nice apartment," he said, somewhat embarrassed by her close scrutiny.

"Stinks," said the girl. She wore a deep-cut gold lamé evening dress, molding her figure — which was firm and flawless. "I *detest* pseudo-Chinese decor in New York brownstones."

"Matter of opinion," said Bonner. From what he could see of the furnishings, the place *was* a bit garish: tall screens with dragons painted on them, more dragons on the heavy brocade drapes and twisting about the black lamps. Still, the large golden gong

## I'M ONLY LONESOME WHEN I'M LONELY

by the patio door was impressive, like an immense coin with carved Chinese swordsmen on charging stallions arranged in a frieze at its edge. A thing to wake the dead, thought Bonner.

"My name's Vivian," said the girl, probing him with her dark eyes. "I drink. A lot. What do *you* do — besides drink?"

"I produce," said Bonner. "TV shows."

"I *detest* television," she told him. "It's a cheap, vulgar medium, glorifying cheap, vulgar people."

Bonner figured she was drunk; this explained a lot, as it always did.

"Listen, Mr. Producer, would you like to seduce me?" Her direct eyes continued to search his own. "Yes — or no?"

Bonner took a pull at his Scotch. Another time he might have considered the proposition, but right now he just wasn't in the mood. "Isn't it a bit early in the evening for that sort of thing?"

"Don't evade my question. I just want to know if you'd like to seduce me — because . . ." and she giggled ". . . I sure as hell would like to seduce *you*."

"I'm flattered," said Bonner.

"So how about adjourning to the bedroom?" She swayed toward him.

"I think you'd better lie down."

"Exactly what I intend to do." She extended a hand. "C'mon."

"Afraid I'll have to take a rain check," said Bonner. "I haven't even had a chance to greet my host."

Her eyes went hard. "Hell with you, Mac," she said. And she turned abruptly away from him. "Hell with *you*," he heard her say again.

Bonner sighed, mixed himself a fresh drink, then moved toward one of the screens. He wanted a closer look at those dragons.

A male voice behind him said: "My wife has a snake named Baby for a pet. Did you ever try and pet a snake?"

Bonner swung around to face a small man with florid features and bulging Lorresque eyes. The man clutched his drink with both hands, blinking up at Bonner.

"No — I never have. The only snakes I've seen are —"

"Eats live mice," said the little man. "Kinda *slithers* up on 'em, the way a snake does, ya know, and the next thing — whap! — no mouse."

Bonner nodded, thinking: just how did I get involved in all this? Who invited me?

Bonner excused himself when the man tried to tell him more about Baby; he moved to a couch near the patio, sat down. He had

to think, mentally retrace his steps . . .

A dark-faced man in his forties, tanned and muscular, sat down beside Bonner. "Name's Mallard. Nickname, Maco. Maco the shark, they call me!" He pumped Bonner's hand, chuckling. "That's cuz I'm real sharp in my line. I'm with Dover. Insurance, Like the White Cliffs of. . . . You know. Wouldn't have a cigar on you, by any chance?"

"Sorry."

"Don't worry. Actually, I gave up smoking the damn things, so I'm always out of them. Doc says they'll kill me. Your lungs collapse, nerves shrivel up, stomach goes sour. I also gotta stay away from sugar. No cream, no sugar. Black coffee. You can get used to anything. Listen, I'm better off *without* a cigar."

"I can see the problem," said Bonner — wondering what it is about a cocktail party that causes total strangers to instantly bare their souls. Bonner wasn't interested in this fellow's sour stomach.

"Knew a guy once — you meet a lot of fruitcake people in the insurance dodge — Anyhow, I knew this guy who married a compulsive eater. Ever heard of 'em?"

"I've read about compulsive eaters," admitted Bonner.

"Man, they gotta eat *all* the time.

This guy's wife would slide out of bed in the middle of the night to raid the goodies. She'd eat maybe a whole pie, or half a watermelon or God knows what else. This guy I knew — her husband — he'd hide all the food. Like a pie, he'd lock up in his desk, and like that. Hide a box of cookies in the hall closet. But she always found the eats. Drove him nuts!"

"Imagine it would," nodded Bonner.

"While we're on the subject of kooks — did you even see that play where two people in cans are the whole cast? I mean, they live in these two *garbage* cans on stage and yell at each other. Wow! I saw that lousy thing once in Chicago."

"The play's by Beckett. All of his work is similar to that. Very much off trail."

"I never in my life heard of anybody livin' in a garbage can," said Mallard. "But once I heard about a guy who usta live in the wood-work. At least he did half the time. Had a little ratty walk-up with one of those foldaway beds. Kind you push up into the wall. He'd *stay* in the damn thing, and when his buddy had a party in the joint this guy would be inside the wall. Hated meeting people. But if he heard somethin' that got him sore — and he got sore real easy — he'd

## I'M ONLY LONESOME WHEN I'M LONELY

pop out of the wall with this Thompson. Bang! The bed would come down and there he'd be, holding this submachine gun."

