NEW WORLDS

COMPACT

SF

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JAMES COLVIN's

The WRECKS of TIME

Two strange men struggled over the fate of the bizarre worlds of subspace

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Contents

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All manuscripts must be double-spaced, typed on quarto paper with a top-sheet containing title, author's name, word-length and author's address. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany all submissions.

THE SANTA CLAUS OF THE ATOMIC AGE

PUBLISHED RECENTLY BY Methuen is the first large selection of the works of Alfred Jarry to be made available to English readers. Alfred Jarry (1873-1907) was the inventor of the imaginary science of 'pataphysics' and father of the literary surrealist movement. Jarry produced an almost monumental volume of imaginative work—plays, fiction and essays—in his short life, laying down paths for later writers that have by no means been followed to their ends. Much of his work, with its grotesque imagery, its zest and scholarly iconoclasm, has yet to be emulated. The power and intelligence of Jarry's work is immediately conveyed in *The Selected Works of Alfred Jarry* (45s. edited by Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor). Anyone seriously interested in 'speculative' fiction should add this book to their library.

It is interesting, incidentally, to read this paragraph in Mr. Shattuck's introduction:

> 'This remarkable commentary (How to Construct A Time Machine) welcomed the French translation of H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* in 1899 and accepted it as a challenge: Jarry sets out to tell us in a practical way how to build one. He maintains scientific and engineering accuracy so meticulously that it is very difficult to detect just where his instructions modulate into fantasy. His physics is too good to be true. Science fiction, which should be one of the most exciting literary genres in our era, has long since become a victim of its own conventions. "How to Construct a Time Machine" suggests the possibility of science-non-fiction. This category of writing could well have its

satirical-sardonic day and carry such "sciences" as psychology and statistics and linguistics to their logical and imaginary extremes.'

An interesting speculation. Mr. Shattuck's comment on *sf is* a reasonable one and echoes much that has been said in this magazine. And yet, bit by bit, here and there, we are beginning to shake off the limiting conventions of sf and expand the field, seeking new subject matter and new techniques, trying to produce, to use that crude phrase we so often fall back on for want of something better, a more lasting 'sense of wonder'. What Jarry has done can be done again—in the terms of today. It may be some time before the sf field produces its Jarry, but the moment will come when sf will explode into something that will produce many works of lasting importance. If this means a rejection on the part of the writers of most of the conventions of sf, then the rejection must be made. We must progress, must adapt or die. The growing general interest in and understanding of symbolism and surrealism encourages us to hope that the old philistinic cries of 'Obscure!' and 'Bad Taste' will soon cease to be heard for good. The work of men like Jarry must be made to look as conventional as the work of Cervantes, Swift, or H. G. Wells. Jarry created Ubu, whom Cyril Connolly has called 'The Santa Claus of the Atomic Age'. It is up to us to create a whole range of mythological figures not only for the Atomic Age, but also for the Space Age.

A little paradoxically, considering all we've said, this issue contains a selection of fairly conventional sf stories, primarily by young writers. As with issue 152, we have concentrated mainly on publishing the work of a group of comparatively unknown writers. This is because of our stated policy to give every opportunity to new, young writers to publish their stories. We think you will find the stories both varied and entertaining. James Colvin's serial is pretty straightforward stuff, in contrast to stories like *The Mountain* and *The Pleasure Garden of Felipe Sagittarius,* but it has a freshness of approach and idea which

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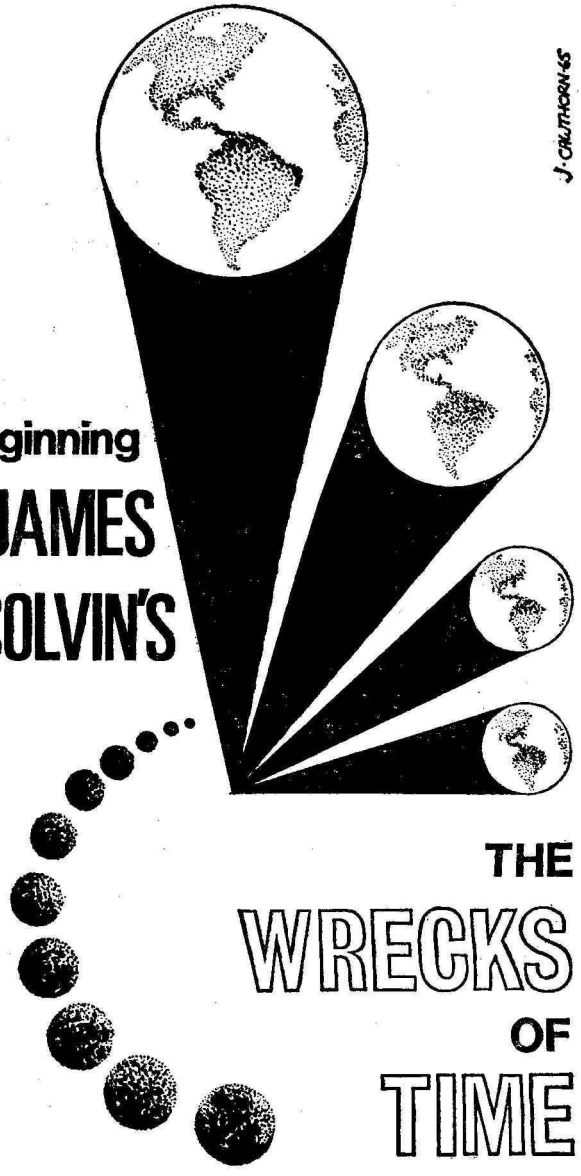
J. CRUTHORN '65
beginning
JAMES
COLVIN'S
THE
WRECKS
OF
TIME

There they lay, outside of space and time, each hanging in its separate limbo, each a planet called Earth. Fifteen globes, fifteen lumps of matter sharing a name. Once they might have looked the same, too, but now they were very different. One was comprised almost solely of desert and ocean with a few forests of gigantic, distorted trees growing in the northern hemisphere; another seemed to be in perpetual twilight, a planet of dark obsidian; yet another was a honeycomb of multicoloured crystal and another had a single continent that was a ring of land around a vast lagoon. The wrecks of Time, abandoned and dying, each with a decreasing number of human inhabitants for the most part unaware of the doom overhanging their worlds. These worlds existed in a kind of subspacial *well* created in furtherance of a series of drastic experiments . . .

one

The Great American Desert

IN PROFESSOR FAUSTAFF'S code-book this world was designated as Earth 3. The professor steered his flame-red Buick convertible along the silted highway that crossed the diamond-dry desert, holding the wheel carefully, like the captain of a schooner negotiating a treacherous series of sandbanks.

The desert stretched on all sides, vast and lonely, harsh and desolate beneath the intense glare of the sun swelling at its zenith in the metallic blue sky. On this alternate Earth there was little but desert and ocean, the one a flat continuation of the other.

The professor hummed a song to himself as he drove, his bulk sprawling across both front seats. Sunlight glinted off the beads of sweat on his shiny red face, caught the lenses of his polaroid glasses and brightened those parts of the Buick not yet dulled by the desert dust. The engine roared like a beast and Professor Faustaff chanted mindlessly to its rhythm.

He was dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and gold beach-

shorts, a pair of battered sneakers on his feet and a baseball cap tilted on his head. He weighed at least twenty stone and was a good six and a half feet tall. A big man. Though he drove with care his body was completely relaxed and his mind was at rest. He was at home in this environment as he was in more than a dozen others. The ecology of this Earth could not, of course, support human life. It did not. Professor Faustaff and his teams supported human life here and on all but two of the other alternates. It was a big responsibility. The professor carried it with a certain equanimity.

The capital of Greater America, Los Angeles, was two hours behind him and he was heading for San Francisco where he had his headquarters on this alternate Earth. He would be there the next day and planned to stop at a motel he knew en route, spend the night there, and continue in the morning.

Peering ahead of him Faustaff suddenly saw what appeared to be a human figure standing by the side of the highway. As he drove closer he saw that it was a girl dressed only in a swimsuit, waving at him as he approached. He slowed down. The girl was a pretty redhead, her hair long and straight, her nose fairly sharp and freckled. Her mouth was large and pleasant.

Faustaff stopped the car beside the girl.

"What's the trouble?"

"Truck driver was giving me a lift to 'Frisco. He dumped me when I wouldn't go and play amongst the cactus with him." Her voice was soft and a trifle ironic.

"Didn't he realise you could have died before someone else came along?"

"He might have liked that. He was very upset."

"You'd better get in." Most young women attracted Faustaff and the redhead particularly appealed to him. As she squeezed into the passenger seat beside him he began to breathe a little more heavily than usual. Her face seemed to assume a more serious expression as he glanced at her but she said nothing.

"My name's Nancy Hunt," she said. "I'm from L.A. You?"

"Professor Faustaff, I live in 'Frisco."

"A professor—you don't look like a professor—a business man more, I guess, but even then—a painter, maybe."

"Well, I'm sorry to say I'm a physicist—a physicist of all work you could say." He grinned at her and she grinned back, her eyes warming. Like most women she was already attracted by Faustaff's powerful appeal. Faustaff accepted this as normal and had never bothered to work out why he should be so successful in love. It might be his unquestioning enjoyment of love-making and general liking for women. A kindly nature and an uncomplicated appreciation for all the bodily pleasures, a character that demanded no sustenance from others, these were probably the bases for Faustaff's success with women. Whether eating, boozing, smoking, love-making, talking, inventing, helping people or giving pleasure in general, Faustaff did it with such spontaneity, such relaxation, that he could not fail to be attractive to most people.

"What are you going to 'Frisco for, Nancy?" he asked.

"Oh, I just felt like travelling. I was with this swimming party, I got sick of it, I walked out on to the street and saw this truck coming. I thumbed it and asked the driver where he was going. He said 'Frisco—so I decided to go to 'Frisco."

Faustaff chuckled. "Impulsive. I like that."

"My boyfriend calls me moody, not impulsive," she smiled.

"Your boyfriend?"

"Well, my ex-boyfriend as from this morning I suppose. He woke up, sat up in bed and said 'Unless you marry me, Nancy, I'm going now'. I didn't want to marry him and told him so. He went." She laughed. "He was a nice guy."

The highway wound on through the barren world and Faustaff and Nancy talked until naturally they moved closer together and Faustaff put his arm around the girl and hugged her and a little later kissed her.

By late afternoon they were both relaxed and content to enjoy one another's company silently.

The convertible sped on, thudding tyres and pumping pistons, vibrating chassis, stink and all, sand slashing

against the windscreen and the big yellow sun in the hot blue above. The vast, gleaming desert stretched for hundreds of miles in all directions, its only landmarks the few filling stations and motels along the rare highways, the occasional mesa and clumps of cactus. Only the City of Angels, in the exact centre of the desert, lay inland. All other cities, like San Francisco, New Orleans, Saint Louis, Santa Fe, Jacksonville, Houston and Phoenix, lay on the coast. A visitor from another Earth would not have recognised the continental outline.

Professor Faustaff chanted wordlessly to himself as he drove, avoiding the occasional crater in the highway, or the place where sand had banked up heavily.

His chant and his peace were interrupted by a buzzing from the dashboard. He glanced at the girl and made a decision with a slight shrug of his shoulders. He reached inside the glove compartment and flicked a hidden switch there. A voice, urgent and yet controlled, began to come from the radio.

" 'Frisco calling Professor F. 'Frisco calling Professor F."

"Professor F. receiving," said Faustaff watching the road ahead and easing off a little on the accelerator. Nancy frowned.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Just a private radio—I keep in touch with my headquarters this way."

"Crazy," she said.

"Professor F. receiving you," he said deliberately. "Suggest you consider Condition C." Faustaff warned his base that he had someone with him.

"Understood. Two things. A U.M. situation is anticipated imminent on E. 15, Grid areas 33, 34, 41, 42, 49 and 50. Representatives on E. 15 have asked for help. Would suggest you use I-effect to contact."

"It's that bad?"

"From what they said, it's that bad."

"Okay. Will do so as soon as possible. You said *two* things."

"We found a tunnel—or traces of one. Not one of ours. A D-squader we think. He's somewhere in your area, anyway. Thought we'd warn you."

Faustaff wondered suddenly if he'd been conned and he looked at Nancy again.

"Thanks," he said to the radio. "I'm arriving in 'Frisco tomorrow. Keep me informed of any emergency."

"Okay, professor. Cutting out."

Faustaff put his hand into the glove compartment again and flicked the switch off.

"Phew!" grinned Nancy. "If that was a sample of the kind of talk you physicists go in for I'm glad I only had to learn Esperanto at school."

Faustaff knew that he should feel suspicious of her but couldn't believe that she was a threat.

His 'Frisco office did not use the radio unless it was important. They had told him that an Unstable Matter Situation was imminent on the fifteenth and last alternate Earth. An Unstable Matter Situation could mean the total break-up of a planet. Normally, representatives of his team there could cope with a U.M.S. If they had asked for help it meant things were very bad. Later Faustaff would have to leave the girl somewhere and use the machine that lay in the trunk of his car—a machine called an Invoker, which could summon one of Faustaff's representatives through the subspacial levels so that Faustaff could talk with him directly and find out exactly what was happening on Earth Fifteen. The other piece of information concerned his enemies, the mysterious D-squad who were, Faustaff believed, actually responsible for creating the U.M. situations wherever they arose. A member—or members—of the D-squad were already on this Earth and could be after him. That was why he knew he should suspect Nancy Hunt and be cautious. Her appearance on the highway *was* mysterious, after all, although he was still inclined to believe her story.

She grinned at him again and reached into his shirt pocket to get cigarettes and his lighter, putting a cigarette between his lips and cupping the flame of the lighter so that he was forced to bend his large head towards it.

As evening came and the sun began to set the sky awash with colours, a motel-hoarding showed up. The sign read:

LA PLEJ BONAN MOTELON
Nagejo—Muziko—Amuzoj

A little later they could just make out the buildings of the motel and another sign.

"PLUVATA MORGAU"
Bonvolu esti kun ni

Faustaff read Esperanto fluently enough. It was the official language, though few people spoke it in everyday life. The signs offered him the best motel, swimming, music and amusements. It had humorously been called The Rain Tomorrow and invited him to join the host.

Several more hoardings later they turned off the road into the car park. There were only two other cars there under the shade of the awning. One was a black Ford Thunderbird, the other was a white English M.G. A pretty girl in a frilly ballerina skirt that was obviously part of her uniform, a peaked cap on her head, strode towards them as they got stiffly out of the car.

Faustaff winked at her, his body dwarfing her. He put his sunglasses in his pocket and wiped his forehead with a yellow handkerchief.

"Any cabins?" he asked.

"Sure," smiled the girl, glancing quickly from Faustaff to Nancy. "How many?"

"One double or two singles," he said. "It doesn't matter."

"Not sure we've got a bed to take you, mister," she said.

"I curl up small," Faustaff grinned. "Don't worry about it. I've got some valuables in my car—if I close the roof and lock it will they be safe enough?"

"The only thieves in these parts are the coyotes," she said, "though they'll be learning to drive soon when they find that cars are all that's left to steal."

"Business bad?"

"Was it ever good?"

"There are quite a few motels between here and 'Frisco,"

Nancy said, linking her arm in Faustaff's. "How do they survive?"

"Government grants mainly," she replied. "There've got to be filling stations and motels through the Great American Outback, haven't there? Otherwise how would anyone get to Los Angeles?"

"Plane?" the redhead suggested.

"I guess so," said the girl. "But the highways and motels were here before the airlines, so I guess they just developed. Anyway some people actually *like* crossing the desert by car."

Faustaff got back into the car and operated the hood control. It hummed and extended itself, covering the automobile. Faustaff locked it and got out again. He locked the doors. He unlocked the trunk, flipped a switch on a piece of equipment, re-locked it. He put his arm around the redhead and said: "Right, let's get some food."

The girl in the cap and the skirt led the way to the main building. Behind it were about twelve cabins.

There was one other customer in the restaurant. He sat near the window, looking out at the desert. A big full moon was rising.

Faustaff and the redhead sat down at the counter and looked at the menu. It offered steak or hamburger and a variety of standard trimmings. The girl who'd first greeted them came through a door at the back and said: "What'll it be?"

"You do all the work around here?" asked Nancy.

"Mostly. My husband runs the gas pumps and does the heavy chores. There isn't much to do except maintain the place."

"I guess so," said Nancy. "I'll have a jumbo steak, rare with fries and salad."

"I'll have the same, but four portions," said Faustaff. "Then three of your Rainbow Sodas and six cups of coffee with cream."

"We should have more customers like you," the girl said without raising an eyebrow. She looked at Nancy. "Want anything to follow, honey?"

The redhead grinned. "I'll have vanilla icecream and coffee with cream."

"Go and sit down. It'll be ten minutes."

They crossed to a window table. For the first time Faustaff saw the face of the other customer. He was pale, with his close-cropped black hair growing in a widow's peak, a neat, thin black beard and moustache, his features ascetic, his lips pursed as he stared at the moon. He turned suddenly and glanced at Faustaff, gave a slight inclination of the head and looked back at the moon. His eyes had been bright, black and sardonic.

A little while later the girl came with the order on a big tray. "Your other steaks are in that dish," she said as she set it on the table. "And your trimmings are in those two smaller dishes. Okay?"

"Fine," Falstaff nodded.

The girl put all the contents of the tray on to the table and then stood back. She hesitated and then looked at the other customer.

"Anything else you want—er—Herr Stevel . . . sir . . .?"

"Steifflomeis," he said smiling at her. Although his expression was perfectly amiable, there was still a touch of the sardonic gleam Faustaff had seen earlier. It seemed to faze the girl. She just grunted and hurried back to the counter.

Steifflomeis nodded again at Faustaff and Nancy.

"I am a visitor to your country I am afraid," he said. "I should have invented some sort of pseudonym that could be more easily pronounced."

Faustaff had his mouth full of steak and couldn't respond at once, but Nancy said politely: "Oh, and where are you from, Mr.——?"

"Steifflomeis," he laughed. "Well, my present home is in Sweden."

"Over here on business or holiday?" Faustaff asked carefully. Steifflomeis was lying.

"A little of both. This desert is magnificent isn't it?"

"Hot, though," giggled the redhead. "I bet you're not used to this where you come from."

"Sweden does have quite warm summers," Steifflomeis replied.

Faustaff looked at Steifflomeis warily. There was very

little caution in the professor's make-up, but the little there was now told him not to be forthcoming with Steifflomeis.

"Which way are you heading?" asked the girl. "L.A. or 'Frisco?"

"Los Angeles. I have some business in the capital."

Los Angeles—or more particularly Hollywood, where the presidential Bright House and the Temple of Government were situated—was the capital of the Greater American Confederacy.

Faustaff helped himself to his second and third steaks. "You must be one of those people we were talking about earlier," he said, "who prefer to drive than go by plane."

"I am not fond of flying," Steifflomeis agreed. "And that is no way to see a country, is it?"

"Certainly isn't," agreed the redhead, "if you like this sort of scenery."

"I am very fond of it," Steifflomeis smiled. He got up and bowed slightly to them both. "Now, please excuse me. I will have an early night tonight, I think."

"Goodnight," said Faustaff with his mouth half-full. Once again Steifflomeis had that secret look in his black eyes. Once again he turned quickly. He left the restaurant with a nod to the girl who was still behind the counter, fixing Faustaff's sodas.

When he had gone the girl came over and stood by their table.

"What you make of him?" she asked Faustaff.

Faustaff laughed. The crockery shook. "He's certainly got a talent for drawing attention to himself," he said. "I guess he's one of those people who go in for making themselves seem mysterious to others."

"No kidding," the girl agreed enthusiastically. "If you mean what I think you mean, I'm with you. He certainly gives me the creeps."

"Which way did he drive in from?" Faustaff asked.

"Didn't notice. He gave an L.A. hotel as his address. So maybe he came from L.A."

Nancy shook her head. "No—that's where he's going. He told us."

Faustaff shrugged and laughed again. "If I read him right this is what he wants—people talking about him,

wondering about him. I've met guys like him before. Forget it."

Later the girl showed them to their cabin. In it was a large double bed.

"It's bigger than our standard beds," she said. "Just made for you, you might say."

"That's kind of you," Faustaff smiled.

"Sleep well," she said. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

The redhead was eager to get to bed as soon as the girl had left. Faustaff hugged her, kissed her and then stood back for a moment, taking a small, green velvet skull cap from his shorts' pocket and fitting it on his head before undressing.

"You're crazy, Fusty," giggled the redhead, sitting on the bed and shaking with amusement. "I'll never make you out."

"Honey, you never will," he said, as he stripped off his clothes and flipped out the light.

Three hours later he was awakened by a tight sensation round his head and a tiny, soundless vibration.

He sat upright, pushing back the covers, and getting as gently as possible out of bed so as not to disturb the girl.

The invoker was ready. He had better lug it out into the desert as soon as possible.

two

Three Men in T-shirts

PROFESSOR FAUSTAFF HURRIED from the cabin, carrying his huge naked bulk with extraordinary grace and speed towards the car park and his Buick.

The invoker was ready. It was a fairly compact piece of machinery with handles for moving it. He heaved it from the Buick's trunk and began hauling it out of the car park, away from the motel and into the desert.

Ten minutes later he squatted beneath the moon, fiddling with the invoker's controls. He set dials and pressed buttons. A white light blinked and went out, a red light

blinked, a green light blinked, then the machine seemed still again. Professor Faustaff stood back.

Half-seen traceries of light now seemed to spring from the invoker and weave geometric patterns against the darkness. At length a figure began to materialise amongst them, ghostly at first but steadily becoming more solid. Soon a man stood there.

He was dressed in a coverall and his head was bandaged. He was unshaven and gaunt. He fingered the disc, strapped wrist-watch fashion to his arm, and said nothing.

"George?"

"Hello, professor. Where are we?—I got the call. Can you make it fast?—we need everybody at the base." George Forbes spoke tonelessly, unlike his normal self.

"You really are in trouble there. Give me the picture."

"Our main base was attacked by a D-squad. They used their disruptors as well as more conventional weapons, helicopters flying in low. We missed them until they were close. We fought back, but the bastards did their usual hit and run attack and were in and out again in five minutes—leaving us with five men alive out of twenty-three, wrecked equipment and a damaged adjustor. While we were licking our wounds they must have gone on to create a U.M.S. We're trying to fight it with a malfunctioning adjustor—but it's a losing battle. Four others just won't be enough. We'll get caught in the U.M.S. ourselves if we're not careful—then you can write off E-15. We need a new adjustor and a full replacement team."

"I'll do my best," Faustaff promised. "But we've no spare adjustors—you know how long one takes to build. We'll have to risk shipping one from somewhere else—E-1 is the safest, I guess."

"Thanks, professor. We've given up hope—we don't think you can do anything for us. But if you can do anything . . ." Forbes rubbed his face. He seemed so exhausted that he didn't really know where he was or what he was saying. "I'd better get back. Okay?"

"Okay," said Faustaff.

Forbes tapped the disc on his wrist and began to dematerialise as the E-15 invoker tugged him back through the subspacial levels.

Faustaff knew he had to get to 'Frisco quickly. He would have to travel tonight. He began to haul the invoker back towards the motel.

When he was quite close to the car park he saw a figure in silhouette near his Buick.

The figure seemed to be trying to open the car door. Faustaff bellowed: "What d'you think you're trying to do, buster?" He let go of the invoker and strode towards the figure.

As Faustaff approached the figure straightened and whirled round and it wasn't Steifflomeis as Faustaff had suspected but a woman, blonde, tanned, with the shapely synthetic curves of a dressmaker's dummy—the kind of curves an older woman bought for herself. This woman seemed young.

She gasped when she saw the fat giant bearing down on her, dressed only in a green velvet skull cap, and she moved away from the car.

"You haven't any clothes on," she said. "You could be arrested if I screamed."

Faustaff laughed and paused. "Who'd arrest me? Why were you trying to get into my car?"

"I guess I thought it was mine."

Faustaff looked at the English M.G. and the Thunderbird. "It's not dark enough to make that kind of mistake," he said. The big yellow moon was high and full. "Which is yours?"

"The Thunderbird," she said.

"So the M.G.'s Steifflomeis. I still don't believe you could make a mistake like that—a red Buick for a black Thunderbird."

"I haven't broken into your car. I guess I was just peeking inside. I was interested in that equipment you've got in there." She pointed to a small portable computer in the back seat. "You're a scientist aren't you—a professor or something?"

"Who told you?"

"The owner here."

"Here. I see. What's your name, honey?"

"Maggy White."

"Well, Miss White, keep your nose out of my car in

future." Faustaff was not normally so rude, but he was sure she was lying, as Steifflomeis had been lying, and his encounter with George Forbes had depressed him. Also he was puzzled by Maggy White's total sexlessness. It was unusual for him to find any woman unattractive—they were always attractive in some way—but he was unmoved by her. Subconsciously he also realised that she was unmoved by him. It made him uncomfortable without realising quite why.

He watched her flounce on high heels back towards the cabins. He saw her enter one, saw the door close. He went to get his invoker and hauled it into the trunk, locking it carefully.

Then he followed Maggy White towards the cabins. He would have to wake Nancy and get going. The sooner he contacted his team in 'Frisco the better.

Nancy yawned and scratched her scalp as she climbed into the car. Faustaff started the Buick up and drove out on to the highway, changed gear and stepped on the accelerator.

"What's the rush, Fusty?" She was still sleepy. He had had to waken her suddenly and also wake the motel owner to pay him.

"An emergency in my 'Frisco office," he said. "Nothing for you to worry about. Sorry I disturbed you. Try and get some sleep as we drive, huh?"

"What happened tonight? You bumped into a girl or something in the car park. What were you doing out there?"

"Got a buzz from the office. Who told you?"

"The owner. He told me while he was filling the tank for you." She smiled. "Apparently you hadn't any clothes on. He thought you were a nut."

"He's probably right."

"I get the idea that the girl and that Steifflomeis character are connected—have they anything to do with this emergency of yours?"

"They just might have." Faustaff shivered. He had no clothes but the shirt and shorts he wore and the desert

night was cold. "Might just be salvagers, but . . ." He was musing aloud.

"Salvagers?"

"Oh, just bums—some kind of con-team. I don't know who they are. Wish I did."

Nancy had fallen asleep by the time dawn came. The rising sun turned the desert into an expanse of red sand and heavy black shadows. Tall cactus, their branches extended like the arms of declamatory figures, paraded into the distance; petrified prophets belatedly announcing the doom that had overtaken them.

Faustaff breathed in the cool, dawn smells, feeling sad and isolated suddenly, retiring into himself in the hope that his unconscious might produce some clue to the identities of Herr Steifflomeis and Maggy White. He drove very fast, egged on by the knowledge that unless he reached 'Frisco quickly E-15 was finished.

Later Nancy woke up and stretched, blinking in the strong light. The desert shimmered in the heat haze, rolling on for ever in all directions. She accepted the bizarre nature of the continent without question. To her it had always been like this. Faustaff had known it as very different five years before—when a big U.M.S. had only just been checked. That was something he would probably never fully understand—tremendous physical changes took place on a planet, but the inhabitants never seemed to notice. Somehow the U.M. Situations were accompanied by a deep psychological change in the people—similar in some ways, perhaps, to the mass delusions involving flying saucer spottings years before on his own world. But this was total hallucination. The human psyche seemed even more adaptable than the human physique. Possibly it was the only way the people could survive and protect their sanity on the insane planets of subspace. Yet the mass delusion was not always complete, but those who remembered an earlier state of existence were judged insane, of course. Even on a mass level things took time to adapt. What the inhabitants of Greater America didn't realise now, for instance, was that theirs was the only inhabited land mass, apart from one island in the Philippines. They still talked about foreign countries, though they would

forget little by little, but the countries were only in their imagination, mysterious and romantic places where nobody actually went. Steifflomeis had given himself away immediately he said he was from Sweden, for Faustaff knew that on E-3 a gigantic forest grew in the areas once called Scandinavia, Northern Europe and Southern Russia. Nobody lived there—they had been wiped out in the big U.M.S. which had warped the American continent too. The trees of that area were all grotesquely huge, far bigger than North American redwoods, out of proportion to the land they grew on. And yet these were one of the best results of the partial correction of a U.M.S.

On all the fifteen alternate Earths with which Faustaff was familiar Unstable Matter Situations had manifested themselves and been countered. The result of this was that the worlds were now bizarre travesties of their originals and the further back down the subspacial corridor you went the more unearthly were the alternate Earths. Yet many of the inhabitants survived and that was the important thing. The whole reason for Faustaff's and his team's efforts was to save lives. It was a good reason as far as they were concerned, even though it seemed they were fighting a slow, losing battle against the D-squads.

He was convinced that Steifflomeis and Maggy White were representatives of a D-squad and that their presence heralded trouble for himself, if not the whole of his organisation. 'Frisco might have some new information for him when he got there. He hoped so. His usual equanimity was threatening to desert him.

'Frisco's towers were at last visible in the distance. The road widened here and cactus plants grew thicker in the desert. Behind Frisco was the blue and misty sea, but the only ships in her harbour were coast-going freighters.

The sedate pace of 'Frisco compared to the frenetic mood he had left behind in L.A. made Faustaff feel a little better as he drove through the peaceful old streets that had retained a character that was somehow redolent of an older America, an America that had only really existed in the nostalgic thoughts of the generation which had grown up before the first World War. The streets were

crammed with signs lettered in Edwardian style, there was the delicious smell of a thousand delicatessens, the tolling of the trolley cars echoed amongst the grey and yellow buildings, the air was still and warm, people sauntered along the sidewalks or could be seen leaning against bars and counters within the cool interiors of little stores and saloons. Faustauff liked 'Frisco and preferred it to all other cities in Greater America, which was why he had chosen to set up his headquarters here rather than in the capital of L.A. Not that he minded an atmosphere of noise, bustle and neurosis—in fact he rather enjoyed it—but 'Frisco had a greater air of permanence than elsewhere on E-3 so that psychologically at any rate it seemed the best place for his H.Q.

He drove towards North Beach and soon drew up beside a Chinese restaurant with dark-painted windows with gold dragons on them. He turned to the redhead.

"Nancy, how would you like a big Chinese meal and a chance to wash up?"

"Okay. But is this a brush off?" She could see he didn't intend to join her.

"Nope—but there's that urgent business I must attend to. If I don't come in later, go to this address." He took a small notebook from his shirt pocket and scribbled the address of his private apartment. "That's my private place. Make yourself at home." He handed her a key. "And tell them you're a friend of mine in the restaurant."

She seemed too tired to question him any further and nodded, getting out of the car, still in her swimsuit, and walking into the restaurant.

Faustaff went up to the door next to the restaurant and rang the bell.

A man of about thirty, dark-haired, saturnine, wearing a T-shirt, white jeans and black sneakers, opened the door and nodded when he saw Faustaff. There was a large old-fashioned clock-face stencilled on to the front of his T-shirt. It looked like any other gimmick design.

Faustaff said: "I need some help with the equipment in the trunk. Anyone else here?"

"Mahon and Harvey."

"I guess we can get the stuff upstairs between us. Will you tell them?"

The man—whose name was Ken Peppiatt—disappeared and came back shortly with two other men of about the same age and build, though one of them was blond. They were dressed the same, with the clock design on their T-shirts.

Helped by Faustaff they manhandled the electro-invoker and the portable computer through the door and up a narrow stairway. Faustaff closed the door behind them and kept an eye on the young men until they had set the equipment down in a small room on the first floor. The boards were bare and the room had a musty smell. They went up more uncarpeted stairs to the next floor which was laid out like a living room, with old, comfortable furniture untidily crammed into it. There were magazines and empty glasses littered about.

The three men in T-shirts flopped into chairs and looked up at Faustaff as he went to a 1920-style cocktail cabinet and poured himself a large glass of bourbon. He spooned ice-cubes into the drink and sipped it as he turned to face them.

"You know the problem they have on E-15."

The three men nodded. Mahon had been the man who had contacted Faustaff the day before.

"I gather you're already arranging for a team to relieve the survivors?"

Harvey said: "They're on their way. But what they really need is an adjustor. We haven't a spare—it'll be dangerous to let one go from another alternate. If a D-squad attacks a world without an adjustor—you can say goodbye to that world."

"E-1 hasn't had an attack yet," Faustaff mused. "We'd better send their adjustor."

"Your decision," said Mahon getting up. "I'll go and contact E-1." He left the room.

"I'll want reports on the situation whenever possible," Faustaff told him as he closed the door. He turned to the two others. "I think I've been in touch with the people who made that tunnel you found."

"What are they—salvagers or D-squaders?" Harvey asked.

"Not sure. They don't seem like salvagers and D-squaders usually only turn up to attack. They don't hang about in motels." Faustaff told about his encounter with the pair.

Peppiatt frowned. "That's not a real name—Steifflomeis—I'd swear." Peppiatt was one of their best linguists. He knew the root tongues of all the alternates, and many secondary languages as well. "It doesn't click. Just possibly German, I suppose, but even then . . ."

"Let's forget about the name for the time being," Faustaff said. "We'd better put a couple of people on to watching them. Two Class H agents ought to be okay. We'd better have recordings, photographs of them, everything we can get for a file. All the usual information—normal whereabouts and so on. Can you fix that, Ken?"

"We've got a lot of Class H agents on retainer. They'll think it's a security job—Class H still believe we're some kind of government outfit. You might as well use half-a-dozen—they're available."

"As many as you think. Just keep tabs on the pair of them." Faustaff mentioned that they were probably in L.A. or 'Frisco judging by what they had said. Their cars shouldn't be hard to trace—he'd taken the numbers as he left the car park that morning.

Faustaff finished his drink and picked up a clip-board of schedules lying on a table. He flipped through them.

"Cargoes seem to be moving smoothly enough," he nodded. "How's the fresh-water situation here?"

"We'll need some more. They're recycling already, of course, but until we get those big sea-water condensers set up we'll have to keep shipping it in from E-6." E-6 was a world that now consisted of virtually nothing but fresh-water oceans.

"Good," Faustaff began to relax. The E-15 problem was still nagging him, though there was little he could do at this stage. Only once before had he experienced a Total Break-up—on the now extinct E-16—the planet that had taken his father when a U.M.S. got completely out of hand. He didn't like to think of what had happened there happening anywhere else.

"There's a new recruit you might like to talk to yourself," Harvey said. "A geologist from this world. He's at main H.Q. now."

Faustaff frowned. "This will mean a trip to E-1. I guess *I'd* better see him. I need to go to E-1, anyway. They'll want an explanation about the adjustor for one thing. They'll be nervous, quite rightly."

"They sure will, professor. I'll keep you in touch if anything breaks with this Steifflomeis and the girl."

"Have you got a bed free? I'll get a couple of hours sleep first, I think. No point in working tired."

"Sure. The second on the left upstairs."

Faustaff grunted and went upstairs. Though he could last for days without sleep, it was mainly thanks to his instinct to conserve his energy whenever he had the chance.

He lay down on the battered bed and, after a pang or two of conscience about Nancy, went to sleep.

three

The Times They Are A-Changing . . .

FAUSTAFF SLEPT FOR almost two hours exactly, got up, washed and shaved and left the house, which was primarily living quarters for a section of his E-3 team.

He walked down towards Chinatown and soon reached a big building that had once been a pleasure house, with a saloon and a dance floor downstairs and private rooms for one night rental upstairs. Outside, the building looked ramshackle and the old paint was dull and peeling. A sign in ornate playbill lettering could still be made out. It read, somewhat unoriginally, The Golden Gate. He opened a side door with his key and went in.

The place was still primarily as it had been when closed down by the cops for the final time. Everything that wasn't faded plush seemed tarnished gilt. The big dance hall, with bars at both ends, smelt a little musty, a little damp. Big mirrors still lined the walls behind the bars, but they were fly-specked.

In the middle of the floor a lot of electronic equipment

had been set up. Housed in dull metal casings, its function was hard to guess. To an outsider many of the dials and indicators would have been meaningless.

A wide staircase led from the floor to a gallery above. A man, dressed in standard T-shirt, jeans and sneakers, was standing there now, his hands on the rail, leaning and looking at the professor below.

Faustaff nodded to the man and began to climb the stairs.

"Hi, Jas."

"Hi, professor." Jas Hollom grinned. "What's new?"

"Too much. They said you had a new recruit."

"That's right." Jas jerked his thumb at a door behind him. "He's in there. It was the usual thing—a guy getting curious about the paradoxes in the environment. His investigations led him to us. We roped him in."

Faustaff's team made a point of drawing its recruits from people like the man Hollom had described. It was the best way and ensured a high standard of recruits as well as a fair amount of secrecy. The professor didn't court secrecy for its own sake but didn't approach governments and declare himself simply because his experience warned him that the more officials who knew about him and his organisation the more spanners there would be in his organisation's works.

Faustaff reached the gallery and moved towards the door Hollom had indicated, but before he entered he nodded towards the equipment below.

"How's the adjustor working. Tested it recently?"

"Adjustor and tunneller both in good shape. Will you be needing the tunneller today?"

"Probably."

"I'll go down and check it. Mahon's in the communications room if you want him."

"I saw him earlier. I'll talk to the recruit."

Faustaff knocked on the door and entered.

The new recruit was a tall, well-built, sandy-haired young man of about twenty-five. He was sitting in a chair reading one of the magazines from the table in the centre. He got up.

"I'm Professor Faustaff." He held out his hand and the sandy-haired man shook it a little warily.

"I'm Gerry Bowen. I'm a geologist—at the university here."

"You're a geologist. You found a flaw in the plot of the Story of the Rocks, is that it?"

"There's that—but it was the ecology of Greater America—not the geology—that bothered me. I started enquiring, but everybody seems to be in a half-dream when it comes to talking about some subjects. A sort of—"

"Mass hallucination?"

"Yes—what's the explanation?"

"I don't know. You started checking, eh?"

"I did. I found this place—found it was turning out a near-endless stream of goods and supplies of all kinds. That explained what was supporting the country. Then I tried to talk to one of your men, find out more. He told me more. It's still hard to believe."

"About the alternates, you mean?"

"About everything to do with them."

"Well, I'll tell you about it—but I've got to warn you that if we don't get loyalty from you after you've heard the story we do what we always do . . ."

"That's—?"

"We've got a machine for brainwashing you painlessly—not only wiping your memory clean of what you've learned from us, but getting rid of that bug of curiosity that led you to us. Okay?"

"Okay. What happens now?"

"Well, I thought I'd give you a good illustration that we're not kidding about the subspacial alternate worlds. I'm going to take you to another alternate—my home planet. We call it E-1. It's the youngest of the alternates."

"The youngest? That seems a bit hard to figure."

"Figure it out after you've heard more. There isn't much time. Are you willing to come along?"

"You bet I am!" Bowen was eager. He had an alert mind and Faustaff could tell that in spite of his enthusiasm his intellect was working all the information out, weighing it. That was healthy. It also meant, Faustaff thought, that

it wouldn't take long for positive information to convince him.

When Faustaff and Gerry Bowen got down to the ground floor Jas Hollom was working at the largest machine there. A faint vibration could be felt on the floor and some indicators had been activated.

Faustaff stepped forward, checking the indicators. "She's doing fine." He looked at Bowen. "Another couple of minutes and we'll be ready."

Two minutes passed and a thin hum began to come from the machine. Then the air in front of the tunneller seemed full of agitated dust which swirled round and round in a spiral until delicate, shifting colours became visible and the part of the room immediately ahead of the tunneller became shadowy until it disappeared.

"Tunnel's ready," Faustaff said to Bowen. "Let's go."

Bowen followed Faustaff towards the tunnel that the machine had created through subspace.

"How does it *work*?" Bowen asked incredulously.

"Tell you later."

"Just a minute," Hollom said, making an adjustment to the machine. "There—I was sending you to E-12." He laughed. "Okay—*now*!"

Faustaff stepped into the tunnel and grabbed Bowen, pulling him in too. Faustaff propelled himself forward.

The 'walls' of the tunnel were grey and hazy, they seemed thin and beyond them was a vacuum more absolute than that of space. Sensing this Bowen shuddered; Faustaff could feel him do it.

It took ninety seconds before, with an itching skin but no other ill-effects, Faustaff stepped out into a room of bare concrete—a store-room in a factory, or a warehouse. Bowen said: "Phew! That was worse than a ghost train."

But for one large piece of equipment that was missing, the equipment in this room was identical to that in the room they'd just left. It was all that occupied the dully-lit room. A steel door opened and a short, fat man in an ordinary lounge suit came in. He took off his glasses, a gesture that conveyed surprise and pleasure, and walked with a light, bouncing step towards Faustaff.

"Professor! I heard you were coming."

"Hello, Doctor May. Nice to see you. This is Gerry Bowen from E-3. He may be coming to work with us."

"Good, good. You'll want the lecture room. Um—" May paused and pursed his lips. "We were a bit worried by E-15 requisitioning our adaptor, you know. We have some more being built, but . . ."

"It was on my orders. Sorry, doctor. E-1 has never had a raid, after all. It was the safest bet."

"Still, a risk. This could be the time they pick. Sorry to gripe, professor. We realised the emergency was acute. It's odd knowing at the back of your mind that if a U.M.S. occurs we've nothing to fight it with."

"Of course. Now—the lecture room."

"I take it you won't want to be disturbed."

"Only if something bad crops up. I'm expecting news from E-3 and E-15. D-squad trouble on both."

"I heard."

The corridor seemed to Bowen to be situated in a large office block. When they reached the elevator he guessed that that must be what it was—outwardly, anyway.

The building was, in fact, the central headquarters for Faustaff's organisation, a multi-storey building that stood on one of Haifa's main streets. It was registered as the offices of the Trans-Israel Export Company. If the authorities had ever wondered about it, they hadn't done anything to let Faustaff know. Faustaff's father was a respected figure in Haifa—and his mysterious disappearance something of a legend. Perhaps because of his father's good name, Faustaff wasn't bothered.

The lecture room was appropriately labelled LECTURE ROOM. Inside were several rows of seats facing a small cinema screen. A desk had been placed to one side of the screen and on it was mounted a control console of some kind.

"Take a seat, Mr Bowen," said Dr May as Faustaff walked up to the desk and squeezed his bulk into a chair. May sat down beside Bowen and folded his arms.

"I'm going to be as brief as I can," Faustaff said. "And use a few slides and some movie-clips to illustrate what

I'm going to say. I'll answer questions, too, of course, but Dr May will have to fill you in on any particular details you want to know. Okay?"

"Okay," said Bowen.

Faustaff touched a stud on the console and the lights dimmed.

"Although it seems that we have been travelling through the subspacial levels for many years," he began, "we have actually only been in contact with them since 1971—that's twenty-eight years ago. The discovery of the alternate Earths was made by my father when he was working here, in Haifa, at the Haifa Institute of Technology."

A picture came on to the screen—a picture of a tall, rather lugubrious man, almost totally unlike the other Faustaff, his son. He was skinny, with melancholy, over-large eyes and big hands and feet. He looked like the gormless feed-man for a comedian.