"Holding *what?*"

"Thompson submachine gun. Got it during the war. Kept it in his apartment to scare people with. Boy, he'd roll out of that wall with the Thompson in his hands and, God, that place would empty in like two seconds. I didn't personally ever meet this guy, just heard about him once."

"I'd say you were lucky," said Bonner.

"Yeah." Mallard chuckled, rubbing his sour stomach. "Lotsa screwballs around. I sold a policy to a writer once. Novelist. He was guilt-ridden. That's what he told me. Said he felt just terrible because he wasn't productive enough. Said it took him five years to write a book, and that he couldn't do more than a page a day. So, at night, to make up for not producing enough during the day, he'd sleep with earphones on his head."

"You mean earplugs, don't you? To keep out noise."

"No — *earphones*. To listen to. He'd buy these language records, where they teach you how to talk in French and all. He'd switch on the phono, stick in a stack of language records, snap on the ole headphones and go right to sleep.

Claimed that every hour he slept he was pickin' up some foreign language. Italian, French, German . . ."

"Did it work?" asked Bonner.

"Hell, he could speak Swahili like a lousy native. Helped his guilt complex."

"We all feel guilt about certain things," Bonner said. "But most of us rationalize our way out of it; we tell ourselves that nothing can be done, that we're victims of circumstance, that our characters are solidly formed and impossible to change."

"Yeah . . . well, me for another drinkee. See ya, chum."

"Right," said Bonner.

"They're all silly sheep," said a tiny, ivory-skinned figurine of a woman at Bonner's elbow. He blinked at her.

"I'm talking about the people of New York," she told him. "When the bomb falls they'll all die like silly sheep. What is needed is an underground cavern several hundred feet below the surface of Manhattan, capable of holding the city's entire population—with trapdoors in every building. When the atomic alarm sounds the trapdoors all spring open and several million people are thrust into the bowels of the earth, to safety. What do you think?"

"Sounds a little expensive," said

Bonner.

"Nonsense. Give or take a bit, it could be done for six billion."

"Oh," said Bonner. "Are you going to try and raise six billion dollars?"

"I was thinking about doing just that," the tiny woman said, and she walked away, toward the kitchen, nodding sternly to herself. "I was most *certainly* entertaining the idea."

Bonner felt a bit dizzy. The party rolled on inexorably, without any visible center, proving the old adage that a host is never really needed, once the drinking begins. Although Bonner had always counted himself among those who seem to bloom in the atmosphere of tobacco smoke and martinis, this party was something else again. He couldn't seem to relate to it.

"Aren't you terribly, horribly lonely?" a girl's voice asked from the smoke haze. Bonner looked up into a dark, sensuous face. A tall, very slim Negress put her glass on the table beside the couch and sat down next to him. "Well — aren't you?"

"Aren't I what?"

"Terribly, awfully lonely."

"Do I look that way?"

"You look lost and alone."

Bonner smiled. "I think I *am* lost."

The girl clapped her hands. "I knew it!"

She removed a long, jewel-studded holder from her purse and fitted a cigarette carefully in place. Bonner lit it for her.

"Nobody is anything but alone," she said with conviction. "Once, when I was very young and concerned with life, I wrote a poem. I called it 'I'm Only Lonesome When I'm Lonely.' Wasn't that a lovely title?"

"Lovely," agreed Bonner.

"I was in Milwaukee, and I was about — God! — fifteen or something, and this fellow wanted me to live with him. But I told him to go bug some other chick. I wrote the poem instead. He used to phone me about twice a week and beg me to change my mind. For maybe a year he called me twice every week, begging."

"I suppose he was lonely," said Bonner.

"Of *course*. Of course he was. But nothing's any good for that — and going to bed with someone doesn't change the scene. The scene is loneliness, now and forever. And nobody can change the scene. So, after a year, he quit calling me."

"Just gave up, eh?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, what happened to him?"

"I *lived* with him, that's what

## I'M ONLY LONESOME WHEN I'M LONELY

happened to him. And he was as lonely as ever, poor bastard. Gee, I think I'm going to have me a cry."

Bonner watched her retrieve her glass and walk into the bedroom. The door slammed behind her.

He got up, walked over to the bar, and mixed himself another Scotch. A young man next to him extended his hand; Bonner automatically shook it.

"You probably know me. I'm Thurston Travers."

"Sorry," said Bonner.

"Skyblazers," said Thurston Travers.

"Beg pardon?"

"That's my TV show. Skyblazers. I'm the joker who saves America's ass every week on CBS."