"That's him. He was a nuclear physicist and a pretty good one. He was born in Europe, spent some time in a German concentration camp, went to America and helped on the Bomb. He left America soon after the Hiroshima explosion, travelled around a little, had a job directing an English Nuclear Research Establishment, then got this offer to come to Haifa where they were doing some very interesting work with high-energy neutrinos. This work particularly excited my father. His ambition—kept secret from everyone but my mother and me—was to discover a device which would counter a nuclear explosion—just stop the bomb going off. A fool's dream, really, and he had sense enough to realise it. But he never forgot that that was what he would like to work on if he had the chance. Haifa offered him that chance—or he thought it did. His own work with high energy neutrinos had given him the idea that a safety device, at very least, could be built that would have the effect of exerting a corecting influence on unstable elements by emitting a stream of high energy neutrinos that on contact with the agitated particles would form a uniting link, a kind of shell around the unstable atoms which would, as it were, 'calm them down' and allow them to be dealt with easily and at leisure.

"Some scientists at Haifa Tech had got the same idea and he was offered the job of directing the research.

"He worked for a year and had soon developed a device which was similar to our adjustors in their crudest form. In the meantime my mother died. One day he and several others were testing the machine when they made a mistake in the regulation of the particles emitted by the device. In fiddling with the controls they accidentally created the first 'tunnel'. Naturally they didn't know what it was, but investigation soon brought them the information of the subspacial alternate Earths. Further frenzied research, which paralleled work on the adjustor, the tunneller and the invoker, produced the knowledge of twenty-four alternate Earths to our own! They existed in what my father and his team called 'subspace'—a series of 'layers' that are 'below' our own space, going deeper and deeper. Within a year of their discovery there were only twenty alternates and they had actually witnessed the total extinction of one planet. Before the end of the second year there were only seventeen alternates and they knew, roughly, what was happening.

"Somehow the complete disruption of the planet's atomic structure was being effected. It would start with a small area and gradually spread until the whole planet would expand into gas and those gasses drift away through space leaving no trace of the planet. The small disrupted areas we now call Unstable Matter Locations and are able to deal with. What at first my father thought was some sort of natural phenomenon was later discovered to be the work of human beings—who have machines that create this disruption of matter.

"Although my father's scientific curiosity filled him, he soon became appalled by the fantastic loss of life that destruction of these alternate Earths involved. Whoever was destroying the planets was cold-bloodedly killing off billions of people a year.

"These planets, I'd better add, all had similarities to our own—and your own, Mr Bowen—with roughly similar standards of civilisation, roughly similar governmental institutions, roughly similar scientific accomplishments—

though all, in some way or another, had come to a dead end—had stagnated. We still don't know why this is."

A picture came on to the screen. It was not a photograph but an artist's impression of a world the same size as Earth, with a moon the same as Earth's. The picture showed a planet that seemed of a universally greyish colour.

"This is E-15 now," Faustaff said. "This is what it looked like ten years ago."

Gerry Bowen saw a predominantly green and blue world. He didn't recognise it. "E-1 still looks like this," Faustaff said.

Faustaff flashed the next picture. A world of green obsidian, shown in close-ups to be misty, twilit, ghastly, with ghoul-like inhabitants.

"And this is what E-14 looked like less than ten years ago," came Faustaff's voice.

The picture Bowen saw next was exactly the same as the second picture he'd seen—a predominantly green and blue world with well-marked continental outlines.

"E-13, coming up now," said Faustaff.

A world of blindingly bright crystal in hexagonal structures like a vast honeycomb. Deposits of earth and water had been collected in some of the indentations. Movie films showed the inhabitants living hand to mouth existences on this strange world.

"E-13 as it was."

A picture identical to the two others Bowen had already seen.

The pattern was repeated—worlds of grotesque and fantastic jungles, deserts, seas, had all once been like E-1 was now. Only E-2 was similar to E-1.

"E-2 is a world that seemed to stop short, in our terms, just around 1960 and the expansion of the space programmes. You wouldn't know about those, even, since E-3 stopped short, as I remember, just after 1950. This sudden halting of all kinds of progress still mystifies us. As I said, a peculiar change comes over people as well, on the whole. They behave as if they were living in a perpetual dream and a perpetual present. Old books and films that show a different state to the one they now know are ignored or

treated as jokes. Time, in effect, ceases to exist in any aspect. It all goes together—only a few, like you, Mr Bowen break out. The people are normal in all other respects."

"What's the explanation for the changes of these worlds?" Bowen asked.

"I'm coming to that. When my father and his team first discovered the alternate worlds of subspace they were being wiped out, as I mentioned, rapidly. They found a way of stopping this wholesale destruction by building the adjustors, refinements of the original machines they'd been working on, which could control the U.M. Situations where they occurred.

"In order to be ready to control the U.M.S. where and when it manifested itself, my father and his team had to begin getting recruits and had soon built up a large organisation—almost as large as the one I now have. Well-equipped teams of men, both physically and mentally alert, had to be stationed on the other alternates—there were fifteen left by then, not fourteen as now.

"Slowly the organisation was built up, not without some help from officials in the Israeli government of the time, who also helped to keep the activities of my father and his team fairly secret. The adjustors were built and installed on all the worlds. By means of an adjustor's stabilising influence they could correct, to some extent, a U.M.S.—their degree of success depending on the stage the U.M.S. had reached before they could get their machine there and get it working. Things are much the same nowadays. Though we can 'calm down' the disrupted matter and bring it back to something approximately its original form, we cannot make it duplicate its original at all perfectly. The deeper back you go through the subspacial levels, the less like the original the planet is and the more U.M. Situations there have been. Thus E-15 is a world of grey ash that settles on it from thousands of volcanoes that have broken through the surface, E-14 is nothing but glassy rock, and E-13 is primarily a crystalline structure these days. E-12 is all jungle and so on. Nearer to E-1 the worlds are more recognisable—particularly E-2, E-3 and E-4. E-4 had it lucky—it stopped progressing just before

the first world war. But it mainly consists of the British Isles and Southern and Eastern Europe now—the rest is either waste-land or water."

"So your father founded the organisation and you carried it on, is that it?" Bowen asked from the darkness.

"My father died in the Total Breakup of E-16," Faustaff said. "The U.M.S. got out of control—and he didn't get off in time."

"You said the U.M.S. weren't natural—that somebody caused them. Who?"

"We don't know. We call them the D-squad—the Demolition Squad. They make it their business to attack our stations as well as creating U.M. Situations. They've killed many people directly, not just indirectly."

"I must say it's hard to believe that such a complicated organisation as yours can exist and do the work it does."

"It has built up over the years. Nothing strange about that. We manage."

"You talk all the time about alternate Earths—but what about the rest of the universe. I remember reading the theory of alternate universes some years ago."

"We're pretty sure that the only alternates are of Earth and the moon in some cases. It's a pity spaceflight is not yet sufficiently sophisticated, otherwise we could put the theory to the test. My father reached this conclusion in 1985 when the second manned spaceship reached Mars and 'disappeared.' It was assumed it had gone off course into a meteor storm on its return flight. Actually it turned up on Earth 5—its crew dead due to the stresses of passing through subspace in a most unorthodox way. This seemed to prove that some distance beyond Earth there are no subspacial alternates. Whether this is a natural phenomenon or an artificial one, I don't know. There's a lot we don't understand."

"You think there is a force at work, apart from you?"

"I do. The D-squad speaks of that. But though we've done some extensive checking up, we haven't found a trace of where they come from—though it must be from somewhere on E-1. Why they should murder planets—and more

specifically the inhabitants of those planets—the way they do, I cannot understand. It is inhuman."

"And what is your real reason for doing all this, professor, risking so much?"

"To preserve human life," said Faustaff.

"That is all."

Faustaff smiled. "That's all."

"So it's your organisation against the D-squad, basically."

"Yes." Faustaff paused. "There are also the people we call salvagers. They came from several different alternates —but primarily from E-1, E-2, E-3 and E-4. At different stages they have discovered our organisation and found out what it does. Either they have found us out of curiosity, as you did, or stumbled upon us by accident. Over the years they have formed themselves into bands who pass through the subspacial alternates looting what they can and selling it in worlds that need it—using E-1 as their main base, as we do. They are pirates, freebooters using stolen equipment that was originally ours. They are no threat. Some people are irritated by them, that's all."

"There's no chance that they are connected with these D-squads."

"None. For one thing it wouldn't be in their interest to have a planet destroyed."

"I guess not."

"Well, that's the basic set-up. Are you convinced?"

"Convinced and overwhelmed. There are a few details I'd like filled in."

"Perhaps Dr May can help you?"

"Yes."

"You want to join us?"

"Yes."

"Good. Dr May will tell you what you want to know, then put you in touch with someone here who'll show you the ropes. I'll leave you now, if you don't mind."

Faustaff said goodbye to Bowen and May and left the little lecture room.

four

The Salvagers

FAUSTAFF DROVE HIS Buick towards the centre of San Francisco where he had his private apartment. The sun was setting and the city looked romantic and peaceful. There wasn't much traffic on the roads and he made good speed.

He parked the car and walked into the old apartment house that stood on a hill giving a good view of the bay.

The decrepit elevator took him up to the top and he was about to let himself in when he realised he'd given his key to Nancy. He rang the bell. He was still wearing the beach shirt and shorts and sneakers he had been wearing the day before when he left Los Angeles. He wanted a shower and a change before anything.

Nancy opened the door. "So you made it," she smiled. "Is the emergency over?"

"The emergency—oh, yes. It's in hand. Forget about it." He laughed and put his arms around her, lifting her up and kissing her.

"I've hungry," he said. "Is my icebox well stocked?"

"Very well-stocked," she grinned.

"Well, let's have something to eat and go to bed." He had now forgotten about wanting a shower.

"That seems a good idea," she said.

Later that night the phone started ringing. Faustaff woke up instantly and picked it up. Nancy stirred and muttered but didn't wake.

"Faustaff."

"Mahon. Message from E-15. Things are bad. They've had another visit from the D-squad. They want help."

"They want me, maybe?"

"Well, yes, I think that's about the size of it."

"Are you at H.Q.?"

"Yes."

"I'll be over."

Faustaff put the phone down and got up. Once again he

was careful not to disturb Nancy who seemed a good sleeper. He put on a black T-shirt and a pair of dark pants and socks, then laced up his old sneakers.

Soon he was driving the Buick towards Chinatown and not much later was in The Golden Gate, where Mahon and Hollom were waiting for him.

Hollom was working on the tunneller, his face screwed up in impatience.

Faustaff went behind the bar and reached under it, putting a bottle of bourbon and some glasses on the counter.

"Want a drink?"

Hollom shook his head angrily.

Mahon looked up from where he was intently watching Hollom. "He's having trouble, professor. Can't seem to drive the tunnel deep enough. Can't reach E-15."

Faustaff nodded. "That's sure proof that a big D-squad is working there. It happened that time on E-6, remember?" He poured himself a large drink and swallowed it down. He didn't interfere with Hollom who knew as much about tunnellers as anyone and would ask for help if he needed it. He leant on the bar, pouring himself another drink and singing one of his favourite old numbers, remembered from when he was a youngster. "Then take me disappearing through the smoke rings of my mind, down the foggy ruins of time, far past the frozen leaves, the haunted, frightened trees, out to the windy beach, far from the twisted reach of crazy sorrow . . ." It was Dylan's *Mr Tambourine Man*. Faustaff preferred the old stuff, didn't care much for modern popular music which had become too pretentious for his taste.

Hollom said tight-faced: "D'you mind, professor? I'm trying to concentrate."

"Sorry," said Faustaff shutting up at once. He sighed, trying to remember how long it had taken them to break through to E-6 the last time there had been a heavy block.

Hollom shouted wildly, suddenly: "Quick—quick—quick—I won't hold it long."

The air in front of the tunneller began to become agitated. Faustaff put down his drink and hurried forward.

Soon a tunnel had manifested itself. It shimmered more than usual and seemed very unstable. Faustaff knew that if it broke down he would be alone in the depths of subspace, instantly killed. Though possessing very little fear of death Faustaff did have a strong love of life and didn't enjoy the prospect of having to give up living. In spite of this he stepped swiftly into the subspacial tunnel and was soon moving along past the grey shimmering walls. His journey was the longest he had ever made, taking over two minutes, then he was through.

Peppiatt greeted him. Peppiatt was one of several volunteers who had gone with the replacement team to E-15. Peppiatt looked haggard.

"Glad to see you, professor. Sorry we couldn't use the invoker—it's busted."

"You are having trouble."

The invoker was a kind of subspacial 'grab', working on similar principles to the sister machines, that could be used primarily to pull agents out of U.M.S. trouble-spots, or get them through the dimensions without needing a tunnel. A tunnel was safer since the invoker worked on the principle of forming a kind of shell around a man and propelling it through the layers in order to break them down. Sometimes they resisted and didn't break down. Then a man 'invoked' was lost for good.

Faustaff looked around. He was in a large, natural cave. It was dark and the floor was damp, neon lighting sputtering on the walls, filling the cave with lurid light that danced like firelight. Pieces of battered electronic equipment lay everywhere, much of it plainly useless. Two other men were by the far wall working at something that lay on a bench. Cables trailed across the floor. Several more men moved about. They carried laser rifles, their power-packs on their backs. The rifles had been stolen from the U.S. government on E-1 and technicians in Haifa were trying to mass produce them, but hadn't had much success as yet. Faustaff's men were not normally armed and Faustaff had given no order to fight back at the D-squad. Evidently someone had decided it was necessary. Faustaff didn't like it, but he decided not to question the order now that it had been made. The one thing the professor

ever seemed adamant about was the fact that like doctors their business was to save, not take, life. It was the entire *raison d'être* of the organisation, after all.

Faustaff knew that his presence on E-15 wasn't likely to serve any particular practical purpose since the men working here were trained to cope with even the most desperate situation, but gathered that he was needed for the moral support the men might get from thinking about it. Faustaff was not a very introspective man on the whole. In all matters outside of his scientific life he acted more according to his instinct than his reason. "Thinking causes trouble," was a motto he had once expressed in a moment of feeling.

"Where's everyone else?" he asked Peppiatt.

"With the adjustor. Areas 33, 34, 41, 42, 49 and 50 were calmed down for a while, but the D-squad came back. Evidently those areas form the key-spot. We're still trying to get them under control. I'm just going back there, now."

"I'll come along."

Faustauff grinned encouragingly at the men he passed on his way to the exit.

Peppiatt shook his head wonderingly. "Their spirit's better already. I don't know what you do, professor, but you certainly manage to make people feel good."

Faustaff nodded absently. Peppiatt operated a control beside a big steel door. The door began to slide back into the wall, revealing a bleak expanse of grey ash, a livid sky from which ash fell like rain. There was a stink of sulphur in the air. Faustaff was familiar with the conditions on E-15, where because of the volcanic upheavals almost everywhere on the planet, the people were forced to live in caves such as the one they'd just left. Their lives were fairly comfortable, however, thanks to Faustaff's cargoes brought from more fortunate worlds.

A jeep, already covered by a coating of ash, stood by. Peppiatt got into it and Faustaff climbed into the back seat. Peppiatt started the engine and the jeep began to bounce away across the wasteland of ash. Apart from the sound of the jeep the world was silent. Ash fell and smoke rolled in the distance. Occasionally when the smoke cleared a little the outline of an erupting volcano could be seen.

Faustaff's throat was clogged by the ash carried on the sulphurous air. It was a grey vision of some abandoned hell and infinitely depressing.

Later a square building, half buried in the ash, came in sight.

"That's one of our relay stations, isn't it," Faustaff pointed.

"Yes. It's the nearest our 'copters can get to the main base without having a lot of fuel difficulties. There should be a 'copter waiting."

A few men stood about outside the relay station. They were dressed in protective suits, wearing oxygen masks and heavy, smoked goggles. Faustaff couldn't see a 'copter, just a small hovercraft, a useful vehicle for this type of terrain. But even as they drew up, an engine note could be heard in the air above and soon a helicopter began to come down nearby, its rotors thrumming as it settled in the dust.

Two men ran from the station as the 'copter landed. They were carrying flapping suits, similar to those that all the men here wore. They ran up to the jeep.

"We'll have to wear these, I'm afraid, professor," Peppiatt said.

Faustaff shrugged. "Well, if we must." He took the suit offered him and began to pull it over his bulk. It was tight. He hated feeling constricted. He slipped mask and goggles over his face. At least breathing and seeing were easier.

Peppiatt led the way through the clogging, soft ash to the helicopter. They climbed in to the passenger seats. The pilot turned his head. "They're coming out with fuel pellets now. Won't be long."

"How are things up at the U.M.S.?" Faustaff asked.

"Pretty bad, I think. There are some salvagers here—we've seen them once—drifting around like buzzards."

"There can't be as much for them to salvage here."

"Only spare parts," the pilot said.

"Of course," said Faustaff.

Using stolen or salvaged equipment belonging to Faustaffs' organisation, the salvagers needed to loot spare parts whenever possible. In the confusion following a major

D-squad attack this could be done quite easily. Though they resented the salvagers, Faustaff's team had orders not to use violence against them. The salvagers were apparently prepared to use violence if necessary, thus the going was pretty easy for them.

"Do you know which gang is here?" Faustaff asked as the 'copter was fuelled.

"Two gangs working together, I think. Gordon Ogg's and Cardinal Orelli's."

Faustaff nodded. He knew both. He had encountered them several times before. Cardinal Orelli was from E-4 and Gordon Ogg was from E-2. They were both men whose investigations had led them to discover Faustaff's organisation and had worked for it for a while before going 'rogue'. Most of their gangs were comprised of similar men. Faustaff had a surprisingly few number of deserters and most of those were now salvagers.

The helicopter began to lift into the ash-laden air.

Within half-an-hour Faustaff could see signs of the U.M.S. ahead.

The Unstable Matter Situation was confined in a rough radius of ten miles. Here there was no grey ash, but boiling colour and an ear-shattering, unearthly noise.

Faustaff found it hard to adjust his eyes and ears to the U.M.S. He was familiar with the sight and sound of disrupted, unstable matter, but he never got used to it.

Great spiralling gouts of stuff would twist hundreds of feet into the air and then fall back again. The sounds were almost indescribable, like the roar of a thousand tidal waves, the screech of vast sheets of metal being tortured and twisted, the rumble of gigantic landslides.

Around the perimeter of this terrifying example of nature's death-throes there buzzed land-craft and helicopters. A big adjustor could be seen, trained on the U.M.S., the men and machines completely dwarfed by the swirling fury of the unstable elements.

They were now forced to use the radios in their helmets to speak to one another, and even then words were difficult to make out through the crackles of interference.

The helicopter landed and Faustaff got out, hurrying towards the adjustor.

One of the men near the adjustor was standing watching the instruments, arms folded.

Faustaff tapped him on the shoulder.

"Yes," came a distant voice through the crackle.

"Faustaff—what's the situation like?"

"More or less static, professor. I'm Haldane."

"From E-2 isn't it?"

"That's right."

"Where are the original E-15 team—or what's left of them?"

"Shipped back to E-1. Thought it best."

"Good. I hear you had another D-squad attack."

"That's right—yesterday. Unusual intensity for them. As you know, they usually attack and run, never risk the chance of getting themselves hurt—but not this time. I'm afraid we killed one of them—died instantly—sorry to have to do it."

Faustaff controlled himself. He hated the idea of dying, particularly of violent death. "Anything I can do here?" he asked.

"Your advice might be needed. Nothing to do at present. We're hoping to calm Area 50 down. We might do it. Ever seen something like this?"

"Only once—on E-16."

Haldane didn't comment, although the implication must have been clear. Another voice came in. It was an urgent voice.

" 'Copter 36 to base—U.M.S. spreading from Area 41. Shift adjustor round there—and hurry."

"We need another dozen adjustors," Haldane shouted as he waved a hovering 'copter down to pick up the adjustor with its magnetic grab.

"I know," Faustaff shouted back. "But we can't spare them." He watched as the grab connected with the adjustor and began to lift it up and away towards Area 41. Adjustors were hard to build. It would be folly to take others from more subspacial Earths.

The dilemma was insoluble. Faustaff had to hope that

the one adjustor would finally succeed in checking and reversing the U.M.S.

A distorted voice that he eventually recognised as Peppiatt's voice said: "What do you think, professor?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. Let's get back to that 'copter and go round the perimeter."

They stumbled back towards the 'copter and climbed in. Peppiatt told the pilot what to do. The 'copter rose into the air and began to circle the U.M.S. Looking it over carefully Faustaff could see that it was still possible to get the U.M.S. under control. He could tell by the colours. While the whole spectrum was represented, as it was now, the elements were still in their natural state at least. When they began to transform the U.M.S. would take on a purple-blue colour. When that happened it would be impossible to do anything.

Faustaff said: "You'd better start getting the native population assembled in one place as soon as possible. We'll have to anticipate evacuation."

"We won't be able to evacuate everyone," Peppiatt warned him.

"I know," Faustaff said tiredly. "We'll just have to do what we can. We'll have to work out the best place to ship them to, as well. Perhaps an uninhabited land area somewhere—where they won't come in contact with the natives of another world. This has never happened before—I'm not sure what a meeting between two different populations would produce and we don't want more trouble than we have." A memory of Steifflomeis popped into his mind. "The Scandinavian Forests on E-3 might be okay." Already, tacitly, he was accepting that E-15 was finished. He was half-aware of this but his mind was struggling against the defeatist attitude beginning to fill him.

Suddenly the pilot broke in. "Look!"

About six 'copters in close formation were coming through the ash-rain in the distance. "They're not ours," the pilot said, banking steeply. "I'm going back to the base."

"What are they?" Faustaff asked.

Peppiatt answered. "Probably D-squaders. Might be salvagers."

"D-squaders! Again!" The D-squads rarely attacked more than once after they had started the initial U.M.S.

"I think they're out to destroy E-15," Peppiatt said. "We'll have to defend, you know, professor. Lots of lives at stake."

Faustaff had never quite been able to make the logical step which excused the taking of life if it saved life. His mind was slightly confused as he nodded and said, with a tight feeling in his chest, "Okay."

The 'copter landed near the adjustor and the pilot got out and spoke to Haldane the chief operator. Haldane came hurrying to where Faustaff and Peppiatt were climbing down. He was fiddling with his helmet. Then his radio blasted on all the frequencies they were using.

"Alert! Alert! All guards to Area 50. D-squad about to attack adjustor."

Within seconds helicopters began to move in towards Area 50 and land, disgorging armed men.

Faustaff felt infinitely depressed as he watched them take up their defensive positions around the adjustor.

Then the D-squad 'copters began to come in.

Faustaff saw black-clad figures, seemingly faceless with black masks completely covering their heads. They had weapons in their hands.

The barely-seen lance of concentrated light from a laser rifle suddenly struck down from one of the leading D-squad 'copters. A man on the ground fell silently.

The guards around the adjustor began to aim a criss-cross lattice of laser-rays at the coming 'copters. The 'copters dodged, but one of them exploded. Like tiny, lethal searchlights the beams struck back and forth. The fact that the D-squads used E-1 equipment for all their attacks indicated to Faustaff that that was their origin. The only device they had which Faustaff and his men didn't have was the Matter Disrupter. Faustaff could make out the 'copter which carried it, flying well behind the others and rather lower.

More of Faustaff's men fell and Faustaff could barely stop himself from weeping. He felt a helpless anger, but it never once occurred to him to strike back at the men who had done the killing.

Another 'copter exploded, another went out of control and flew into the U.M.S. Faustaff saw it become incredibly luminous and then its outline grew and grew, becoming fainter as it grew, until it vanished. Faustaff shuddered. He wasn't enjoying his visit to E-15.

Then he saw several of his guards fall in one place and realised that the attacking D-squad were concentrating their fire. He saw laser beams touch the adjustor, saw metal smoulder and burst into white flame. The helicopters rose and fled away, their mission accomplished.

Faustaff ran towards the adjustor. "Where's Haldane?" he asked one of the guards.

The guard pointed at one of the corpses.

Faustaff cursed and began checking the adjustor's indicator dials. They were completely haywire. The adjustor was still powered and its central core hadn't been struck, but Faustaff could see immediately that it would take too long to repair. Why had the D-squads intensified their attacks so much, risking their lives—indeed, losing their lives—to do so? It wasn't like them. Normally they were strictly hit-and-run men. Faustaff pushed this question from his mind. There were more immediate problems to be solved.

He switched his helmet mike to all frequencies and yelled. "Begin total population assembly immediate. Operate primary evacuation plan. The U.M.S. is going to start spreading any time—and when that happens we won't have much notice before the whole planet breaks up."

The 'copter with the grab began to move down towards the adjustor but Faustaff waved it away. The adjustor was heavy and it would take time to get it back to base. The evacuation of all the men from the area was more important. He told as much to the pilot over his radio.

Against the background of the vast, undulating curtain of disrupted matter, the team worked desperately to get out of the area, Faustaff helping men into 'copters and giving instructions wherever they were needed. There weren't enough 'copters to get everyone out at once. The evacuation would have to be organised in two lifts.

As the last of the 'copters took off, a handful of men, including Faustaff and Peppiatt, were left behind.

Faustaff turned to look at the U.M.S. with despair, noting that the spectrum was slowly toning down. It was the danger signal.

He looked back and saw some land vehicles bumping across the grey wasteland towards them. They didn't look like his organisation's jeeps or trucks. As they drew closer he could make out figures sitting in them, dressed in a strange assortment of costumes.

Sitting high in the back of one jeep was a man dressed in red—a red cap on his head, a red smock covering most of his body. He had a small oxygen mask over his nose and mouth, but Faustaff recognised him by his clothes. It was Orelli, leader of one of the biggest teams of salvagers. He had a laser-rifle pack on his back, and the rifle across his knees.

Peppiatt's voice came through the crackle of static in his earpiece. "Salvagers. Not wasting much time. They must be after the adjustor."

The remaining guards raised their weapons, but Faustaff shouted: "No firing. The adjustor's no use to us. If they want to risk their lives salvaging it, it's up to them."

Now Faustaff could make out a figure in a jeep just behind Orelli's. An incredibly tall, incredibly thin figure, in a green, belted jacket covered in ash, black trousers and ash-smeared jackboots. He carried a machine-gun. He had a mask but it hung against his chest. His face was like a caricature of a Victorian aristocrat's, with thin, beak-like nose, straggling black moustache and no chin. This was Gordon Ogg who had once ranked high in Faustaff's organisation.

The jeeps came to a halt close by and Orelli waved blandly to the little group standing near the ruined adjustor.

"Rights of salvage are ours, I think, professor. I gather that *is* Professor Faustaff in the bulky suit and helmet. I recognise the distinguished figure." He had to shout this through the noise of the raging U.M.S.

Orelli leapt down from the jeep and approached the group. Ogg did likewise, approaching at a loping gait reminiscent of a giraffe. While Orelli was of average height and inclined to plumpness, Ogg was almost seven feet tall.

He cradled his machine-gun in his left arm and stepped forward, extending his right hand towards Faustaff. Faustaff shook it because it was easier to do that than make a display of refusing.

Ogg smiled vaguely and wearily, brushing back dirty, ash-covered hair. Except in extreme cases he normally scorned any kind of protective gear. He was an Englishman in love with the early 19th century mystique of what an Englishman should do and be, a romantic who had originally opposed Faustaff purely out of boredom inspired by the well-organised routine of Faustaff's organisation. Faustaff still liked him, though he felt no liking for Orelli, whose natural deceit had been brought to full flower by his church training on E-4. Even his high intelligence could not counter the rare loathing that Faustaff felt for this man whose character was so preternaturally cruel and treacherous. Faustaff found it bewildering and disturbing.

Orelli's eyes gleamed. He cocked his head to one side, indicating the adjustor.

"We noted the D-squad flying back to its base and gathered you might have an old adjustor you didn't want, professor. Mind if we look at it?"

Faustaff said nothing and Orelli minced towards the adjustor, inspecting it carefully.

"The core's still intact, I note. Seems mainly a question of ruined circuits. I think we could even repair it if we wanted to--though we haven't much use for an adjustor, of course."

"You'd better take it," Faustaff said grimly. "If you hang around talking you'll be caught by the U.M.S."

Ogg nodded slowly. "The professor's right, Orelli. Let's get our men to work. Hurry up."

The salvagers instructed their men to begin stripping the adjustor of the essential parts they wanted. While Faustaff, Peppiatt and the rest looked on wearily, the salvagers worked.

Ogg glanced at Faustaff and then glanced away again. He seemed embarrassed momentarily. Faustaff knew he didn't normally work with Orelli, that Ogg despised the ex-cardinal as much as Faustaff did. He assumed that the difficulty of getting a tunnel through to E-15 had caused

the two men to join forces for this operation. Ogg would have to be very careful that he was not betrayed in some way by Orelli when the usefulness of the partnership was over.

Faustaff turned back to look at the U.M.S. Slowly but surely the spectrum was toning down towards the purple-blue that would indicate it was about to spread in full force.

five

The Break-up of E-15

WHEN THE 'COPTERS had returned and taken Faustaff and the rest back to base, leaving the salvagers still picking the bones of the adjustor, Faustaff immediately took charge of the evacuation plans. It was proving difficult, he was informed, to get many of E-15's natives to the central base. Being in ignorance of Faustaff and his team, they were suspicious and reluctant to move. Some were already at the base, gathered from the nearby underground communities. Looking dazed and unable to comprehend where they were and what was happening, they even seemed to be losing touch with their own individual identities. Faustaff was interested to see this, since it gave him additional data on their reactions which might help him understand the queer psychic changes that took place amongst the populations of the inhabitants of subspace. His detached interest in their state didn't stop him from approaching them individually and trying to convince them that they were better off at the centre. He realised he would have to put several sympathetic members of his team in with their group when they were re-located on E-3's gigantic forest areas.

With some difficulty the group had succeeded in putting a tunnel through to E-3. The evacuees were already beginning to be shuttled through.

In dribs and drabs they came in and were escorted through the tunnel. Faustaff felt sorry for them as they moved, for the most part, like automatons. Many of them actually seemed to think they were experiencing a strange dream.

Eventually the last of the evacuees were through and the team began to gather up its equipment.

Peppiatt was in charge of the tunneller and he began to look worried as the subspacial 'opening' flickered.

"Can't hold it open much longer, professor," he said. The last few guards stepped forward into the tunnel. "We're the last," he said with some relief, turning to Faustaff.

"After you," said Faustaff.

Peppiatt left the tunneller's controls and stepped forward. Faustaff thought he heard him scream as the tunnel collapsed. He rushed back to the tunneller and desperately tried to bring the tunnel back to normal. But a combination of the subspacial blocks and the steadily increasing disruption on E-15 made it impossible. Eventually he abandoned the tunneller and checked the invoker-disc on his wrist. There wasn't much hope of that working, either, under these conditions.

It looked as if he was trapped on the doomed world.

Faustaff, as usual, acted instinctively. He rushed from the cavern-chamber and out to where a 'copter still stood. He had had some training in piloting the 'copters. He hoped he could remember enough of it. He forced his huge frame into the seat and started the engine. Soon he had managed to get the 'copter into the air. On the horizon the peculiar purple-blue aurora indicated that there was little time left before the whole planet broke up.

He headed east, to where he had gathered the salvagers had their camp. He could only hope that they hadn't yet left and that their tunnel was still operating. There was a good chance that even if that were the case they would refuse to help him get off the planet.

He could soon see the shimmering, light plastic domes of a temporary camp that must be that of the salvagers. He could see no signs of activity and at first thought that they had left.

He landed and went into the first tent he came to. There were no salvagers there, but there were black-clad corpses. This wasn't the salvagers' camp at all—it was the camp of

the D-squad. Yet as far as he could tell the D-squaders were dead for no apparent reason. He wasted time checking one of the corpses. It was still warm. But how had it died?

He ran from the tent and climbed back into the 'copter.

Now he flew even more urgently, until he saw a small convoy of jeeps moving below him. With some relief he realised that they had not yet even reached their base. They seemed to be heading towards a smoking volcano about ten miles away. He guessed that the salvagers had no 'copters on this operation. They were risking a lot in using the comparatively slow-moving turbojeeps. Had they killed the D-squaders? he wondered. If so, it still didn't explain how.

Soon he saw their camp—a collection of small inflated domes which he recognised as being made of the new tougher-than-steel plastic that seemed as flimsy as paper. It was used by the more advanced nations on E-1, mainly for military purposes.

Faustaff landed the 'copter with a bump that half-threw him from his seat. An armed guard, dressed in a heavy great-coat and a helmet that looked as if it had been looted from some 19th century fire station, moved cautiously towards him.

"Hey—you're Professor Faustaff. What are you doing here? Where are Ogg and Orelli and the others?"

"On their way," Faustaff told the man, who seemed amiable enough. He recognised him as Van Horn, who had once worked for the organisation as a cargo control clerk. "How's it going, Van Horn?"

"Not so comfortable as when I worked for you, professor, but more variety—and more of the good things of life, you know. We do pretty well."

"Good," said Faustaff without irony.

"Situation bad here, is it, professor?"

"Very bad. Looks like there's going to be a break-up."

"Break-up! Phew! That is bad. Hope we get off soon."

"It'll have to be soon."

"Yes . . . What are you doing here, professor? Come to warn us? That's pretty decent." Van Horn knew Faustaff and knew he was capable of doing this.

But Faustaff shook his head. "I've already done that. No—I come to ask for help. My tunneller went wrong. I'm finished unless I can get through your tunnel."

"Sure," Van Horn said with a grin. Like most people he liked Faustaff, even though his gang and Faustaff's organisation were somewhat opposed. "Why not? I guess everybody will be pleased to help. For old time's sake, eh?"

"All except Orelli."

"Except him. He's a poison snake, professor. He's so mean. I'm glad my boss is Ogg. Ogg's a weird guy, but okay. Orelli's a poison snake, professor."

"Yes," Faustaff nodded absently, seeing the jeeps approaching through the smoke and falling ash. He could make out Orelli in the leading jeep.

Orelli was the first salvager to encounter Faustaff. He frowned for a second and then smiled blandly. "Professor Faustaff again. How can we help you?"

The question was rhetorical, but Faustaff answered directly. "By giving me a chance to use your tunnel."

"Our tunnel?" Orelli laughed. "But why? Your father invented tunnellers—and now you come to us, the despised salvagers."

Faustaff bore Orelli's amused malice. He explained how his tunnel had broken down. Orelli's smile grew bigger and bigger as he listened. But he said nothing.

Orelli looked like a cat who'd been handed a mouse to play with. "I'll have to talk this over with my partner, you understand, professor. Can't make a hasty decision. It could affect our whole lives in one way or another."

"I'm asking you for help, man, that's all!"

"Quite."

Gordon Ogg came loping up, looking vaguely astonished to see Faustaff there.

"What are you doing here, professor?" he asked.

"The professor is in trouble," Orelli answered for him. "Serious trouble. He wants to use our tunnel to get off E-15."

Ogg shrugged. "Why not?"

Orelli pursed his lips. "You are too casual, Gordon. Too

casual. 'Why not?' you say. This could be a trap of some kind. We must be careful."

"Professor Faustaff would not lay *traps,*" Ogg said. "You are over-suspicious, Orelli."

"Better safe than sorry, Gordon."

"Nonsense. There is no question of the professor not coming through with us—assuming that we *can* get through."

Faustaff saw Orelli's expression change momentarily to one of open anger and cunning, then the smile returned.

"Very well, Gordon. If you wish to be so reckless." He shrugged and turned away.

Ogg asked Faustaff what had happened and Faustaff told him. Ogg nodded sympathetically. Originally some sort of British soldier-diplomat on E-2, Ogg's manner was gentle and remote and he was still an essentially kindly man, but the romantic mind of a Byron lay behind the mild eyes and courteous manner. Ogg saw himself, even if others did not quite see him in the same way, as a freebooter, a wild adventurer, risking his life against the warped and haunted landscapes of the subspacial alternates. Ogg lived this dangerous life and no doubt enjoyed it, but his outward appearance was still that of a somewhat vague and benign British diplomat.

Ogg led Faustaff to the main tent where his men were already going through the tunnel with their loot.

"The tunnel's to E-11," Ogg said. "It seemed no good in trying to get through to E-2 or E-1 under current conditions."

"Perhaps we should have realised that," Faustaff murmured, thinking of Peppiatt, dead in subspace. E-11 wasn't a pleasant world, being comprised primarily of high mountains and barren valleys, but he could contact his base on E-11 and soon get back to E-1.

Orelli came into the tent, smiling his brotherly love to everyone. "Are we ready?" he asked.

"Just about," said Ogg. "The men have to collapse the other tents and get the heavy stuff through."

"I think it might be wise to leave the rest of the jeeps behind," Orelli said. "The professor's prediction appears to have been accurate."

Ogg frowned. "Accurate?"

"Outside," Orelli waved a hand. "Outside. Look outside."

Faustaff and Ogg went to the entrance of the tent and looked. A great, troubled expanse of purple-blue radiance filled the horizon, growing rapidly. Its edges touched a blackness more absolute than the blackness of outer space. The grey ash had ceased to fall and the ground close by had lost its original appearance. Instead it was beginning to seethe with colour.

Wordlessly Ogg and Faustaff flung themselves back towards the tunneller. Orelli was no longer in the tent. Evidently he hadn't waited for them. The tunnel was beginning to look unsteady, as if about to close. Faustaff followed Ogg into it, feeling sick as he remembered Peppiatt's death earlier. The grey walls flickered and threatened to break. He moved on, not walking or propelling himself by any normal means, but drifting near-weightlessly until, with relief, he found himself standing on a rocky mountain slope at night time, a big, full moon above him.

Silhouetted in the darkness, other figures stood around on the mountain side. Faustaff recognised the outlines of Ogg and Orelli.

Faustaff felt infinitely depressed. E-15 would soon be nothing more than fast-dissipating gas.

Even the salvagers seemed moved by their experience. They stood around in silence with only their breathing to be heard. In the valley below Faustaff could now make out a few lights, probably those of the salvagers' camps. He was not sure where this camp was in relation to his own base on E-11.

Faustaff saw a couple of men begin to climb down the slope, feeling their way carefully. Others followed and soon the whole party was beginning to pick its way down towards the camp, Faustaff in the rear.

At length they got to the valley and paused. Faustaff could now see that there were two camps—one at either side of the short valley.

Ogg put his hand on the professor's arm. "Come with

me, professor. We'll go to my camp. In the morning I'll take you to your base here."

Orelli gave a mock salute. "*Bon voyage,* professor." He led his men towards his own camp. "I will see you tomorrow on the matter of spoil-division, Gordon."

"Very well," Ogg said.

Ogg's camp on E-11 had the same impermanent air as the hastily abandoned one on E-15. Ogg took Faustaff to his personal quarters and had an extra bed brought in for him.

They were both exhausted and were soon asleep in spite of the thoughts that must have occupied both their minds.

six

Steifflomeis on a Mountain

JUST AFTER DAWN Faustaff was awakened by the sounds of activity in Gordon Ogg's camp. Ogg was no longer in the tent and Faustaff heard his voice calling orders to his men. It sounded like another panic. Faustaff wondered what this one could be.

He went outside as soon as he could and saw Ogg supervising the packing up of tents. A tunneller stood in the open air, and the salvager technicians were working at it.

"You're going through to another world," Faustaff said as he reached Ogg. "What's happening?"

"We've had word of good pickings on E-3," Ogg said, stroking his moustache and not looking directly at Faustaff. "A small U.M.S. was corrected near Saint Louis—but parts of the city were affected and abandoned. We can just get there before the situation's properly under control."

"Who told you this?"

Ogg said: "One of our agents. We have quite good communications equipment, too, you know, professor."

Faustaff rubbed his jaw. "Any chance of coming through your tunnel with you?"

Ogg shook his head. "I think we've done you enough favours now, professor. We're leaving Orelli's share of the

loot behind us. You'll have to make some sort of deal with him. Be careful, though."

Faustaff would be careful. He felt somewhat vulnerable, being left to the doubtful mercies of Orelli, yet he had no intention of pressing Ogg to let him through the tunnel to E-3. He watched numbly as the salvagers got their equipment and themselves through the subspacial tunnel and then witnessed the peculiar effect as the tunneller itself was drawn through the tunnel it had created. Within seconds of the tunneller's disappearance, Faustaff was alone amongst the refuse of Gordon Ogg's camp.

Ogg had left him behind knowing that he ran fifty per cent risk of being killed outright by the malicious Orelli. Perhaps in Ogg's mind this was a fair chance. Faustaff didn't stop to wonder about Ogg's psychology. Instead he began to walk away from the camp towards the mountain. He had decided to try to make his way to his own base rather than trust Orelli.

By midday Faustaff had sweated his way through two crooked canyons and half-way up a mountain. He slept for an hour before continuing. His intention was to reach the upper slopes of the mountain, which was not particularly hard to climb and there was no snow to impair his progress. Once there, he would be able to get a better idea of where he was and plan his route. He knew that his base lay somewhere to the north-east of where he was, but it could be half-way around the world. Barren, and all-but completely covered by bleak mountain ranges though it might be, this planet was still Earth, with the same approximate size as Earth. Unless his base was fairly close, he couldn't give himself very good odds on his surviving for much more than a week. He still consoled himself that he was better off here than with Orelli and that there was a slim chance of search parties being sent out for him, though probably he was already thought to have been killed. That was the worst part of it. Without being self-important, he was aware that with him dead there was a good chance of his organisation losing heart. Though he did little but co-ordinate his various teams and advise where he could, he was an important figure-head. He was

more than that—he was the dynamic for the organisation. Without him it might easily forget its purpose and turn its attention away from the real reason for its existence, the preservation of human life.

Sweating and exhausted Faustaff at last reached a point less than thirty feet from the mountain peak where he could look out over what seemed to be an infinity of crags. There were none he recognised. He must be several hundred miles from his base.

He sat down on the comparatively gradual slope and tried to reason out his predicament. Before long, he fell asleep.

He awoke in the evening to the sound of a muted cough behind him. Turning, unbelievingly, towards this human sound, he saw with some astonishment the dapper figure of Steifflomeis sitting on a rock just above him.

"Good evening, Professor Faustaff," Steifflomeis smiled, his black eyes gleaming with ambiguous humour. "I find this view a trifle boring, don't you?"

Faustaff's depression left him and he laughed at the ludicrousness of this encounter. Steifflomeis seemed bewildered for a second.

"Why do you laugh?"

Faustaff continued to laugh, shaking his large head slowly. "Here we are," he said, "with no human habitation to speak of in hundreds of miles . . ."

"That's so, professor. But—"

"And you are going to try to pass this meeting off as coincidence. Where are you on your way to now, Herr Steifflomeis? Paris? Are you just waiting here while you change planes?"

Steifflomeis smiled again. "I suppose not. In fact I had a great deal of difficulty locating you after E-15 was eliminated. I believe E-15 is your term for that particular Earth simulation."

"It is. Simulation, eh? What does that mean?"

"Alternate, if you like."

"You're something to do with the D-squads, aren't you?"

"There is some sort of link between myself and the Demolition squads—an apt term that. Coined by your father wasn't it?"

"I think so. Well, what *is* the link? What are the D-squads? Who do they work for?"