"Oh, yes. I've heard of you."

"Thurston Travers is not my *real* name. Real name's Abby Thatch. Can you imagine a guy named Abby Thatch saving America's ass every week on CBS?"

"You've got me there."

"My mother told me that I did a terrible thing when I changed my name for TV. She took it as a kind of personal family betrayal. See, for years she dreamed of reading the Thatch name in the papers. I killed that dream."

"I see," said Bonner.

"Look at this," Travers said, pulling a brown wallet from his

coat and flipping it open. He stabbed a finger against a plastic-covered photo. That's her. Elma Thatch. And that's me — standing next to her. When I had hair."

Bonner looked at the photo. "I don't see much difference. In your hair, I mean."

"Difference is, I have to wear rugs now. Been going bald for five years. When you act, you *got* to have hair — so I wear some. Pull it. Go ahead, give it a tug."

"Well — I —"

"Go ahead. As a favor to me."

He inclined his head, and Bonner tugged at the fringe of Thurston Travers' hairpiece.

"Tight, eh? Really *snug*. Stays on the ole head."

"Very much so."

"They cost a fortune just to keep clean. They gotta go in to a special cleaners."

"Do you have a duplicate?"

"Oh, sure. Got all kinds, in fact. Got a windblown one. You know, for the windblown look. Wind machine'll lift a cheap rug right off your scalp. Then I got a western job, with long sideburns. And a crewcut. Cost me a fortune. But worth every penny."

"I'll bet," said Bonner.

"I got a theory about photographs," Travers went on. He tapped the photo in his wallet once again. When you take a pho-

to, you freeze time. Nobody in the photo ever ages. They just stay frozen on paper, the way they looked the instant the shutter snapped. Like they're suspended in Time. Each photo is a tiny pebble of Time, held in your hand. You see?"

"Unusual theory," agreed Bonner. He took a long pull at his Scotch, wishing he were drunk. Drunk, he could go on listening to Travers. Maybe. Bonner was exhausted; he felt wrung dry, and the Scotch was doing no good. No lift at all. These insane, never-ending conversations were the stuff of nightmares.

A tall blonde in a sequined sheath dress sidled up to him.

"I'm Lorraine," she said huskily. "I couldn't help overhearing you and Mr. Travers discussing theories. I have one."

"You have one what?"

"A theory. About sleep. Want to hear it?"

Numbed, Bonner nodded his head. He drained the last of the Scotch.

"I feel that we all go insane every night. When we fall asleep our subconscious takes full command, and we become victim to whatever whim it conjures up. We lie there, slack-jawed and helpless, while our subconscious flings us into other cities. Or into the past — or

the future. Suddenly we're naked in the middle of Fifth Avenue — or fighting a giant squid at the bottom of the Indian Ocean. We have absolutely no control. The mind whirls crazily in the skull. For eight hours each night, the earth goes mad!"

"Listen," said Bonner, desperately, "Isn't the host ever coming back? I've got to —"

"What host?"

"The guy who threw this party."

"I wouldn't know who you mean," the blonde said. "But, relax, sweetie. You're going to eventually meet *everybody!*"

"No," said Bonner, putting down his glass. "I've had quite enough."

He turned toward the door. The room seemed solid with bodies, all talking, drinking, gesturing. The thick smoke obscured the ceiling. Bonner experienced a sudden, consuming sense of panic. He had to get away from this party — *now*. The Chinese gong flared gold at the corner of his eye; he glanced directly at it. If he struck the gong its noise would stun the crowd for a moment; they'd have to stop this incessant, maddening chatter — and he could be out and gone before they resumed.

Bonner reached the gong. There didn't seem to be anything to strike it with. He clenched his right fist, drove it forcefully into



## I'M ONLY LONESOME WHEN I'M LONELY

the center of the gong.

There was no sound. The conversation went on.

The sequined blonde had followed him; now she smiled. "You can't ever stop the party," she said softly. "No one can ever do that."

Bonner's throat was dry; he felt the panic rising in him. Blindly, he pushed into the crowd, shoving the guests aside in his rush for the door.

The fat man was still there, like a guard. "Goin' somewhere, fella?" he asked Bonner.

"Damn right I am. Stand aside or —"

"Sure. I got no beef with you, fella."

Bonner jerked the door open, almost leaping into the hall.

The door closed; the party sounds faded.

Breathing deeply, Bonner walked to the elevator. He pressed the DOWN button.

This entire evening had been insane. He still couldn't remember anything about how he got here or who invited him or why he'd come at all. Just the cab in front of the restaurant . . . then the four metal walls of the elevator. Nothing else.

The heavy doors whispered open, and Bonner stepped inside.

He pressed the lowest button on the panel. Quietly, with an oiled

hum, the elevator began its efficient descent.