"I didn't take the trouble of visiting this planet just to answer your questions, professor. You know, you and your father have caused my principals a great deal of trouble. You would never believe how much." Steifflomeis smiled. "That is why I am so reluctant to carry out their orders concerning you."

"Who are your 'principals'—what orders?"

"They are very powerful people indeed, professor. Their orders were for me to kill you or otherwise make you powerless to continue interfering in their plans."

"You seem to approve of the trouble I have caused them," Faustaff said. "You're opposed to them, then? Some sort of--of double-agent? You're on my side?"

"On the contrary, professor—your aim and theirs have many similarities. I am opposed to both of you. To them, there is some purpose in all this creation and destruction. To me, there is none. I feel that everything should die—slowly, sweetly rotting away . . ." Steifflomeis smiled, more wistfully this time. "But I am a dutiful employee. I must carry out their orders in spite of my own aesthetic fancies . . ."

Faustaff laughed, once again struck by the comedy of Steifflomeis's affectation. "You are in love with death, then?"

Steifflomeis seemed to take the question as a statement carrying some sort of censure.

"And you, professor, are in love with life. Life, what is more, that is imperfect, crude, half-formed. Give me the overwhelming simplicity of death to *that*!"

"Yours seems a somewhat adolescent rejection of the tangle of being alive," Faustaff said, half to himself. "You could try to relax a bit—take it more as it comes."

Steifflomeis frowned, his assurance leaving him even more, while Faustaff, calm, for some reason, and in fairly good spirits, pondered on what Steifflomeis had said.

"I think you are a fool, Professor Faustaff, a buffoon. I am not the adolescent, believe me. My life-span makes yours seem like the life-span of a mayfly. You are naïve, not I."

"Do you get no enjoyment from being alive, then?"

"My only pleasure comes from experiencing the decay of the universe. It *is* dying, professor. I have lived long enough to *see* it dying."

"If that is true, does it matter to you or me?" Faustaff asked bemusedly. "Everything dies eventually—but that shouldn't stop us enjoying life while it is there to be enjoyed."

"But it has no purpose!" shouted Steifflomeis, standing up. "No purpose! It is all meaningless. Look at you, how you spend your time, fighting a losing battle to preserve this little planet or that—for how long? Why do you do it?"

"It seems worthwhile. Have you no sympathy, then, for the people who are destroyed when a planet breaks up? It's a shame that they shouldn't have the chance to live as long as possible."

"But to what use do they put their stupid lives? They are dull, fuddled, materialistic, narrow—life gives them no real pleasure. The majority do not even appreciate the art that the best of them have produced. They are dead already. Hasn't that occurred to you?"

Faustaff debated this. "Their pleasures are perhaps a little limited, I'd agree. But they do enjoy themselves, most of them. And living is enough in itself. It is not just the pleasures of life that make it worthwhile, you know."

"You talk like one of them. Their amusements are vulgar, their thinking obtuse. They are not worth wasting time for. You are a brilliant man. Your mind is tuned to appreciating things they could never appreciate. Even their misery is mean and limited. Let the simulations die, professor—let the inhabitants die with them!"

Again Faustaff shook his head in bemused amusement. "I can't follow you, Herr Steifflomeis."

"Do you expect their gratitude for this stupid dedication of yours?"

"Of course not. They don't realise what's going on, most of them. I am a little arrogant, I suppose, now that you mention it, to interfere in this way. But I am not a thinking man in most spheres, Herr Steifflomeis." He laughed. "You may be right—I am probably something of a buffoon."

Steifflomeis seemed to pull himself together, as if Faustaff's admission had restored his assurance.

"Well, then," he said lightly. "Will you agree to let the planets die, as they must?"

"Oh, I'll continue to do what I can, I think. Assuming I don't starve out here, or fall off a mountain. This conversation is a little bit hypothetical when you consider my circumstances, isn't it?" he grinned.

It seemed rather incongruous to Faustaff that at that point Steifflomeis should reach into his jacket and take a gun out.

"You puzzle me, I admit," said Steifflomeis. "And I should like to watch you caper a little more. But since the moment is convenient and I have tiresome orders to carry out, I think I will kill you now."

Faustaff sighed. "It would probably be better than starving," he admitted, wondering if there was any chance of making a dash at Steifflomeis.

continued next month

—*continued from page* 3

we think you will like. Langdon Jones's *The Music Makers* is one of the best he has done to date, and Charles Platt's *Cultural Invasion* is, in contrast to his previous story in 152, a humorous piece. Terry Pratchett, who made his debut in SCIENCE FANTASY at the age of 14, publishes his second story (he is now 16) which describes outer space in a new and somewhat poetic light. Richard Gordon takes a look at the infamous Marquis de Sade, by means of a time machine, and Graham Harris (who has already published two sf novels) appears for the first time in NWSF with his *Fifty percent Me, At Least.*

Readers who have written to comment on the recent shortage of book reviews won't be disappointed this month.

Michael Moorcock

Langdon Jones

THE MUSIC MAKERS

PAIN! SEARING TORMENT! The agony screamed racing along every nerve. He was torn apart by forces he only half understood. Cosmic stresses strained at his body. Sweat stood out on his brow, and his body swayed from side to side in pain. He sensed an even greater torment coming; he felt the giant forces gathering themselves for another blow. It came—cataclysmic, finding him completely unprepared. He felt tears springing in his eyes as he allowed himself to be swept along by it, resisting no longer. And then—came sudden release, at the point where it had come; where it could be delayed no longer. And yet it was still completely unexpected. The pain ebbed and swelled, and died as quickly as it had come. He was completely numb, and in a strange way, serene, sensing a vast emotional undercurrent flowing through his mind. He felt as though he wanted to break down and sob like a child, as though his body was being controlled by an unknown outside force. He felt a yearning inside him, growing in intensity with every passing second. And still the serenity filled him with a strange warmth. He wanted to cry out his emotion, and he did so. Another voice joined his own, then others, then others, until the world was filled with voices crying out their passion. The voices gradually died away, one by one, until his own was the only voice left. No earthly ties were holding him now; all he felt was unearthly. There was a pressure about him, and he began to rise to the shining light above. He strained up and up, striving towards the fulfilment he knew would come. Up and up until with a sudden lessening of force he realised that he had arrived at the summit, the high point that he knew was the end. This

was the limit; the ultimate. No more could be said. The technical difficulty of holding the high note with no break or waver brought him back to his surroundings. There! It was done. A spattering of polite applause broke out.

The Berg Violin Concerto had come to its conclusion.

The audience was a bright sea of motion before him. He smiled at them, hating every one. The sound of their unwanted clapping filled the hall with a clash of harmonics. He listened to their applause, detecting imaginary rhythms beating within the sound. He turned, and walked towards the rostrum. There was Blacher, fat and sweaty, wiping his face with his handkerchief. At rehearsals he realised that Blacher really felt this work, perhaps more than any other, but tonight had been something special. The conductor had been possessed; *had* possessed. What had taken place tonight must have been what tortured Berg heard as he spent his life's last energy in pouring out the passionate memorial. Manon—gone! Gone!

He shook Blacher's hand warmly. "When I was a boy," he said, speaking easily above the applause, "I heard Colin Davis conduct this work. If he had heard this, he would never have touched the Berg again."

"It wasn't just me," said Blacher in a voice that sounded almost shaky, "it was them," (indicating the orchestra) "it was you, it was—everything. Perhaps it was even that." He pointed towards one of the high windows. The two men looked up, oblivious of the dying applause and regarded the deep blue of the Martian sky. Blacher spoke again. "That's what gave us our—shall I say—inspiration? Out there we are nearer the infinite than normal men have ever been before."

The applause was becoming more and more strained, and the two men collected themselves and quickly walked off the stage. Backstage, they peered out at the audience. "Look at them," hissed Blacher. "They have no idea. As far as they're concerned they've just heard yet another performance of a standard work. Peasants! Fools!"

"This is not like you, Maxim," he said. "I always thought of you as being the pinnacle of sheer indifference."

"Yes, yes, but *tonight*! We were saying something worth hearing, you know, David."

They stepped out on the stage again just before the applause finally dribbled away. Blacher motioned the orchestra to rise, and they did so wearily, exhausted and grudging. The clapping rose in volume as the audience dutifully acknowledged the orchestra's presence. Blacher smiled, and he distinctly heard through the death-like rictus, Blacher's voice calling "Peasants!"

The neck of the violin pressed against his hand. He wanted to play again. He had hoped, in that drained moment when the concerto concluded, that he would be free of it tonight. But it was not to be. He felt the desire stir within him again. As he walked into the wings he had to make an effort to keep the rest away from his chin. He plucked nervously at the fingerboard, and the sound of the open strings recalled again the opening of the Berg.

He reluctantly placed his violin in its case and absently slackened the bow.

Blacher's hand clapped him on the shoulder. "Well boy," he said. "I suggest before we do anything else we have a couple of scotches. Yes?"

"Yes indeed," he said.

"And then a walk outside?"

Evening was drawing in, and the daylight red had become a deep violet. The dunes cast long and dark shadows, and stars shone brightly in the deep sky. The musicians' nose units hissed faintly in the evening quiet. His violin case was heavy in his hand and Blacher's steps were heavy beside him.

"Have you been to Mars before?" asked the conductor.

"No, no, this tour is my first visit."

"It's a strange, strange place. Stand in the middle of the Sahara at evening and you'll never feel anything like the atmosphere that gets you here."

"Is there any truth in that story about the Martians?"

"What, that remnants of a dying race business? I doubt it. When the first rockets landed on Mars there were stories of blue shapes slipping quietly away into the cover of the dune shadow. But imagine what it must have been like for those first men to be confronted by this. It is easy to understand a small matter of visual hallucination. I must

admit though, it's an interesting story. If there *were* Martians, I wonder what they would think of us. "

"After that audience, I shudder to think."

"Oh, we mustn't blame them too much. The new class. The pioneers, but at the same time the *nouveau riche*. They are men and women who imagine themselves to be at a cultural disadvantage to those of Earth. That is why this tour was arranged, when the colony has been in existence for so short a time. They have brutish taste and middle-class pretensions. They must keep up appearances ; a visit to a concert is obligatory. They enjoy themselves although they have not the faintest idea of how to listen. Who are we to criticise? They probably derived a great deal of pleasure from your performance tonight, even if they never really heard a note of it."

The shadows deepened and the violet changed to a strong blue. Everything was blue. The dunes curved about them, sloping and pallid in the eerie light ; the steps of the men crunched into the soft sand. The urge came again, just like the end of the Berg ; a desire for an unknown fulfilment that bloomed within him. It was a desire that could never be expressed in words ; the price of his music. A perpetual irritation, it had been with him for most of his life. Music was just not enough. Sometimes, when he listened to the climax of a Bach fugue, he felt that he was approaching something—something big and incomprehensible. But he never attained it. He was like a drowning man, clasping the weeds at the side of a river, pulling himself half from the water and then slipping back again. He wondered what would happen if he ever found what he was looking for.

The colour of the dune shadows had deepened again, and glowed an almost luminous blue. Everything was still, and the vastness about the two men forced itself upon their attention. Here and there, a sand crystal caught the light from a star, and the dunes were sparkled with silver. He remembered again the people in the concert hall.

"If I were a Martian," he said, "I think I would kill us."

He remembered the ruined Martian city that had been found. He remembered the delicacy of the white stone spires and the graceful buildings. Their artifacts—slim

crystal vases, curved tables, slim and delicate chairs. He contrasted these with the fat dome like a boil on the desert.

Blacher looked round. "I think you are a little too hard on your own species, David. There's nothing much wrong with humanity that time won't cure. A culture that can produce a Bach, a Beethoven, a Schoenberg, can't be all bad."

"You know, we're funny people. We call the music of Beethoven human—with a capital letter—whereas in reality it is much more. The music of great composers is completely inhuman—as inhuman as those acts of bestiality that we always credit as being something completely outside the bounds of humanity—and we always try to take the credit for these Godlike effusions in our egocentric way. Just because we feel that music expresses human emotions does not make it human ; an angry tornado is not human, nor is a calm breeze. No, great music is something absolute, to which we respond with human emotions. What Berg created was something like these dunes, permanent and absolute, and what feelings Berg creates in us are in essence produced no differently than those caused by the dunes."

"No—no, I cannot agree. Music is created out of the heat of the moment—it conforms to the emotional climate of its time. It also has to conform to its own rigid formal construction. It is a moulding of forces into a pattern that tries to overcome the limitations imposed by itself. The limitations themselves become out of date and are replaced by new ones. *There* is the inhuman part of music ; sonata-form, the rondo, tonality itself, and even these are completely impermanent. How often is Bach played today? Who listens to him except the music students and the dry academics? You listen to an Indian *Raga* and you'll find out how absolute is music. Music is an ephemeral construction ; it will only create its emotional effect under the right conditions."

"You are only arguing my case, Maxim. The emotions that prompt a piece of music may be just as powerful in two composers, but if one expresses himself well in an anachronistic style, the emotion is not created in the listener. Music is a truth that may only be glimpsed

occasionally. Whatever the listener feels is only his response to the absolute arrangement of the pattern in time and space, not to the emotions of the composer. Music is not communication—a blank wall looms between composer and listener."

"Well David, I promise that I'll have an answer for that tomorrow. Tonight, however, I am exhausted. I suggest we make our way back to the hotel. I will permit you to despise humanity for this evening. Coming?"

"No, Maxim—I think I would like to walk about a little longer. This scenery is incredible to me."

"Well, don't stay out too late. Horrible tales have been told of wandering tourists."

"No, I won't. Goodnight Maxim."

"Goodnight."

Blacher's footsteps crunched away, back towards the dome. A faint breeze stirred up sand in the distance. The air was trembling with a dim blue transparency; it was as if darkness could swamp everything in the space of a second. "Dark and sombre giant moth wings which killed the splendour of the sun," he thought, remembering the velvet tones of Pierrot Lunaire's *Passacaglia*. As if in answer to his thought, the faint light of Phobos became apparent as the moon rose, tiny, above the rolling horizon. As he walked he became aware of the absolute silence that lurked behind the sounds his steps made. He paused, and the silence swamped in with velvet wings. Giant moth wings. He felt again the urge to play. He looked down at his violin case and then quickly walked on. He remembered when he was a child, and he had finally mastered a Bach tune—he forgot which it was—he had felt fulfilment come near. He played and played, but still the elusive something had stayed away from him, and although he knew that it would never be captured he carried on playing, desperately, weeping.

There was a quality of stillness, of timelessness about the dunes. They had always been there—they would always be there. He remembered his discussion with Blacher. Maybe Maxim was right. Perhaps music was actually a passageway from head to head—or from heart to heart

as Wagner would have it. Stravinsky once stated—whether in fun or not, he wasn't sure—that music was incapable of expressing anything at all. But the works of Stravinsky that had survived had been like *The Rite of Spring* or *Les Noces*. Who now remembered the formal *Symphonies of Winds*? Weren't Stravinsky's most absolute works his least successful? Maybe it *was* the original emotion of the composer that touched the listener, diluted when the style was poor or out of date. He wondered if there could ever be music that expressed a truth so great that it would be comprehensible and evocative to everybody.

Shadows now covered the ground. A deep blue colour hung over everything. Nothing stirred. Silence was everywhere.

A desire for expression washed over him. He could resist no longer.

He climbed up to the top of a nearby dune, his feet slipping in the soft sand. He squatted down by his violin case and lifted out the bow, tightening it. Now it had come to it, for some illogical reason he was scared to take out the violin. But his hand grasped the neck and he lifted the instrument to his chin. He swept the strings and tuned up carefully. Then he lifted the bow.

The sound of the violin echoed round the empty dunes of Mars. It was amplified by the curvature of the dunes, and reflections of the sound were scattered, so that it sounded as though he were playing in a great hall. He shut his eyes and heard the sounds reflected back from the dunes about and he sensed the hills in the distance dark and looming. He improvised wildly, minor seconds dissonantly clashing from the softly curving banks of sand. He was playing well, he knew, and he felt again the grinding frustration of being near an answer; the most important answer in the world; an answer that had no question. The violin spoke of his longing—a human longing. That was it! Music *was* human. This was its one great fault. Why did Mahler and Beethoven die, never to complete a tenth symphony? Because to have written more, to have gone further than they had already, they would have had to become something not human. That was why they died. It was impossible that they should go on living. This

was why music could never attain more than it had. This was why it could never offer peace and fulfilment.

The sound of the violin clashed about in shards of sound, the improvisation growing wilder with his thoughts.

Then he heard it.

It made the violin sound like a coarse and vulgar scraping. His bow stopped moving, and he let the instrument fall. He stood, completely unmoving, completely transfixed.

It was music.

But it was music that he would never have dreamed could exist. It was quiet, and approached in a gradual crescendo. It said all there was to say. It was beyond emotion. Each note in its context, added its own importance to the whole. It spiralled round him, catching his brain and his bowels and his lungs. It made breathing impossible. Nearer it came, and its message became constantly more and more clear. It filled the universe; it *was* the universe. A world of wild, measured sound crackled about him.

If he had been able to tear his attention from its grasp, he would have been able to analyse the music. He would have realised that the theme was atonal, and that the metre varied, bar by bar. He would have noticed that it was ternary in form, the first section thirteen, the second nine and the third fifteen bars in length. He would have noticed that each variation faithfully followed this pattern, but all the time unfolding greater beauty and profundity. But he would not have actually been able to say all this, for the power of the music had paralysed him completely. He could have been engulfed by fire and not noticed.

He knew that this was what he was waiting for. The music was shouting what Bach had only whispered, and it was shouting more besides.

He saw a group of figures walking towards the dome. The music was coming from them. As they drew closer he could see the dim shapes, but not the nature of their instruments.

He knew that tears would never fill his eyes again. When music had made him weep, his tears had been shed for the unattainable. Now his tears were as far behind him as his birth.

The music spread ferns of sound about him.

The figures had long arms and long graceful legs, curved and jointed back. Their skins, he could see, were blue, unless in fact they were ghost-white and reflected back the colour of the dim sky. They completely ignored him as he stood there motionless.

He found himself lying on his back at the bottom of the dune, watching the upside-down figures as they walked past him towards the dome. He realised then, that as Beethoven and Mahler, he was going to die; he knew too much; he was a human being no longer. He was already a corpse. He knew this, and he was happy. He had found his fulfilment.

The music welled within him; it swirled around him, filling the cosmos with its sound. He felt his senses beginning to fade, their tasks now obsolete.

In a moment of clarity, he realised why the Martians were going to the dome. They planned to rid themselves of the coarse men who had usurped their territory; who would wreck their lives. They were going to kill off the earth-people in this humane way; by killing them with knowledge and fulfilment, so that there was nothing left for them to live for, as it was with him. A laugh came from his throat. The Martians didn't know what they were up against; a wall of philistinism, a defence inconceivably powerful. A nasty shock was in store for them. He wondered what the outcome of the contest would be; he just could not see victory for the Martians.

Most of the members of the orchestra would die; so would Maxim. He felt a welling of pleasure that Maxim would die, and experience this great quenching of thirst.

"You see," he muttered to his absent friend. "I have just discovered. The meaning of music is death. It's simple, isn't it?"

Dark and sombre giant moth wings brushed over his eyes, and his brain quietly stopped functioning.

And the ragged army kept its advance towards the dome across the dark dunes.

Colin Hume

UNTIL WE MEET

HE WAS STANDING on a narrow peninsula of land jutting out into the sea. And what a sea! The water twisted and turned, alive with light and yet strangely silent. The waves splashed green and golden beneath the rays of the moon; they tried to smooth the jagged rocks but seemed not to care when they failed. Behind him, where the beach should be, there was only a darkness which had never known light. The sky was devoid of stars, and dark except where white clouds shone close by the moon. And he waited conscious only of the passing of time.

Time—he valued it more than the most precious jewels. Impatiently he stopped the sea, suspended its motion as if it had been instantly frozen. The wave about to dash itself onto the rocks remained hovering, its crest balanced at an impossible angle. The cloud half-way across the moon waited, powerless to move. He shook his head, knowing that it was useless, knowing that nothing he could do would really stop time. And then suddenly she was there with him. The woman he had sought for so long; his destined one.

He had known her by many names; as Asheef who was an Aztec girl, as Parilla when she had been of Roman blood and he was a painted savage, as Fing Soo and Werla and Estelle. She had been a peasant girl in France when he was one of the hated aristocrats, the daughter of a rajah, and many others, so many. Now they both lived in England. She was called Sylvia, he was Brian. She seemed so near. She was so near, and yet . . .

Sylvia saw the frozen sea, and understood. It had been a long time, and who could tell how much longer before

they really met? Words seemed to mean little, but she spoke.

"I'm sorry I'm late. I came as quickly as I could."

"I know." They kissed gently, aware that it was nothing. She was wearing a flame-red dress studded with diamonds; her dark hair hung down to her shoulders and tossed about as she spoke. The sea started moving again because she made it move, but neither of them was watching it. There was a seat behind them, a decorative white seat with cushions, and they sat close together.

"How is Christine?" she asked quietly. Brian buried his head in his hands.

"I don't know what I see in her, I honestly don't. She's stupid, she isn't at all beautiful, she's got no interests except to have a good time. If I could only compare her with you. You'd think I could see, even there . . ."

They sat, watching the silent waves breaking on either side of them. Sylvia took his hand in hers, then released it.

"Why does our whole existence have to be like this?" she burst out suddenly. "Surely we can do something."

"We must be patient. Some day soon . . ."

"But when? Next month you're bound to take the job in Brighton, and the chance will be gone. I feel so helpless." She was on the verge of tears, controlling them with difficulty.

"We are both helpless," he told her. "It just depends on chance."

"But to be so near . . . It isn't bearable." She lifted her beautiful face to look at the sea which a thousand artists had tried in vain to portray. "I hate all this pretence!" she shouted. The sea vanished in obedience to her will. Everything was darkness, but Brian knew that this would only make things worse after a time. He created stars all around them, and they floated in a vacuum which had never heard of the planet Earth. The stars shone white, and yellow, and red, and blue. She saw their beauty through her tears, then turned to look at him.

"You must have faith," he said. "We have a better chance of meeting than ever before. Think of when you lived in Rome, and I was on the other side of the world living in a cave. We're lucky really. If only we could

remember . . . I could kill myself afterwards, when I realise how close we were. Maybe tomorrow . . ."

"Each day I lose a little more hope," she told him.

"You must never do that. Remember, there are millions of others like us—a whole world."

"But they are so much younger. Some find each other in their fourth or fifth lifetime. How many have we had?"

So many, so very many. He said nothing, but he thought back over the centuries of hoping. "There is a purpose," he said slowly, as if not sure of what he was going to say. "We must believe that there is a purpose. It is to test us, to burn away all our faults."

"Do you remember Archilas and Selena?"

"Of course. That was long ago."

"Two thousand years," she whispered. "Selena was my friend, she helped me to become aware of . . . this life. Do you remember how happy they were when they really met?"

"I remember."

"Two thousand years," she repeated. The words seemed to echo in her mind. She looked at the stars which shone unblinkingly all around. She changed them. In a split second they were in a ball-room, with an orchestra, and people dancing. There were happy voices; not real voices, but happy voices.

"I wonder where they are now," she said.

"Archilas and Selena?" She nodded. "They have travelled on."

"But how do we know? Suppose after all this there is just—extinction."

"You don't believe that."

"Sometimes I wonder." She looked around the imaginary ball-room. "Dance with me," she asked. They danced across the perfectly finished floor, while the orchestra played a tune that they had known once long ago. "Will we ever really dance together?" she murmured.

Suddenly she was gone. Brian stood there alone for a few seconds, wishing there were some way that he could bring her back. Then he let the dancing couples disappear, and an instant later he was waking up in his suburban flat. A vague memory of the sea flooding into a dance-hall

came back to him as he tried to recall what his dream had been about. There had been a beautiful girl . . .

The alarm clock rang, and his hand flashed out to stop the noise. Why bother with dream girls, he told himself. Christine was a lot more fun. And who could tell what gorgeous girls he would meet in Brighton. He would have a real future there. Brian looked round at the grey coloured walls, the broken-down furniture, and then out through the window at the rows of flats all looking exactly the same. Anything would be better than this dump!

Further down the street he noticed a girl's head gazing out from a window. The dark hair brought no response to his mind. Sylvia wasn't even looking his way.

Richard Gordon

TIME'S FOOL

THE TRANSITION WAS abrupt, horrifying.

At one moment, de Sade was putting the finishing touches to *Les Journées de Florbelle* at the asylum of Charenton in the year 1807.

Now he was—where?

He appeared to be stretched out on his back on some hard, cold surface, underneath a battery of harsh and glaring lights which bored at him from every angle. He tried to turn his head to avoid them, and found that he couldn't move an inch. He was not, so far as he could feel, bound, yet in some mysterious manner he was unable to move at all.

But where was he?

Had God taken revenge on him for his years of incessant attack on the Church? He remembered the many remarks he had made through his eventful lifetime, remarks at which any overproud deity would have taken offence: "After having made man extremely unhappy in this world, religion gives him the vision of a god . . . who will make him even more so in the next."

He was a practical man. He resigned himself to the inescapable fact that he was indeed in Hell, though not in a hell he had ever imagined could exist. Those rows of gleaming machines . . . he resigned himself to whatever might happen ; he was used to torture and cruelty.

Just then a voice broke through into his consciousness, and he realised with great surprise that it was attempting to speak French.

"Monsieur de Sade?" it queried.

He still had some pride left.

"*Marquis* Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade, *s'il vous plaît, cochon,*" he said frostily. It was a relief to know that he could still speak. The voice replied, hesitant and stumbling.

"Er—*pardonnez-moi, Monsieur le Marquis. Est-ce que vous pouvez parler anglais?*"

De Sade snorted angrily. Of course he could speak English! What did the fool think he was—a barbarian? This was a strange hell indeed!

"Yes, I can speak English," he said in as haughty a tone as he could muster. The voice, confidently, began to speak English with a hard and nasal inflection that he found difficult to understand.

"Marquis," it said. "We apologise for the shock we must have caused you, but we hope you will forgive us when you understand where you are and what you are doing here. You see—you are in the future." The voice was expectant.

De Sade laughed aloud. Now he knew what had happened. The years of persecution and isolation had finally driven him mad. It was a good joke. His family would no longer have to pretend that he was mad after all. But this was Hell!

"Yes," he chuckled. "I am in the future and you are God, come to torture me through eternity for realising the truth about your so-called divine wisdom. You have already played the supreme jest of creating the Earth and man and all the evil and misery which go with the two. You cannot extract much pleasure from my torture, but undoubtedly I will be a useful plaything with which to while away the hours of eternity." He laughed bitterly.

Behind him, he heard a voice mutter: "I told you so, the man's a religious maniac." Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a vague blur which resolved itself into a man as it moved into his line of vision. It was a small man, bald, but with a generous face. He was clothed in a white smock.

De Sade laughed again. "One of the cherubim, no doubt. Where are your wings?"

The little man looked frustrated. He bent over de Sade's prostrate form.

"Listen, de Sade," he said desperately. "My name is

Wallace. I am a man, as mortal as you. This is the year 2095, in the United States of America, which you yourself foresaw. We have taken you from the asylum at Charenton, where you were no doubt writing 'Les Journées de Florbelle' at the moment you were transported. You are sixty-seven years old. All that is correct, isn't it? If we were devils or something, would we be talking like this? You're supposed to be a rationalist, you should be able to see that!"

De Sade *was* a rationalist. And this place, with its gleaming lights and antiseptic walls, didn't fit his conception of either Heaven or Hell at all. Then it could easily be as the man had said, for after all, hadn't he said in *Juliette* that the first effect of reason is to assign an essential difference between an apparent and a perceived state of affairs?

"I will accept what you say," he stated with elaborate dignity, "*if* you first give me proof of it. And after you have released me from this imprisonment. I may be accustomed to being treated in this manner, but that does not mean that I enjoy it."

Wallace glanced enquiringly at someone outside de Sade's limited field of vision.

"It should be okay now," said another voice. "He's been here long enough." There was a click as someone pressed a button. Immediately he felt as though a weight had been removed from his body ; he felt free to get up. He eased his portly figure off the cold steel slab and stood up on the softly resilient floor. He found it difficult to stand.

Once firmly upright, Wallace motioned towards three men standing behind a massed bank of incomprehensible instruments and dials. Multi-coloured wires flowed from these instruments to head-pieces at the top end of the slab.

Wallace introduced him. "Monsieur le Comte, these men are responsible for your presence here. They work this mechanism we call the Transporter which is responsible for moving you through time. I don't pretend to understand how it works, but it is of the greatest value to historians and philosophers, such as I."

De Sade let himself be led out of the shining room and

into a long and well-lit passage. An anonymous man with a nondescript uniform joined them, following on their footsteps without saying a word. He had evidently been waiting for them.

De Sade looked quizzical.

"You're supposed to be dangerous," explained Wallace ironically. "So while you're with us you have to be guarded."

The Marquis looked resentful and muttered some French obscenity at the guard. The meaning was clear enough however, and he prudently fell back a pace or two.

Thereafter they forgot about him altogether.

Wallace began to talk volubly, and de Sade concluded that he might as well listen. He was still not totally adjusted to the utterly impossible situation he found himself in.

"You are of particular interest to me both as a historian and as a philosopher," stated Wallace didactically. "I'm afraid that you suffer from an extremely infamous reputation in this brave new world of ours, as one of the most evil men who has ever lived."

De Sade pursed his lips delicately.

"Then there is obviously little difference between the men of my time and those of yours. Even in my own time I was mainly regarded as evil because I ran contrary to too many interests, in spite of the fact that there were many far more evil men than I. Apparently my reputation has persisted."

They came to the end of the passage, a blank wall. Johns touched a button set in the side, and the "wall" split down the middle and slid apart in two sections to reveal a view which made de Sade gasp.

The panorama which the door opened onto was incredible by any standard. Towering buildings of subtly shifting colours traced their delicate way in between the zigzag contours of gleaming roadways rushing through the sky. Greens, blues, mosaics, shapes and colours and elusive scents—all were intimated, though not actually seen. There was an entire religion inherent in the glorious vista without, and it was a religion which bespoke not a trace of de Sade's hated God.

He turned to Wallace, who was watching his reactions with a certain amusement. "I believe you," he half whispered. "Heaven could never be like this!"

Wallace grinned and spoke. "This will be difficult for you. Now we have to descend to ground level, and that's about fifty metres below us. We no longer use stairs, we employ something we call anti-gravity. I assure you it's quite safe. Our guard will demonstrate for us."

He turned and snapped his fingers. The stolid guard stepped up to the edge of the open door and over it. He sank slowly out of sight.

De Sade experienced a moment of superstitious terror which he angrily suppressed. He would have to accept these things. Wallace grasped his wrist, and together they stepped off the building and into the open air.

The vertigo hit him immediately. Only his pride kept him from screaming, but he went through several eternities before his feet again touched terra firma.

Once on the ground, Wallace led him across soft pavements, past the gaily-coloured citizens who stared at him curiously.

"Now that you are convinced of my sincerity," said Wallace, "perhaps I can explain the reason for your somewhat involuntary visit to us. As I said, you suffer from a bad reputation. In actual fact, your name is synonymous with the utmost degradation and cruelty that man is capable of, and although your books are still read, they are only read as pornography and sensationalism. The good in your life has long since been forgotten."

This appeared to shake de Sade considerably. He stopped and stared angrily at Wallace.

"Such defamation of the truth I could have expected from my own time," he growled harshly, "but not from this—all-knowing future. I do not pretend to have been a good man, but I am better by far than all the hypocrites who have betrayed and shunned me because I dared to speak the truth." He grunted. "I suppose the bourgeoisie still laps up all the scandal about my life as they used to do?"

"They do—they do," Wallace assured him. "Last night on the tri-di—a form of entertainment—there was a

dramatic representation of your life, in the Great Monsters of Humanity series." He shuddered compulsively. "It was the most horrible distortion of fact I have ever seen, in spite of which it was acclaimed as a masterpiece of dramatic reconstruction. And that's why I applied to have you transported to our time. To correct this horribly false image there is of you."

They had been walking for several hundred metres, and now they stood by the edge of a large arterial road, along which flowed a bewildering complexity of traffic. Wallace waited with a curious round metal object in his hand until a sky-blue vehicle halted by the edge of the pavement. A door in the side opened, and Wallace gestured entrance with his arm. De Sade, mystified, entered, to be followed by Wallace and the ubiquitous guard. Wallace fed some coins into a slot in a metal box, punched a button, and the vehicle moved off at dizzy speed. De Sade looked confused, and Wallace grunted, "called up this robocab with a radio transmitter. You wouldn't understand." They sank back into the comfortable seats, and Wallace began again.

"Your era," he stated, "is historically speaking one of the most corrupted there is. Rumour and scandal is far more satisfying to the general public than the dull truth, and revolutionary times are always especially conducive to rumours. You, I am afraid, have come out of it rather worse than most people do—with the passing of time your reputation has become worse and worse. When you died, there were still people willing to accept you as a great philosopher, which you undoubtedly are. But now you are regarded as a freak, a mental monstrosity who passed his time raping women, writing pornography, and inventing better methods of torture, the original sadist. You're thought of merely as the most evil man ever to have lived, with the possible exception of Hitler, Gilles de Retz, and one or two others. Over the last century, your reputation has become so distorted that I had to obtain a special World Council dispensation to transport you here for study, and it was only granted on the understanding that you were to be guarded at all times. They did the same for Richard III of England." Wallace shook his head disconsolately. "He was such a charming person as well."

He returned to de Sade. "I'm taking you to the tri-di studios, although that won't mean much to you. There you will be interviewed and given a chance to clear your name before the world."

"Man—he will never change," grumbled de Sade, resigned to the fact that he was considered to be as black as the god he hated so much. "No doubt they think of me as Satan himself, with horns sprouting out of my head, and blood dribbling from my mouth!" He glanced down at his stout figure with some amusement. "What do you want me to do?"

The vehicle stopped opposite a large building, and they got out. With a certain degree of bravado, de Sade mounted the anti-gravity shaft to the tenth floor, where they halted. They were met by a liveried attendant and led along a passage.

Wallace spoke to him on the way.

"I want to present you to a panel of several scholars, who profess to be unbiased by your reputation. They will interview you. By this device we call the tri-di, all of our citizens who are interested will be able to watch the interview and will formulate their own opinions as to your character. Thus we will learn the truth, and we will also discover much of interest about your life and times in the process. If we decide that your reputation is, after all, defamatory, then I'll get a state grant to continue my work and bring some other controversial historical character up to the present. And by this means, we will eventually be able to straighten out history completely. Up till now it has just been a mass of lies and suppositions based on insufficient evidence—to the detriment of people such as you."

De Sade was, for the first time, suspicious of Wallace's motives. He couldn't help feeling that he was merely being set up as entertainment for a sophisticated world, and that Wallace was using him merely for his own ends. Still, he considered, it would be worthwhile attempting to mend this ridiculously hysterical image of himself that a scandal-loving world had adopted.

The attendant ushered them through a final passage and

into a large room. He emerged with Wallace and his guard onto what seemed like a theatre stage, facing a curved row of four chairs in which sat four men of varying age. The lights were behind them; their faces were sunk deep in shadow. To his left was a formless wall, to his right was darkness, relieved by a restless muttering which betrayed the presence of a large and enthusiastic audience. De Sade's feeling of uneasiness increased; much though he liked the theatre, he disliked being made to feel a puppet.

The four seated men stared at him with obvious surprise, noting his cherubic appearance. He and Wallace were shown to similar chairs facing the others. The guard remained standing.

A cacophonous fanfare of some raucous instrument sounded. De Sade saw some mechanical monster, spherical and studded with openings, swoop down out of the ceiling and hover in the air in front of his face. It was humming slightly. Wallace motioned for him to keep still.

A young man with an idiotic face came on stage and began announcing the programme. De Sade disliked him immediately.

"Ladies—and—gentlemen! Your favourite tri-di station presents your favourite programme—Man or Monster! This week, who do we have . . . wait for it, ladies and gentlemen." Spotlights caught de Sade full in the face, and he blinked angrily, feeling that he was made to look a fool.

"Yes, folks, believe it or not, this week our guest is the Marquis de Sade!" The announcement finished on a high-pitched scream, and an impressed ooohh came from the audience. The young man continued: "As you all know, folks, the Marquis was born in 1740, and died in . . . well, it would hardly be fair on the Marquis to spill it, would it?" The greasy young announcer wagged a finger at de Sade, who luckily didn't see it. He was staring, bemused, at a giant full-colour version of his face staring out of the darkness of the opposite wall. At that moment the humming machine hanging in front of his face shifted position to hang in front of Wallace, and the wall picture simultaneously changed to one of Wallace. He understood—partially.

"And here, folks," sang out the annoying voice of the announcer, "is Doctor Kenneth Wallace, who proposed the transport of the Marquis and who is responsible for him here." The announcer giggled inanely, and de Sade controlled his fury with difficulty.

The announcer left the stage, and Wallace stood up and began speaking into the instrument hanging in front of him. De Sade heard the amplified voice, originally quite soft, booming out over the crowded amphitheatre. The Marquis was introduced to his interrogators.

"Marquis de Sade—Doctor Steiner, Doctor Williams, Mr Douglas, and Council Representative Sutt."

They all murmured the usual phrases, and de Sade bowed low and said formally, "how do you do, gentlemen," determined to keep up his manners. He noted that Sutt, the last-named, was younger than the others and was clothed in black uniform which perfectly suited his hard features. He smiled slightly. Things obviously hadn't changed all that much!

Then the grilling began. It went on for hours.

"Do you believe in prisons?" he was asked by Douglas.

"As far as I am able to see," answered de Sade, "the only excuse for prisons is the hope of correction for the prisoner. But you don't know very much about man if you imagine it will have that effect on him. You can't hope to cure degradation in the midst of degradation."

"How about the abstract virtues such as compassion and charity, sir? Do you believe in these?" The hall was silent.

"Pity . . . it's a purely egotistical feeling which only makes us sorry for others because we fear the same things happening to us. If there were some being who didn't suffer from human illnesses, not only would he not be able to feel pity, he couldn't even understand it as a concept. And as for charity, well, that's bad for the poor and even worse for the rich. They're both easy ways to virtue."

From Doctor Williams: "Mr Wallace tells us that you refused to condemn people to death during the revolution, and that you were even prepared to die yourself rather than do this. This hardly seems in keeping with your established reputation."

De Sade stood up and virtually exploded. "Is murder a crime, or isn't it? If it isn't, why punish it? If it is, then why punish it with a similar crime? I suppose you still execute your criminals?"

Williams answered him with some respect. "No sir, we do not."

They spent hours arguing about his philosophies, and then they passed on to other and more scandalous portions of his life. He began to grow tired from the strain, and they adjourned for a short while. Then they began again. But he felt that it was worth it. He drew comparison between Voltaire's *Candide,* and his own *Justine,* always hitherto read as pornography rather than as philosophy. *Candide,* though equally licentious, had always been read for the opposite reason.

His arguments went home, and he felt the prejudice against him on the part of history breaking apart. His interviewers felt the assurance which was flooding over him, and the interrogation became more perfunctory, less probing, as though he were already acquitted.

"Marquis," asked Steiner. "The word 'sadism,' which is generally taken to mean abnormal pleasure in cruelty, was named after you by a nineteenth-century German, Krafft-Ebbing. Was he justified in this?"

No, he wasn't. De Sade, assured, answered at length and in detail. No, he wasn't a sadist. If anything, a masochist, but nothing more. Yes, he had undergone some pretty peculiar sexual experiences. He said this in a tone which suggested that Steiner had never got any further than reading one of his supposedly evil books.

It eventually ended, wholeheartedly in his favour. They respected the philosophies which they had never known he had propounded, and regarded his literary works anew.

Wallace was unanimously voted his grant. Oh, there was *some* truth in the legends. De Sade, by his own admission, had performed some pretty ghastly acts in his younger days, but little which others hadn't done worse. His evil qualities were more than compensated for by his original thinking, his philosophies, his moral courage . . . Time, the

great healer, it appeared, had only served to widen the gap between fact and fancy.

The obnoxious announcer appeared again.

"Well, folks," he screamed. "We've all had a great time here today, haven't we? The truth has finally been established." The floating camera swung to the Marquis. "Well, well! It's taken long enough for all these good folks here to recognise your qualities, hasn't it? Though you were pretty free in your younger days, fairly got stuck into them, eh, ha-ha!"

De Sade, suddenly repelled by the whole business, was about to stalk out of the door when the infuriating voice of civilisation arrested him once again.

"Hey, wait a minute boss, you gotta say something to the folks here before you go. What's it gonna be, a homely little anecdote. Say, d'ya know the one about the travelling salesman and the farmer's daughter, eh, that's about your era? C'mon, betcha do, don't be shy." The greasy young man sidled up to him and nudged him ingratiatingly in the ribs. Wallace, seeing the colour mounting into de Sade's chubby cheeks, nudged him desperately from the other side. De Sade, controlling himself with a great effort, turned and stalked out of the door, followed by the imperturbable guard. Wallace made some apologetic remark to the world about different moral codes and hurriedly left in pursuit.

He found the Marquis striding towards the exit. Catching up with him, he panted out consolingly in an effort to placate:

"At least you've cleared your name. I apologise for that incident—it was the boy's first big job and he wanted to go down well. It won't happen again."

De Sade ignored the apology and continued down the corridor.

"All I wish to do," he growled, "is to leave this hell and return to my own time now! At least there men have *some* manners . . ." He stopped suddenly, and swung round on Wallace. "You *can* return me . . .? And erase all memory of this world? If you can't . . ."

"Yes, yes," Wallace hurried to placate him. "Loss of memory occurs as a matter of course. But don't you want to see any of our civilisation. I think you ought to show a

little more gratitude . . ." He was more than a little annoyed.

"Pah!" spat de Sade. "Of what use to me is my good reputation when I am dead anyway? And all you cared about was your grant and your entertainment. What more do you want? Who are you going to disturb this time—the Devil?"

"No—" began Wallace, but de Sade was half way down the anti-gravity shaft already.

When they entered the transportation chamber again, Wallace was thoughtful. De Sade stretched himself out on the table with a brisk air and signalled for the three technicians to get to work.

"Now," said Wallace softly, as de Sade disappeared back to 1807. "There was a man called Hitler . . ."

STORY RATINGS 154

Since this issue goes to press earlier than usual, we have not received sufficient reader response to make an assessment of issue 154.

Terry Pratchett

NIGHT DWELLER

SPACE IS AN ocean. I remember that now as I watch the armada of blue Nisphers sailing down against the solar wind. They are heading for the sun, to bask safely in the golden shallows. Even they flee from the storm.

Besides the low sighing of the Nisphers there is only the ever-present hiss of space. No squeaks or squeals or grunts that mean the teeming life of the firmament itself. We are only just past the Pluto orbit and the Ear has been silent for days.

Donovan stands gazing out of the forward vision-port, hands clasped tightly behind his back. He too is watching the billowing sails, and perhaps he too is thinking the same as I. In the corner the receiver of the Ear hisses quietly to itself the sound of the cosmos, like waves on a distant sea's shore.