Then — abruptly — it stopped.

Bonner glanced up as the doors parted, admitting a tall, solemn-looking man in a dark gray suit.

Bonner gasped, smiled. "Harry!" "Sid! Sid Bonner!" The solemn face broke into a wide grin. "My Lord — it's been *years!*" They pumped hands.

Bonner quit smiling then. He peered intently into the face of his old friend. "You — you *can't* be Harry Nalbin."

"I'm nobody else. Do I look so different?"

"No, No, you look exactly the same. But — you're . . ."

". . . dead?" Nalbin nodded his head. "Sure I am. So are you. So's everybody in this place."

"Look, Harry — or whoever you are — I'm going home. Back to my apartment. I'm going to get off at the lobby floor, walk straight out of this building and hop a cab."

"There's no lobby floor, Sid."

Bonner flicked his gaze to the elevator panel. The lowest button read FLOOR 2.

"We use this elevator to get from one party to another," said Harry Nalbin. "That's all it's good for. You get so you need a change. You always end up back at the first party. But you learn to adjust; we all have."

Bonner stared at Nalbin.

"You're telling me that this place is — Hell? Is that it?"

"Who knows what it is? Call it that if you prefer. Or Limbo. Or the Great Beyond. It's just where people like us end up, that's all."

"Us?"

"Party people. Wolcott Gibbs is down here. So is Dylan Thomas. When Jimmie Thurber died he came down here too. Lots of others. You'd think it'd be a ball, but even the celebrities get pretty boring after a year or two of solid conversation. And you can't really get stoned; that's the hell of it. But we're all waiting for Elsa

Maxwell. When *she* dies this place should really swing. At least for a while, anyhow."

The elevator stopped.

"Second floor," said Nalbin. "C'mon. I'll introduce you around."

Nalbin took Bonner's arm. Around him, Bonner could hear the familiar sounds: the tinkle of ice, a jazz record playing, the tide of cocktail voices. . . . The *horribly* familiar sounds.

Harry thumbed a buzzer. A door opened.

A flushed fat man was standing there.

"C'mon in, fellas," he said. "Join the party."



GET THE GAMMA HABIT.  
FOR DETAILS, SEE PAGE 69

## A NOTE ON ERNEST HEMINGWAY

We had hoped to present, in GAMMA 2, a short fantasy by Ernest Hemingway, *The Good Lion*, which originally appeared in the March, 1951 issue of *Holiday* magazine. This fable, written with humor and compassion, deals with the problems of a winged lion. He flies away from Africa because his very bad jungle friends do not understand or appreciate a very good lion with wings. The unhappy beast ends up at Harry's Bar, in Venice, moodily ordering a very dry martini. End of fable.

Scribner's, who now control the rights to Hemingway's work, refused us permission to use *The Good Lion*, in deference to the late author's personally-expressed wish that his material not be reprinted in magazines. Even a personal plea to his widow, Mary Hemingway, failed to alter the situation. (Though, in her kind reply, Mrs. Hemingway expressed sincere regret as to the final decision.)

Therefore, since we cannot present it, we urge our readers to seek out this fantasy on their own. Hemingway, the good lion of letters, was not a fantasist; his brand of realism, in fact, influenced all contemporary literature — but we can recall at least one other item in the Hemingway canon which falls into the fantasy genre: *Today is Friday*, a brief playlet in which he takes us back to the time of Christ's death. We witness a conversation, over wine, involving three Roman soldiers. The dialogue is hard, modern, tough — but the subject is Christ's death on the Cross, at which they all assisted. If not outright fantasy, this is far off the beaten fictional path.

When he died in 1961, Hemingway left a mass of unpublished work behind him — all of which has now been gathered together by Mary Hemingway, who plans to release this material (the best of it) to publishers over the coming years. And perhaps, buried somewhere in these pages, there are other Hemingway fables. Yet whatever the subject matter, we look forward to these books by the famed author-adventurer whose career was far more fantastic than any of his fiction. We mourn the passing of Ernest Miller Hemingway, who soared high among the truly creative men of his time. His wings are folded now.

The Good Lion is dead.

So much happens so fast in the career of Ray Bradbury that it is difficult to keep up with this talented gentleman. Latest from the Bradbury camp: Robert Mulligan and Alan Pakula (the team responsible for the award winning *To Kill a Mockingbird*) have purchased film rights to Ray's oft-optional *The Martian Chronicles*, with plans to produce the book on a grand scale for Cinerama. Also, the French "New Wave" director, Francois Truffaut, will soon begin filming Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* in Europe. Meanwhile, Ray is busy on a very unusual assignment: he has been chosen to work with the U.S. Government (directly under President Kennedy) in designing the interior of the U.S. Pavilion at the New York World's Fair (opening in April of '64). "Seventeen million will be spent on this building," says Bradbury. "What I put on paper will be created in three dimensions. If I say, for example, let us have our audience seated on a moving vehicle, traveling through interior darkness; as we turn a corner we come upon the original 'Spirit of St. Louis' flying in the night . . . well, they'll get the plane for me from the Smithsonian. This is a great challenge!" The Bradbury talent, therefore, will be on display on many more projects — yet the short story remains his most representative showcase, and the intricately-wrought, symbolic, yet savagely realistic tale which follows contains some of Bradbury's finest writing — which is very fine indeed. GAMMA 2 is proud to present it.

## SOMBRA Y SOL

### *Ray Bradbury*

Morning.

The little boy, Raimundo, ran across the Avenida Madera. He ran through the early smell of incense from many churches and in the smell of charcoal from ten thousand breakfast cookings. He moved in the thoughts of death. For Mexico City was cool with

death thoughts in the morning. There were shadows of churches and always women in black, in mourning black, and the smoke from the church candles and charcoal braziers made a smell of sweet death in his nostrils as he ran. And he did not think it strange, for all thoughts were

## SOMBRA Y SOL

death thoughts on this day.

This was *El Dia De Muerte*, the Day of Death.

On this day in all the far small places of the country, the women sat by little wooden slat stands and from these sold the white sugar skulls and candy corpses to be chewed and swallowed. In all of the churches services would be said, and in graveyards tonight candles would be illumined, much wine drunk, and many high man-soprano songs cried forth.

Raimundo ran with a sense of the entire universe in him; all the things his Tio Jorge had told him, all the things he had himself seen in his years. On this day events would be happening in such far places as Guanajuato and Lake Patzcuaro. Here in the great bull-ring of Mexico City even now the *trabajandos* were raking and smoothing the sands, tickets were selling, and the bulls were nervously eliminating themselves, their eyes swiveling, fixing, in their hidden stalls, waiting for death.

In the graveyard at Guanajuato the great iron gates were swinging wide to let the *turistas* step down the spiral cool staircase into the deep earth, there to walk in the dry echoing catacombs and gaze upon mummies rigid as toys, stood against the wall. One hundred ten mummies stiffly wired to the

stones, faces horror-mouthed and shrivel-eyed; bodies that rustled if you touched them.

At Lake Patzcuaro, on the Island of Janitzio, the great fishing seines flew down in butterfly swoops to gather silverine fish. The island, with Father Morelos' huge stone statue on top it, had already begun the tequila drinking that started the celebratory *El Dia De Muerte*.

In Lenares, a small town, a truck ran over a dog and did not stop to come back and see.

Christ himself was in each church, with blood upon him, and agony in him.

And Raimundo ran in the November light across the Avenida Madera.

Ah, the sweet *terros!* In the windows, the sugar skulls with names on their snowy brows: JOSE, CARLOTTA, RAMONA, LUISA! All the names on chocolate death heads and frosted brows.

The sky was glazed blue pottery over him and the grass flamed green as he ran past the *gloriettas*. In his hand he held very tightly fifty centavos, much money for much sweets, for surely he must purchase bone, sockets, and ribs to chew. The day of eating of death. They would show death, ah, yes, they would! He and *madrecita mia*, and his brothers,

ay, and his sisters!

In his mind he saw a skull with candy lettering: RAIMUNDO. I shall eat my own skull, he thought. And in this way cheat death who always drips at the window in the rain or squeaks in that hinge of the old door or hangs in our urine like a little pale cloud. Cheat death who is rolled into tamales by the sick tamale-maker, death wrapped in a fine corn-tortilla shroud.

In his mind, Raimundo heard his old Tio Jorge talking all this. His ancient, adobe-faced uncle who gestured his fingers to each small word and said, "Death is in your nostrils like clockspring hairs, Death grows in your stomach like a child. Death shines on your eyelid like a lacquer."

From a rickety stand an old woman with a sour mouth and tiny beads in her ears sold shingles on which miniature funerals were conducted. There was a little cardboard coffin and a crepe-paper priest with an infinitesimal Bible, and crepe-paper altar boys with small nuts for heads and there were attendants holding holy flags and a candy white corpse with tiny black eyes inside the tiny coffin and on the altar behind the coffin was a movie star's picture. These little shingle funerals could be taken home

where you threw away the movie star's picture and pasted in a photograph of your own dead in its place on the altar. So you had a small funeral of your loved one over again.

Raimundo put out a twenty centavo piece. "One," he said. And he bought a shingle with a funeral on it.