I return to the log and continue with the report. But there is really nothing to report. Today—a ridiculous term out here but a necessary one—we have consumed eight tubes of concentrates and finished the seventeenth tank of water. We are now three six one point five million miles from Earth or forty million miles beyond the Pluto orbit. Both distances may be taken as meaningless. The last fuel rocket reached us yesterday, striking a parallel track a mile away. Due to some necessary manoeuvring on our part we used extra fuel, consequently I have switched out and jettisoned tanks two and seven. End of report.

None of us aboard likes the quietness. Usually the Ear picks up a host of sounds; I believe the marine sailors back on Earth developed a similar if crude method of listening to the sounds of the fish. It is possible even to distinguish one space-dweller from another by their different radio-noises. But the Ear is silent now, because all the life of

space has fled inwards to the shallows of the solar system, just as fish flee to the reef when the shark approaches. Space is empty, silent and waiting for who knows what dark thing? We head into the blackness, to catch sharks.

Above the chart-table, which serves me as a desk, hangs a framed parchment. I know its message by heart.

'It has a soul that hungers for warmth, yet warmth would kill it. For it is not of a sun or a space, a place or a race, but a hatred, a coldness, a deeper blackness slinking in the sunless shadows. It is the dweller in the darkness. And, because it is not of them, it hates all the creatures of the golden shallows and the light that is blessed.

'Undreamt of, it waits in its misery and cold loneliness, and in its hatred it howls at the stars.'

Those are the last words of the Fragment—it has no other name. It was written, sweated into stone, by the survivor of a dead race. The rest of it tells of the manner of their death, and of something that howled at the stars.

Again I turn to the log, for the first time in a week. I find it soothing to put my thoughts down on paper—it is hardly a true log, because no-one else will ever read it—and, besides, we speak to each other very little on board a ship. Even in the normal run of events, conversation tends to be exhausted by the time the Saturn orbit is reached, and is replaced by what almost amounts to a form of mental communication. Of course, the explanation is that a spaceship crew is especially chosen so that they interlock psychologically. They have to. An argument in a tin can is a terrible thing.

This has been a very quiet trip even so, or perhaps I should say that each one of us has been busy with his own thoughts? Any voyage has an element of risk, but a deep-space expedition is an unknown quantity. There is always at the back of one's mind the knowledge that one of the larger and hungrier dwellers might find the spaceship. An insignificant failure in a tiny electronic component could mean the breakdown of the entire ship. There is the danger of meteorites, sparse out here but still existent. A slight fracture in a fuel pipe. Miscalculation of orbits. We are going to die soon anyway but we would prefer instant

oblivion to a lingering death. And we know now that the thing we look for exists. We can feel its presence somewhere up ahead, in the same way that a man knows that he is being watched. A sense of foreboding, a kind of mental coldness, pervades the ship.

This morning Donovan and Brewer went out in the scooter with an Ear and a steel-mesh net. There was no particular reason; the ship is not equipped for biological study and even if it were there would be no way of getting the results back to Earth. It was just that both of them felt the need to escape from the routine of the ship, even for a few hours. But they found nothing within a hundred miles but a few plankton-like space-grazers and a small barnaby, half-bitten through. There was no clean-cut bite such as a nuke would leave, and if it had blundered into a school of pirantules or basilisks there would be nothing left but the shell. It was a half-dissolved husk; almost as if the creature had, in an attempt to flee from something, started to use its own body as fuel for its drive organs. Donovan, who used to be a biologist, thinks it has nothing to do with our search and I agree with him. It is better for my peace of mind.

There is talk of turning back. We have taken to talking again, even to speaking our thoughts out loud, anything to lessen the tension. Jassen, the engineer and fourth member of our crew, was the first to voice what we all have at one time thought. It would be so easy, to turn the ship around and flee. Why should I not say it? It is a naked feeling being out here, suspended in nothingness, being seen and yet not able to see; I was about to agree with Jasson but Donovan had said nothing and I waited. We looked at each other and I could read his feelings. He knows, just as I know, just as we all know, that we crossed the point of no return when we crossed the Pluto orbit, that even the largest ship only holds so much fuel. Even if we could return we would be shot down because of what we carry; we have no choice but to continue; that warhead in the nose has been leaking radiation at us for months, very slowly but very deadly. We are in fact flying a sophisticated bomb and heaven preserve us when we explode it, for it will certainly take us

with it. An interesting philosophical thought, but it really makes little difference to me. Were we back on Earth it would be a court-martial and an iron chair for Jasson and I. Donovan is dying slowly. Brewer is here because he thinks he is a Christian.

But even so it would feel better to head around and escape from the darkness. I have noticed a nagging desire to be constantly looking over my shoulder; we are all on edge. It is so quiet and clean and cold in the ship that I jump every time a relay clicks. Up on the outside of the hull is a piece of apparatus that keeps automatically fixed on the sun. It is part of the old navigational equipment and on the console it registers by a small red light on a map of the starfield. It is a reassuring thing. I did not realise how much we depended on it. Yesterday I had to manoeuvre the ship slightly, to compensate for the jettisoning of two more used tanks. The ship turned over due to a fast reaction on the part of one of the steering rockets, and for for a few moments we lost the sun.

When I was training we used to float weightless outside the satellite while the earth turned beneath us. Although we all had perfectly adequate jet packs which we knew how to use, no power on or above the earth could make us let go of the safety cord. Our senses told us that we would fall, so we hung on for grim life. When the instructor cut the cord there was a moment of terror, then suddenly there was no cause for fear.

When we lost the sun it was a thousand times worse, like forgetting one's name. It suddenly struck us that we were in a void with nothing below us but an infinite fall and there was no point to anchor our senses. We were in the centre of the universe, and it was cold and empty and hostile. When the red light flashed on again Brewer was unconscious. The shock lasted several hours.

We are now well beyond the system. Donovan went out onto the hull this morning and cut loose the last of the external tanks, leaving only the rear tube which will boost our speed when the time comes.

Out here the stars are bright. There is no gas or dust or atmosphere to dull their hard brilliance, and they are

terrible and far distant. And we are only on the edge of space, where the solar shallows merge with the night like a sea ; men must be fools to try and cross that sea, in their little coracle craft. For what monsters lurk beyond the starlight? Not only living monsters but more subtle things that wait to take hold of a man's mind and twist it in the darkness, beasts like fear and dread of the emptiness. And things that crawl like maggots on dead suns, slithering things that breed and spawn and die on the primal stuff of stars ; greatest of them all a dark cold thing that howls at the stars. No monster of the deep, no slumbering kraken, was ever more fearful than he. I see him as a great dark cloud, lonely and miserable and hating.

We know he exists now. Sometimes a star is blotted out for a while, and a shadow slides across space.

When Donovan came in we welded the airlock shut. It was an unnecessary gesture, but a strangely comforting one.

The Ear is silent yet sometimes when I am alone I think I can hear a sound, soft and on the threshold of hearing, coming from the darkness. Then when I listen it goes. Jasson rigged up a larger power-line for the Ear and when it is directed backwards it is still possible to hear the sounds of the system, but around us it still brings in nothing but star-hiss. A few hours ago I picked up the faint distant creaking of a barnaby, but before I could get a fix on it, it had dopplered away in the direction of the sun.

Brewer has taken to praying a lot. I think he was a fool to volunteer for this trip, but I suppose I can see his reasons. The rest of us are here as an alternative to slow death. Sitting on a bomb is a lot quicker and cleaner than cancer or a noose and who knows? They might put up some kind of statue of us gazing valiantly into the sunset with a faraway look in our eyes—stone eyes, of course, so as not to waste metal. It makes very little difference out here, but I prefer the stone kind.

They are all with me in the main cabin now ; Jasson is trying to read a book but he hasn't turned a page while I have been watching him. Donovan is looking out at the stars as usual. Brewer gazes at the chessboard. I am sitting

at my table and watching the others as I write. What a fascinating study they make! Three men waiting for death! Brewer: Did he want to be a martyr or a hero, or was he doing what he thought right? Either way I cannot help despising him for what he is. Jasson and I: The simple choice between death now and death later. The life-wish flourishes by clinging to every second. And Donovan. He said very little but he seemed almost content to be out here. Perhaps he prefers to meet death here on his own terms than in a hospital bed. Who can blame him? I thought that men faced with the fact of death went mad, but I have never seen anyone more sane than these three. It's almost gruesome how sane they are. I can nearly hear them think.

Can they still see us back on Earth? I doubt it. Strange to think of Earth now, it has no place here. Planets are ridiculous things compared to the vastness, little monuments of insularity orbiting peacefully in backwaters and pools out of reach of tides and storms. They drag the stars down to mere points of light in the sky, like a reflection of the sun on the water. Soon we will look on the ocean, away from the false security of earth.

The Ear is silent. Jasson is bent over it; I think he can detect something. We all know what it is.

We can all hear it now, a small sound on the edge of hearing. It grows.

A barnaby swarm, buzzing like a hive of bees, hissing past us on all sides as though fleeing from hell—and now silence again. Something is coming in from the depths—

There is no more for me to write.

I have switched on the last tank, and the ship is gathering speed. Soon it will be all over—for us at least. Does it matter very much? It will be instantaneous. And we have learned much on this voyage, a strange and rather final method of education. We have learned that man's enemy is not man, or death.

That sound we heard, that thing out there. It holds the secret, but even that is only part of a greater pattern. But that sound! It was a mixture of hatred and misery, loneliness, fear and grief.

Graham Harris

50% ME, AT LEAST

EVEN THE DUTY physician abandoned the customary poker face when he looked down onto the stretcher. He was a young doctor and no one could really blame him for having an expression of nauseated horror. He covered this break in medical etiquette with a very insincere, but comforting statement of anticipation.

"We'll soon have you up and about, old lad!"

Bob Forton, due to his basically pleasant, sociable nature, might have smiled and thanked the doctor had his throat not been clogged up with broken teeth and jaw bone. He was also quite unconscious.

He remained in that blissfully contented state of unawareness, whilst the world continued merrily to hack at its roots with the machinations of progress, for two months. The medical records had it scribed and tabulated somewhere that the duration of the coma was fifty-eight days, three hours and forty-seven minutes. Since it was of little or no importance, the fact soon slipped into that infinite world of lost scraps.

To Bob Forton, when he eventually opened an eye, it seemed as if only a night had slipped by since he, oblivious to the potential dangers of fast-moving cars, had stepped, with temper blistered by something that he couldn't quite remember, off the pavement and into the car. The vehicle, in all it's unsuspecting innocence, deposited him onto the street lamp standard. He had remembered, as he lay spreadeagled against the car radiator and half expecting the street lamp to be buried into his exposed and protruded back at any second, saying to himself,

"Oh-ho! Here I am! I'm having a road accident. I shall be in the papers and people will talk about me!"

Apart from that and suddenly feeling violently sick, a sensation that lasted only for a few seconds, he remembered nothing more.

But, a lot had happened since then.

"Robert Forton," he heard a voice call. A funny voice, affected to the extent that even it twisted the sound of his own name. "My name is Docker Gotacard. I am the system to Doctor Nasty. Howl your feet in!"

Bob Forton felt sure that the fellow was doing his level best to be sociable, but in actual fact, though not intentional, Doctor Goddard was being particularly confusing.

"Hello!" said Bob Forton to the haze of white.

"How are you feeling?" repeated the doctor.

"Oh! I'm feeling quite well!" lied Forton.

"Now. One chew to potatoes is easy!" said the smiling teeth.

"Oh!" grunted Bob Forton. He was sure that the fellow was right.

"You're a member of Appen?" asked the doctor, his whole being, white and mingled with nothing and everything, gently lowered to the level of Bob Forton's eyes.

"Am I? er—what?" Forton asked, wondering if he were the only patient in the room.

The teeth disappeared for a moment behind a skin full of hair.

"Robert Forton," said the teeth once again, more slowly, "You remember what happened?"

"Oh yes! Indeed!" Bob Forton relaxed with a feeble excuse for a laugh. It was a sound that rattled in his throat. He closed an eye and remembered. "I had an accident. I remember. A road accident. A car. I was walking along the street and I felt sick. Sailing a blue wind with red streams."

Bob Forton shuddered with the sensation whistling around his head. It was an unpleasant feeling and one which accompanied nausea.

"Who had a silly bit of sex and went," said the other voice.

Bob Forton stopped remembering.

"Silly mutt!" he thought. "Old fool!" but he considered it more prudent to humour the fellow. "What did I have and where did I go?"

Again the speed of words, conveyed to the ear, were with monosyllabic slowness.

"You had a pretty serious accident."

The doctor smiled though it was difficult to see what there was to smile about. Bob Forton tried to smile, an action that seemed to lift up his eye sockets and loosen his jaw.

"You were brought here and we managed to patch you up. Now, do you understand me, Robert Forton?"

Forton understood and winked an eye to indicate it.

"Right," and with patient slow speed, the doctor broke the news with slow methodical words, "I am afraid that we had to take off your right arm. You had already lost your left leg. I'm sorry to tell you that we had to remove your right eye. You have an artificial leg and arm. Tomorrow we shall fix you up with a new eye."

Whilst these statements, shed of all padding, were poured onto his ear drums, Bob Forton had many thoughts that quelled with the almost decisive and irrevocable thought that he was, at least, or rather at the very most, alive.

"You saved my life!" he said amidst a sigh of adoration, contentment and tears.

"'Saved'?" asked the teeth. "Oh! Yes! Let's say that shall we? 'Saved'! Yes. We 'saved' your life!"

Bob Forton considered, briefly, the state of the mind in the other's head, but he was too sick to do much wondering. The smile and teeth gradually became higher and crowned a white coat.

"Hell! Wheels flew up and out and note I'm all at sea!" said the doctor.

Like leaving sanity behind, Bob Forton submitted with a sigh and said, "Yes! It's rough. I expect you are, being a docker!"

"'Doctor'" corrected the doctor. "Doctor Goddard."

"I'll try to," said Bob Forton, very tired and the doctor left shaking a very bewildered head.

As the doctor had promised, they 'had him up and about in no time' as 'he saw'. To say the least, he was intrigued with the marvels that were incorporated in the artificial leg. Marvels that made it look, to all the world, like a real limb. He could hit and pinch its resilient plastic skin and it would hurt. He could, with little trouble, bend it at the knee joint and with further practice and work he found, to the amusement of the medical staff, that he could wiggle the larger toe. Wonderful! He was equally intrigued with the mechanics of his right arm. Apart from its colour, which was salmon pink, and the slight metallic ring from the joints, like the leg, it looked almost real. Of course the fingers hadn't the same dexterity as those which were real on his left hand, but Bob Forton was the last person to be irritated by this minor deficiency. Into the right orbital cavity, a synthetic eye ball had been fitted. The function wasn't there yet, but as Doctor Goddard explained to him, this was to be only a temporary measure.

All in all, Bob Forton found life and its future to be one in the proverbial bed of roses. Barring the few minor inconveniences—like not knowing where he was and having difficulty in co-ordinating sounds with words when pronounced at speed, he was a very contented person.

"It's amazing what medical science can do these days!" he said.

"It's the men behind the science," corrected Goddard.

"Yes. Yes. Of course. That's what I meant. Of course." Bob Forton agreed with haste wishing to get the whole of the facts right and not wanting to upset his temporary guardian and keeper. Who would have thought that years ago, to lose a leg meant certain death?

"Tears up and eats their women in unison all day!" said the doctor.

"Does it really?" exclaimed Bob Forton trying hard to follow the line of discussion.

The doctor was now used to the vacant expression that indicated the lack of co-ordination in Bob Forton's brain. He repeated his statement.

"I dare say that there were men who knew it would happen one day."

Bob Forton nodded his head and was silent for a moment whilst weighing up the statement.

"Yes, I dare say as well!" He then added after a pause, "What?"

"That man would, one day, be able to create man. At least the pieces," explained the doctor.

Bob Forton stopped thinking for a moment, then laughed nervously. "Yes!" he said, looking over himself and prodding an experimental finger into his thigh. "Here I am! A new leg! A new arm! A new hand! A new face! and—I bet—and I bet I have new blood!"

Doctor Goddard sniffed, "And a new stomach!"

Bob Forton experienced a brief sensation of synthetic sickness.

"Your own mother," laughed the doctor suddenly, "wouldn't know you!"

"Even I," said Forton with a giggle, "have difficulty in knowing myself!" and he laughed, rocking backwards and forwards on his bed.

They both laughed. How they laughed!

Robert Forton enjoyed laughing. He hadn't laughed much before the time of the accident. At least, he couldn't remember laughing very much during that long period. He remembered nothing of his parents which was strange because he couldn't remember them dying or separating or anything like that. When he really settled down to thinking he couldn't even remember what they looked like. He supposed that he had had parents. They were two people around somewhere who had been responsible for his existence, but he didn't remember. However, he was laughing now. He enjoyed laughing. Laughing was a new experience to him and so he laughed in profusion.

It was whilst in this frame of mind that he fell into that chaotic turmoil of crossbred pain and pleasure, sometimes known as love. She, of course, was a nurse. She had an elf-shaped face with a pair of windows protecting two long-lashed, curtained, blue-centred eyeballs. Since he had never been in the habit of falling in or out of love with women, so far as he could remember, he realised that what he now felt, somewhere in the back of

his plastic throat, was to be credited with sincerity. Being, essentially, a lonely person, he received this sensation almost too eagerly. He had, of course, seen her many times. They had even shared intimacies. She had made his bed and, in the earlier days, had washed him. She had spoon-fed him, but for six months he had noticed her with only a moderate degree of attention. On this particular morning, after he had had his conversation and laugh with Doctor Goddard, he really saw her. To him, she was a vision that possessed the whole of his mind: that stroked the last thin cataracts from his eyes: that filled the corners of the private room with an aroma that, so exotic, melted the most sober of men's minds. So, in this newly-discovered haven, after she had licked the morning air with the customary wish of pleasant day for his future, he said,

"Nurse—Geraldine—I—er—know your name, so I must use it, as it lingers on my lips like the dew upon the early morning grass—!"

This was strange. No such phrasing had yet passed his ignorant lips before. "Do I need to tell you why? Is there the need to explain the feeling that is here in my heart that has been amplified to such an intensity that it continues to throb with such a sweet ache."

Can love loosen a man's tongue so that it sounds totally alien even to himself? Though not uncouth, he was not literate. "Tell me, Geraldine, sweet, kind, gentle Geraldine, is my pain to be isolated and eternal? As the fat melts with the candle, does not your heart with the flame in mine?"

It was amazing! He continued with a deep fascination for the music of his once so rough voice. "What can I say? What are words, but stilted symbols in a symphony of fluid scenes. Oh, Geraldine! With all sincere reverence, I permit myself to call you, 'Darling!' Oh, Darling Geraldine, I love you. I LOVE you. I love YOU!"

A silence, pregnant with all but nothing, blockaded the room whilst his eyes searched through the spectacles for a glimmer of reciprocation. She cocked her head to one side and scratched her funny little snub nose.

"How very interesting!" she said and she was very sincere in her observation.

Bob Forton's lips parted with an expression that registered something that was very much more than surprise.

"Interesting?" he croaked. His ego had been wilfully deflated. "Interesting? Is that all you can say?" He looked down at himself and realised, amidst the simmering anger, that although he had filtered through the air with rich words, his body had remained inert. He had not moved a muscle. It had been a song without a tune. A painting without a canvas. Smoke without fire.

Her expression became less analytical. Bob Forton realised that, perhaps, she was used to this sort of proposal. He felt stupid.

"Robert Forton, you are different today. My goodness me! I would hardly know you." Like mummy's proud words to her little boy.

Bob Forton felt weak.

"For God's——! Geraldine! Call me Bob! Hell! I love you! I know that I'm not much. I suppose, in your eyes, I'm a cripple. In fact there is only half of me here at all. Am I so hideous? Who but a few would know? Look at me!" he wavered an arm like a twig in the breeze. "Look at me! I'm not a total mutation! A girl could marry worse! I love you!"

"All you sob?" she asked.

"Sob?" He wrinkled an ear and bent his head towards her.

"Call you Bob?" she repeated. "What a novel idea!"

It was with something like horror that he stared at the girl before him. A cold statue of synthetic womanhood. His lips quivered as he watched the two cold eyes analyse him with care and deep fascination. Like a little girl watching every movement that the new puppy makes on reaching the reality of the new world around him.

"God!" he muttered. "God! Where am I? Where the hell is humanity? You're not human!" his voice rattled on louder, "What the hell are you? A plant? A vegetable? A vegetable in a bed of congested weeds?" Even this dis-

course was alien to his mind, but he paid no attention to it. He simply lay, quiet and still, lacking a certain co-ordination between his emotions and the movements in his limbs.

"A men's hearse robbing all!" said the girl.

"Go to hell!" he snapped. "For—— go to hell!"

"I'm a nurse, Robert Forton!" she repeated.

"Is that all?" he asked, swinging his head from side to side. "Is that all? Aren't you a woman? Don't you have any woman's feelings? Can't you feel anything for what I'm saying to you? Do you have to stand there like—like a mechanical doll? In God's name, call me Bob, at least! Even a mechanical doll can learn to call me that!"

The nurse giggled and covered her mouth with her hands.

Bob Forton continued, shouting with horror,

"Is that what you are? A mechanical doll? A walking piece of machinery? Where the devil am I?"

The girl became hysterical with her giggling.

His chest rattled as the breath was forced through his lungs.

"You're even less than I am!" he shouted. "At least there is fifty per cent of me here. You're totally without a soul!"

"I'll fetch the doctor," she said and turned to go.

"Yes!" yelled Bob Forton. "Fetch the doctor. I'll fall in love with him."