Tio Jorge said, "Life is a wanting of things, Raimundo. You must always be wanting things in life. You will want *frijoles*, you will want water, you will desire women, you will desire sleep; most especially sleep. You will want a burro, you will want a new roof on your house, you will want fine shoes from the glass windows of the *zapateria* and, again, you will want good meat; you will, once more, desire sleep. You will seek a horse, you will seek children, you will seek the jewels in the great shining stores on the *avenida* and, ah yes, remember? You will lastly seek sleep. Remember, Raimundo, you will want things. Life is this wanting. You will want things until you no longer want them, and then it is time to be wanting only sleep and sleep. There is a time for all of us, when sleep is the great and the beautiful thing. And when nothing is wanted but only sleep, then it is one thinks of the Day of the Dead and the happy

## SOMBRA Y SOL

sleeping ones. Remember, Raimundo?"

"Si, Tio Jorge."

"What do *you* want, Raimundo?"

"I don't know."

"What do all men want, Raimundo?"

"What?"

"What is there to want, Raimundo?"

"Maybe I know. Ah, but I don't know, I don't!"

"I know what you want, Raimundo."

"What?"

"I know what all men in this land want; there is much of it and it is wanted far over and above all other wantings and it is worshipped and wanted, for it is rest and a peacefulness of limb and body . . ."

Raimundo entered the store and picked up a sugar skull with his name frosted upon it.

"You hold it in your hand, Raimundo," whispered Tio Jorge. "Even at your age you hold it delicately and nibble, swallow it slowly into your blood. In your hands, Raimundo; look!"

The sugar skull.

"In the street I see a dog. I drive my car. Do I pause? Do I unpress my foot from the pedal? No! More speed! Bom! Sol! The dog is happier, is he not? Out of this world, forever gone?"

Raimundo paid money and proudly inserted his dirty fingers within the sugar skull, giving it a brain of five wriggling parts.

He walked from the store and looked upon the wide, sun-filled boulevard with the cars rushing and roaring through it. He squinted his eyes and—

The *barreras* were full. In *la sombra* and *el sol*, in shadow or in sun the great round seats of the bull-ring were filled to the sky. The band exploded in brass! The gates flung wide! The *matadors*; the *banderilleros*, the *picadors*, all of them came walking or riding across the fresh smooth sand in the warm sunlight. The band crashed and banged and the crowd stirred and stirred and murmured and cried aloud.

The music finished with a cymbal.

Behind the *barrera* walls the men in the tight glittery costumes adjusted their *birettas* upon their greasy black hair-dos and felt of their capes and swords and talked and a man bent over the wall above with a camera to whirr and click at them.

The band whammed proudly again. A door burst open, the first black giant of a bull rushed out, loins jolting, little fluttery ribbons tacked to his neck. The bull!

Raimundo ran forward, lightly, lightly, on the Avenida Madera. Lightly lightly he ran between the fast black huge bull cars. One gigantic car roared and horned at him. Lightly lightly ran Raimundo.

The *banderillero* ran forward lightly, lightly, like a blue feather blown over the dimpled bull ring sands — the bull a black cliff rising. The *banderillero* stood now, poised, and stamped his foot. The *banderillas* are raised, ah! so! Softly softly ran the blue ballet slippers in the quiet sand and the bull ran and the *banderillero* rose softly in an arc upon the air and the two poles struck down and the bull slammed to a halt, grunting-shrieking as the pikes bit deep in his withers! Now the *banderillero*, the source of this pain, was gone. The crowd roared!

The Guanajuato cemetery gates swung open.

Raimundo stood frozen and quiet and the car bore down upon him. All of the land smelled of ancient death and dust and everywhere things ran toward death or were in death.

The *turistas* filed into the cemetery of Guanajuato. A huge wooden door was opened and they walked down the twisting steps into the catacombs where the one hundred and ten dead shrunken people stood horrible against the

walls. The jutting teeth of them, the wide eyes staring into spaces of nothing. The naked bodies of women like so many wire frames with clay clinging all askew to them. "We stand them in the catacombs because their relatives cannot afford the rent on their graves", whispered the little caretaker.

Below the cemetery hill, a juggling act, a man balancing something on his head, a crowd following past the coffin-carpenter's shop, to the music of the carpenter, nails fringing his mouth, bent to beat the coffin like a drum. Balanced delicately upon his proud dark head, the juggler carries a silvery-skinned box which he touches lightly now and again to give it balance. He walks with solemn dignity, his bare feet gliding over the cobbles, behind him the women in black *rebozos* tooth-ing tangerines. And in the box, hidden away, safe and unseen, is the small child body of his daughter, newly dead.

The procession passes the open coffin shops and the banging of nails and sawing of boards is heard through the land. In the catacomb, the standing dead await the procession.

Raimundo held his body, so, like a *torero*, to make a *veronica*, for the great hurtling cars to pass and



## SOMBRA Y SOL

the crowd to cry 'Ole!' He smiled wildly.

The black car rose over the blotted light from his eyes as it touched him. Blackness ran through him. It was night.

In the churchyard on the island of Janitzio, under the great dark statue of Father Morelos, it is blackness, it is midnight. You hear the high voices of men grown shrill on wine, men with voices like women, but not soft women, no, high, hard, and drunken women, quick, savage and melancholy women. On the dark lake little fires glow on Indian boats coming from the mainland, bringing tourists from Mexico City to see the ceremony of *El Dia De Muerte*, sliding across the dark foggy lake, all bundled and wrapped against the cold.

Sunlight.

Christ moved.

From the crucifix he took down a hand, lifted it, suddenly — waved it.

The hot sun shone in golden explosions from the high church tower in Guadalajara, and in blasts from the high, swaying crucifix. In the street, below, if Christ looked down with mellow warm eyes, and he did so now in this moment, he saw two thousand upturned faces; the spectators like so many melons scattered about the market, so

many hands raised to shield the uptilted and curious eyes. A little wind blew and the tower cross sighed very gently and pressed forward under it.

Christ waved his hand. Those in the market below waved back. A small shout trickled through the crowd. Traffic did not move in the street. It was eleven of a hot green Sunday morning. You could smell the fresh clipped grass from the plaza, and the incense from the church doors.

Christ took his other hand, also, and waved it and suddenly jerked away from the cross and hung by his feet, face down, a small silver medallion jingling in his face, suspended from about his dark neck.

"Ole! Ole!" cried one small boy, far below, pointing up at him, and then at himself. "You see him, you see? That is Gomez, my brother! Gomez who is my brother!" And the small boy walked through the crowd with a hat, collecting money.

Movement. Raimundo, in the street, covered his eyes and screamed. Darkness again.

The tourists from the boats moved in the dream of the island of Janitzio at midnight. In the dim streets the great nets hung like fog from the lake and rivers of today's silver minnows lay glittering in cascades upon the slopes.

Moonlight struck them like a cymbal strikes another cymbal; they gave off a silent reverberation.

In the crumbling church at the top of the rough hill is a Christ much drilled by termites but the blood still congeals thickly from his artistic wounds and it will be years before the agony is insect-eaten from his suffering mask.

Outside the church, a woman with Tarascan blood lifting and falling in her throat sits fluttering ripped morning-glories through the flames of six candles. The flowers, passing through the flames like moths, give off a gentle sexual odor. Already the moving tourists come and stand about her, looking down, wanting to ask, but not asking, what she is doing, seated there upon her husband's grave.

In the church, like resin from a great beautiful tree, the limbs of Christ, themselves hewn from beautiful limbs of imported trees, give off a sweet sacred resin in little raining droplets that hang but never fall, blood that gives a garment for his nakedness.

"Ole!" roared the crowd.

Bright sunlight again. A pressure on Raimundo's flung body. The car, the daylight, the pain!

The *picador* jostled his horse forward, the horse with thick mattresses tied to it, and kicked the bull in the shoulder with his boot

and at the same time penetrated that shoulder with the long stick and the nail on the end of it. The *picador* withdrew. Music played. The *matador* moved slowly forward.

The bull stood with one foot forward in the center of the sun-held ring, his organs nervous. The eyes were dull glazed hypnotic eyes of fear-hate. He kept eliminating nervously, nervously, until he was streaked and foul with a nervous casting out. The greenish matter pulsed from his buttocks and the blood pulsed from his gored shoulder and the six *banderillas* bindled and clattered on his spine.

The *matador* took time to rearrange his red cloth over his blade, just so carefully, while the crowd and the pulsing bull waited.

The bull can see nothing, know nothing. The bull desires not to see of this or that. The world is pain and shadows and light and weariness. The bull stands only to be dispatched. It will welcome an end to confusion, to the racing shapes, the traitorous capes, the lying flourishes and false fronts. The bull plants out its feet in feeble stances and remains in one position, slowly moving its head back and forth, eyes glazed, the excrement still unfelt rivuleting from its flanks, the blood tiredly

## SOMBRA Y SOL

pumping from the neck. Somewhere off in the glazed distance a man holds out a bright sword. The bull does not move. The sword, held by the smiling man, now cuts three short gashes down the nose of the empty-eyed bull . . . *so!*

The crowd shouts.

The bull takes the cutting and does not even flinch. Blood flushes from the snuffling, cut nostrils.

The matador stamps his foot.

The bull runs with feeble obedience toward the enemy. The sword pierces his neck. The bull falls, thuds, kicks, is silent.

"*Ole!*" shouts the crowd. The band blows out a brass finale!

Raimundo felt the car hit. There were swift intervals of light and darkness.

In the Janitzio churchyard two hundred candles burned atop two hundred rocky graves, men sang, tourists watched, the fog poured up from the lake.

In Guanajuato, sunlight! Striking down through a slot in the catacombs, sunlight showed the brown eyes of a woman, mouth wide in rictus, cross-armed. Tourists touched and thumped her like a wind-hollowed tree.

"*Ole!*" The *matador* circled the ring, his small black *biretta* in his fingers, high. It rained. Centavo pieces, purses, shoes, hats. The *matador* stood in this rain with his

tiny *biretta* raised for an umbrella!

A man ran up with a cut-off ear of the slain bull. The *matador* held it up to the crowd. Everywhere he walked the crowd threw up their hats and money. But thumbs jerked down and though the shouts were glad they were not so glad that he keep the cut-off ear. Thumbs went down. Without a look behind him, shrugging, the *matador* gave the ear a crackling toss. The bloody ear lay on the sand, while the crowd, glad that he had thrown it away, because he was not *that* good, cheered. The bucklers came out, chained the slumped bull to a team of high-stamping horses who whistled fearful sirens in their nostrils at the hot blood odor and bolted like white explosions across the arena when released, yanking, bounding the dead slumped bull behind, leaving a harrowing of the horns in sand and amulets of blood.

Raimundo felt the sugar skull jolt from his fingers. The funeral on the wooden slat was torn from his other wide-flung hand.

"Bang!" the bull hit, rebounded from the *barrera* wall as the horses vanished, jangling, screaming, in the tunnel.

A man ran to the *barrera* of Senor Villata, poking upward the *banderillas*, their sharp prongs

choked with bull blood and flesh. "Gracias!" Villata threw down a peso and took the *banderillas* proudly, the little orange and blue crepe paper fluttering, to hand about like musical instruments to his wife, to cigar-smoking friends.

Christ moved.

The crowd looked up at the swaying cross on the cathedral.

Christ balanced on two hands, legs up in the sky!

The small boy ran through the crowd. "You see my brother? Pay! My brother! Pay!"

Christ now hung by one hand on the swaying cross. Below him was all the city of Guadalajara very sweet and very quiet with Sunday. I will make much money today, he thought.

The cross jolted. His hand slipped. The crowd screamed.

Christ fell.

Christ dies each hour. You see him in carven postures in ten thousand agonized places, eyes lifted to high dusty heavens of ten thousand small churches, and always there is much blood, ah, much blood.

"See!" said Senor Villata. "See!" He wagged the *banderillas* in the face of his friend, red and wet.

With children chasing, snatching at him, laughing, the *matador* circles the ring again to the ever increasing shower of hats, running

and not stopping . . .

And now the tourist boats cross the dawn pale lake of Patzcuaro, leaving Janitzio behind, the candles snuffed, the graveyard deserted, the torn flowers strewn and shriveling. The boats pull up and the tourists step out in the new light, and in the hotel on the mainland shore a great silver urn waits, bubbling with fresh coffee, a little whisper of steam like the last part of the fog from the lake, goes up into the warm air of the hotel dining room and there is a good sound of chattered plates and tining forks and low converse, and a gentle lidding of eyes and a mouthing of coffee in dreams already begun before the pillow. Doors close. The tourists sleep on fog-damp pillows, in fog-damp sheets, like earth-spittled winding clothes. The coffee smell is as rich as the skin of a Tarascan.

In Guanajuato, the gates close, the rigid nightmares are turned from. The spiral stair is taken up in hot November light. A dog barks. A wind stirs the dead morning-glories on the pastry-cake monuments. The big door whams down on the catacomb opening. The withered people are hidden.

The band hoots out its last triumphant hooting and the *barreras* are empty. Outside, the people walk away between ranks of

## SOMBRA Y SOL

phlegm-eyed beggars who sing high high songs, and the blood spoor of the last bull is raked and wiped and raked and wiped by the men with the rakes down in the wide shadowed ring. In the shower, the *matador* is slapped upon his wet buttocks by a man who has won money on this day.

Raimundo fell, Christ fell, in glaring light. A bull rushed, a car rushed, opening a great vault of blackness in the air which slammed, thundered shut and said nothing but sleep. Raimundo touched the earth, Christ touched the earth but did not know.

The cardboard funeral was shat-

tered to bits. The sugar skull broke in the far gutter in three dozen fragments of blind snow.

The boy, the Christ, lay quiet.

The night bull went away to give other people darkness, to teach other people sleep.

Ah, said the crowd.

RAIMUNDO, said the bits of the sugar skull strewn on the earth.

People ran to surround the silence. They looked at the sleep.

And the sugar skull with the letters R and A and I and M and U and N and D and O was snatched up and eaten by children who fought over the name.

2