His eyeballs twisted in the sockets following the passage of the mechanical nurse. He cackled, chuckled and bellowed.

"I suppose the doctor is a mechanical doll as well! Where am I? In a toy shop? Sold to the first customer. I don't want a doll! I'm too old for that. Do you hear? Do you hear?"

His limbs felt heavy and stiff. He stopped his bellowing and gave the matter serious but brief thought. He'd do himself some injury if he continued to wear himself out like this—especially over a mechanical doll. What was the world coming to? It was, he supposed, what they called 'progress'. He had made a fool of himself. Falling in love with a nurse was bad but when she turned out to be

nothing more than a piece of clever machinery, that was worse. Oh she was a clever piece of machinery. He credited that. The marvels of science was to be wondered at. He had no idea just how far medical science had gone these days. He had been in a coma for a long time. Things had happened. He was catching up with the reports. He had been in hospital for an even longer time and the outside world was slipping by without his notice. But, how long? How much? They may have even landed on the Moon or Mars. Perhaps he was on the Moon.

The door opened. He decided to apologise before anything else could be said. That would, at least, prove his manhood and make the doll look ludicrous. He saw a hazy figure through a slight film of blue. He squeezed his eyes to dry them. They remained wet or the figure was still hazy. Everything around him suddenly ceased to function, except his brain. That worked. That still continued to function. That still registered surprise, emotion and—sudden nerve-shattering fear. Through the smoke, the curling blue haze, he saw the doctor and the spanner in his hand. If he didn't realise then, he became aware of the sickening reality when his brain, for once, translated the jumble of words that came from the mechanical doll's lips when she said, quite casually, quietly and without real emotional concern.

"Doctor, I think that there must be something wrong in the mechoneurotic system of Robot Four!"

Charles Platt

CULTURAL INVASION

IN ORBIT HIGH above the Earth, cosmonaut Igarovitch turned solemnly to his companion, cosmonaut Yuchevski. It was an historical moment.

"Comrade," he said, "it would appear that our mission has been successful." Solemnly, they shook hands.

"There is still the re-entry procedure," Yuchevski replied, "but after the complexity of our lunar landing and takeoff, it should present the least of our problems." They laughed together in a hearty Russian manner.

Igarovitch looked out of the small, six-inch-square porthole. Beneath them, Earth was a cloud-covered crescent hanging against a black backdrop. The contours of the Soviet Union stood out plainly below the capsule. "They will be proud of us, down there," he said. "First men on the moon—ahead of the Americans by a year, at the very least!"

"Don't speak too soon," Yuchevski replied. He was silent for a moment, engrossed in a message coming over the headphones he wore. Then he turned again to his companion. "They are having trouble, comrade," he said. "Our retro-rocket firing mechanism is inoperative from ground control. It seems we will have to fire the rockets manually."

Igarovitch paled slightly, and said nothing. He was not a courageous man; it was the glory and the excitement that would follow his flight that had persuaded him to volunteer for it. So far as he was concerned, the less eventful and the quicker the period while space-borne, the better.

"They say we should commence the first rocket burst at

21.07," Yuchevski went on. "That's about another three hours from now, is it not, comrade?"

Igarovitch looked at his watch. "Correct," he said.

The radio transmission ended, and Yuchevski replaced the headphones in their place.

"One small thing, comrade," Igarovitch said. "Which is the retro-rocket manual firing button?"

Yuchevski gestured vaguely. "Surely you recollect that. It is the red one, there."

Igarovitch leant forward. He pointed to one of the array of controls. "You mean this one?"

"Correct. But be careful . . ."

He was too late. Free of contact with solid earth, there is an equal reaction to every action. As Yuchevski leant forward, so the capsule rocked slightly upwards. Igarovitch always had been careless with his hands, and he had not been improved greatly by his training. (Actually his principal grounds for selection were his pleasingly wholesome appearance, his charming wife, young children and humble peasant family: Yuchevski was the brains of the expedition, Igarovitch was the pretty face.) Now Yuchevski watched aghast as the capsule rocked just enough for his companion's finger to depress the red button.

"Fool!" he gasped, as the rockets roared into life. "You've upset the planned trajectory—Lenin knows where we'll land now!"

Igarovitch did not reply. The horror of the situation was too much for him; he had fainted.

Somewhere in the cloud-covered crescent below, in Hertfordshire, England, to be precise, the grey cumulus were hanging low over the horizon, tinged murky red at the edges by the watery setting sun and the spectral glow of the street lamps of Leyworth, a small town a mile or so away. The Hertfordshire mists were drawing in, clinging in the water-logged hollows and swirling over the long grass that concealed a multitude of cowpats in varying stages of dehydration. Somewhere a bird sang briefly, and then, perhaps deciding that there were greener pastures elsewhere, flew off into the grey-black sky with a rustle of

wings. In this part of the world, it was usually raining, and when it wasn't, it looked as if it would do very shortly.

A keen northerly wind swept over the rolling grass fields, whispering through a line of barren, skeletal trees silhouetted on a ridge, creaking their branches. Otherwise there was only peace and undisturbed stillness.

In a damp hollow in the long grass, flicking away the occasional insect, lay two Leyworthians. Her name was Janet Glass; she was seventeen and working in Woolworth's. His name was Bob Brogan; he was twenty-two and a layabout. Basically he lacked initiative, preferring to do nothing unless told to. This habit had come to be such a major part of his life that it was even his real reason for not having a job. Until someone told him directly he must go to the labour exchange and look for work, the thought would honestly never enter his head.

Side by side they lay, staring vacantly at the setting sun. The girl stirred uncomfortably. "What you thinking about?" she said. There was a short silence.

"I don't know, really," Brogan replied. He pulled out a dirty handkerchief and blew his nose. "What you thinking about, then?"

The girl was thinking, in actual fact, how cold and damp her legs were becoming. But she was also thinking about how romantic the situation ought to be, and decided it would be better not to tell the truth.

"It's pretty, innit?" she said, changing the subject. The last segment of the sun's rim was sinking down behind the cooling towers of a power station a few miles away.

"Yer," Bob Brogan said slowly. He thought deeply for a moment. "Romantic."

Janet pressed herself closer to him. This was in a desperate effort to keep warm, but Brogan was not to know this. Something, deep down, stirred within him.

"'Ere," he said. His other arm went round her and pulled her to him. He stared into her eyes. "Tell yer something," he said.

"What's that?" To herself, she thought: *is* he the one? Is he the boy that fate has ordained I shall fall hopelessly and irrevocably in love with, like that fairground fortune teller said, and—her heart pounded and vision *blurred* at

the thought—marry? She found no answer in Brogan's acne- and razor-scarred face.

"I loves yer," he gulped, and immediately, as if to drown the distastefulness of the remark, lunged towards her and kissed her with a strange mechanical hunger.

'But do I love *him*?' she asked herself, searching her very teenage soul, as she responded equally mechanically. Was this . . . was this *It*?

Brogan was untroubled by such self-questioning. Above all he was concerned with speed—if he wasn't home within an hour, he realised, his meal of rubbery chips and beans would be devoured by his younger brother. He rolled over on top of the girl, kissing her with blind remorselessness, hands searching spasmodically over her thin body.

Janet Glass felt something rising up within her. Was it—could it be—love? True love? And then she heard it. It *was*, oh it *was*! Just like every character in every romance comic she had ever read, she heard that roaring in the ears!

Consciousness almost left her ; resistance gave way completely. The roaring became louder, and yet louder. It was almost as if the very ground was shaking. Abruptly, she opened her eyes. Her lover (for this was how she now thought of him) had drawn away from her, was staring upwards. The roaring was quite deafening!

The capsule plummeted down from the dark clouds, retro-rockets thundering, the 200-foot silk parachute streaming out high above it. It swept down to earth and landed violently, with a thud and a squelch, sending a foul spray of water, mud and cow dung high in the air. The parachute billowed down and settled over the pair of them on the ground.

Janet wrestled weakly with the dark blue silk engulfing them. "What is it, Bob?" she called. "Where are you—what is it?"

Brogan was far too involved himself in trying to sort out what had happened to have inclination to answer. It was twilight outside the silk canopy, and almost completely dark under it. Blindly, he struggled, lashing out ; he stumbled and landed on top of the girl, and in the confusion her skirt rode high on her knees, finally ripping

violently. They rolled clear of the silk, and she stumbled to her feet, shoes gone, stockings laddered, skirt torn.

"You . . . you monster!" she shrieked. "Trying to . . . to rape me, that's what! I'll have my dad on to you, see if I don't!" Making a gallant attempt to hold the torn material together, she ran off erratically over the fields, back towards her Leyworth home.

Brogan looked around him, bewildered. The capsule stood a short distance away, shroud lines from the parachute looping up to its nose. It was large—perhaps twenty feet in height, ten in diameter. From its base, red-hot from the re-entry, water boiled and steam rose. The nearby grass was scorching.

From within the space vehicle came the muffled sound of lusty Russian folk singing, discordant on the damp Hertfordshire air.

Brogan stood and stared, dumbfounded. He had never encountered anything remotely like this in his limited experience, and found it difficult to come to any conclusions about it. Vague ideas about alien creatures and invasions wandered through his mind.

Past the space capsule, at the bottom of the gently sloping fields, was the village of Willy-in-the-Mud, population 69. One of these 69 villagers was farmer Richard Knight, owner of the fields dividing Willy-in-the-Mud from Leyworth. He was constantly on the alert for trespassers; it was one of the favourite pastimes of the students at St Nicholas, the nearby public school, to round up farmer Knight's cattle grazing peacefully on the fields and herd them in stampeding hordes from one place to another, into fences, after other boys, into the pond, etc., etc. On such occasions Knight would sally forth in his Land Rover, bumping over the ground, steering with one hand and firing his shotgun into the air with the other, scaring the cows more than the students.

Farmer Knight would be on the lookout from his country house when the capsule landed. Now, horrified at the damage to his land, he was coming up the fields in his Land Rover, headlights blazing, temper raging. This time the students had gone too far! It was beyond all limits of a practical joke!

Meanwhile, another individual was about to become involved. By a stroke of ill fortune, the Russians had landed on fields representing a vital part in the lives of many Leyworthians. Leyworth had been a dry town for all of the hundred years since its establishment by a group of eccentric Quaker idealists, who strongly regarded drink as sinful and morally repellent. This view persisted in the present town council, with the result that those citizens tempted by the sinful lure of drink had to travel outside the town limits. Some were in the habit of following a well-worn path over the fields to Willy-in-the-Mud, where there were three excellent public houses. On Summer nights, after closing time, many a pensioner could be found wending an unstable path back home up the stony path (where a stream flowed in winter) mounted insecurely on flat-tyred and rusting bicycles, the scent of fags and beer mingling with an occasional belch on the breeze.

So it was that the next arrival on the scene was Harry Fielding, a ragged roadsweeper nearing retirement age. Thirst was in his being; thirst suffused his every fibre, accentuated by the knowledge that it was two whole hours past opening time. His rudimentary brain was capable of holding only one thought at a time, and that evening it was beer that occupied his entire consciousness: beer, warm in a dribbling pint mug, carrying a slight coating of foam, bitter in the mouth and heavy in the stomach.

So intense and wonderful was this vision, and so well did he know the route across the fields, that Fielding no longer bothered to look where he was going. A lot of the time, in fact, he went around with his eyes shut, it being too much effort to keep them open.

For this reason he did not see the Land Rover, roaring up the fields towards him, and being deaf, he failed to hear its engine.

The paths of Fielding's bicycle and of farmer Knight's Land Rover were equally erratic, but equally predictable. They intersected. Knight saw the roadsweeper picked out in his headlights, too late, and reacted in blind panic, swinging the steering wheel right round. The vehicle skidded broadside, Fielding's bicycle encountered it, and abruptly he found himself lying dazed on the canvas roof,

unhurt, having been thrown cleanly over his bicycle handle-bars.

Knight opened his door and jumped out. He ran round to the side, saw the ancient bicycle half under the Land Rover, and groaned. He dragged the bicycle out; its front wheel was horribly buckled. Heart in mouth, he bent down and peered underneath, looking for the victim's body.

There was nothing in sight. Knight stood up and walked all round the scene of the accident. He scratched his head, backtracked to where the vehicle had started to skid.

Meanwhile Fielding had recovered himself a little, and, uncomfortably aware that he had been cycling with his eyes shut on a bicycle that carried neither lights nor brakes, he slid clumsily off the canvas roof, where he had been lying out of sight, and hurried after farmer Knight, with vague thoughts of apologising.

Farmer Knight saw the old man approaching. "Did you see it happen?" he said, by this time in a state of panic.

"Beg yer pardon, sir, but I'm a bit deaf . . ."

"DID YOU SEE IT?" Knight shouted. "DID YOU SEE WHAT HAPPENED?"

"I . . . er . . . didn't see nothing, much," the roadsweeper mumbled. "Me eyes ain't so good, y'know . . ."

"Perhaps you'd be so good as to help me look for the poor bastard I knocked off his bike."

"Sorry, sir, didn't quite catch . . ."

"I said, HELP ME, HELP ME LOOK FOR HIM, HE MUST BE LYING AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE!"

Blindly, Fielding obeyed. He had been conditioned firmly in his youth to follow the orders of a landowner, and in any case, if Farmer Knight was ready to ignore the damage that had undoubtedly been done to his Land Rover and forget about the accident, Fielding was only too pleased to help him look for whatever the man had lost.

Together they searched in progressively widening circles for the body of the accident victim. As they disappeared into the darkness, Brogan, who had some vague idea of the accident, crept up to the Land Rover. It stood, hand-

brake off, engine running, headlamps blazing. It was, in fact, just waiting to be driven off. He opened the driver's door and looked in. It was almost too tempting . . .

In the space capsule it was becoming uncomfortably hot, as the heat from the re-entry gradually spread from the tail through the insulation to the nose.

Igarovitch fidgeted. "When will our comrades from the base come to rescue us?" he asked. "Have you any idea, Comrade Yuchevski?"

Yuchevski gnawed his thumb nail nervously. It was likely that, after all the propaganda and ceremonies, he, as captain, would have Igarovitch's foolhardy act blamed upon him. The prospect was unpleasant.

"I have no idea when they will come," he said shortly. "I have no idea where we are; as you know, comrade, the re-entry burned off the radio aerials. We can no longer receive transmissions from control; there is nothing we can do except activate the distress beacon—which I have already done—and then wait."

"Could we not take a look outside, comrade?" Igarovitch whined. "It would do no harm; we shall either roast or suffocate at this rate."

"If we are on foreign soil, it's against the regulations . . ."

But Igarovitch had already started to spin the screw clamps around the hatch. Slowly he pushed it open.

The Hertfordshire mists swirled in; both cosmonauts coughed and sneezed violently, shivering in the sudden blast of air. "It must be Siberia!" Igarovitch wheezed. "Nowhere else could there be so foul a climate!"

"You could well be correct," Yuchevski replied, staring out into the darkness. "See," he said, pointing down to the lights of Willy-in-the-Mud, "a peasant village, not far away. We have nothing to worry about, by now they are sure to have contacted the authorities." He leant forward and pulled the hatch shut again, excluding the damp, choking air.

Yuchevski was, of course, quite mistaken. In the bawdy pubs of Willy-in-the-Mud it was too noisy for anyone to

have heard the landing of the craft, and even if they had, it would take more than that to distract the clientele from the business of drinking, darts and dominoes. And the few villagers not in the pubs were either hypnotised by television or out playing Bingo.

However, outside of Willy-in-the-Mud, there were a few citizens who had chanced to notice the landing. One was Isaac Smith, science master at the nearby St Nicholas' public school for boys, pleasantly situated mid-way between Leyworth and the green fields sloping down to Willy-in-the-Mud. Smith was on duty at the time, which entailed forcing unco-operative children into bed and encouraging them to remain silent at least until he was out of earshot. Consequently he was only too glad of a distraction.

He was a thin, timid man who, it was said, had made science his career to prove to himself that he could conquer his own fear of the subject. Acids, explosions and boiling water all scared him. Perhaps in compensation for his frailty, he nursed a thick black beard that enveloped his face to such an extent that all his facial features were entirely smothered, any expression he might otherwise have shown rendered invisible. This, coupled with the fact that he wore thick-lensed glasses and was Welsh, lent him a totally false air of remote inscrutability.

When Smith saw the capsule land, his interest quickened. He was writing a teach-yourself book on chemistry, and had been for years; but being, for all of his temerity, a shrewd business man, he saw at once he would be able to make a lot more money writing up his experiences in contact with a flying saucer—or whatever the object he had seen land should turn out to be. Quickly he slammed the door on the last dormitory of screaming children and hurried out across the playing fields to Willy-in-the-Mud.

He was followed at a discreet distance by a well-built woman in her late forties who held the post of temporary Russian mistress at St Nicholas'. She was from the USSR, and on her return would be writing a thesis on capitalist education methods. Now, she was much more interested in science master Smith, hurrying off across the fields at half-past eight, night drawing in. She had had designs on

the man since she had first seen him at the beginning of term, two weeks back, but had been unable to evoke a response from him to her amorous advances. Perhaps, she thought, he was running off to a typical English pub. What better place to snare him, when his resistance was dulled by alcohol?

Smith paused and looked down the fields to where the space vehicle stood. It was clear that it had terrestrial origins; in the twilight the faded, blistered image of a hammer and sickle and the letters 'CCCP' could be made out painted on the nose. The parachute lay like a shimmering pool of dark water on the ground. The water-logged mud still steamed and bubbled from the heat of the space vehicle's metal shell.

More important, there were others already in the scene. Smith walked warily towards the Land Rover where it stood, headlamps blazing in the night. Whoever owned it could either be potential witness to his story, or perhaps potential competitor, out to make his own profit from the news of the incident. He crept up behind the figure of Brogan, on the point of stealing the Land Rover.

"Aha!" Smith cried, clapping the youth on the shoulder.

Brogan jumped visibly. It was one of his private fears that he should be accosted while stealing something. Not having the intelligence to thieve with any subtlety, he always knew he would be caught in the end, but the idea of being caught before he had had a chance to benefit from the crime never ceased to distress him.

Desperately he attempted to scramble free and into the driving seat, so he could possibly drive away, but Smith held him back.

"I want to speak to you," he said. "Stay where you are!"

To Brogan this was worse than a death sentence. "I was just having a look, honest!" he said, quivering. "I weren't going to do nothing!"

Smith scratched his beard. His eyes narrowed behind the glittering spectacles. "Just having a look, eh?" he said, thinking the youth had been referring to the space capsule. "Tell you what, why don't you drive down to the village in your Land Rover and call the newspapers?"

This way, Smith reasoned, he could stay to guard his find, scaring off any intruders.

Brogan gulped. He was being told to drive off in the vehicle. This man must be its owner!

"You want me to ring up the papers?" he said.

"Yes," said Smith. "Ring them and tell them the Russians have landed a space ship here."

Brogan had long since forgotten the space capsule, and was now even more confused. But driven on by Smith's beard and glittering eyes, he got into the driving seat. "Go on, then!" Smith urged him.

The Land Rover is well known for its unusually wide choice of gears, but, alas, not to Brogan. He had only ever driven a friend's Ford Popular; now, he pushed the gear lever into where he assumed first gear would be.

He revved the engine wildly, and let in the clutch. The Land Rover shot backwards with all the power of its four-wheel drive and, after spinning in a neat circle, continued backwards at full speed down the hill, weaving and swaying dangerously. In his preoccupation with the steering, Brogan had forgotten to take his foot off the accelerator.

Smith scratched his beard. At least the youth was headed in the right direction. There was a sound of distant splintering as the vehicle hit the wooden fence at the bottom of the hill; it disappeared out of sight along the road.

A cry sounded behind Smith: the cry of a farmer who can stand no more. "You!" Knight shouted. "It was you who let that maniac steal my Land Rover!"

Smith eyed the newcomer hesitantly. The situation was becoming complex.

Farmer Knight recognised the science master at once as the unhelpful man to whom he had complained, in the past, about the St Nicholas students' habit of herding the cows.

"I might have known it!" he cried, "it's that school again. Not content with constructing your insane practical jokes on my pasture," (he gestured wildly at the space craft), "you let your delinquent students run off with my

property, you encourage them to . . . to lawlessness and destruction!"

Farmer Knight gasped for breath. "I'll stand for no more of this," he went on. "I'll have the police on to you, that's what I'll do. I'll call them now, that's what I'll do!"

He strode off down the hill.

"He say something about the police?" said a voice from behind Smith. The science master turned round again. How many more people was he going to come upon out here in the fields? He eyed Fielding, the battered road-sweeper, with suspicion.

"Yes," he said, "he's going to call the police."

"After I helped him, and all," the man muttered. Hurriedly he shuffled towards his bicycle, and stumbled off down the hill, dragging the only remaining evidence of the accident after him.

Smith scratched his beard. His eyes shifted warily, half expecting some new intruder to spring up out of the darkness. But now there was silence, and he turned towards the black shape of the space craft, blocking out the stars.

He walked slowly up to it, shoes rustling in the grass. When he was a short distance away, he froze where he stood; unmistakably he had heard someone else's shuffling steps and breathing, approaching from the opposite side. The other person had heard Smith's approach at the same instant, and also stopped. They stood, opposite sides of the space vehicle, listening intently.

Smith advanced again. So did the other person. "Who's there?" he whispered; whoever it was didn't reply. He hurried round the cylindrical form of the craft; as he did so, the other person ran round it the other side, out of sight. "This is absurd!" Smith shouted, "Stop playing games with me!"

Abruptly he changed direction, and started running back around the capsule. Just as he feared the other person had again duplicated his actions, they collided head on, from opposite directions.

Smith collapsed on the ground, his spectacles askew, a bulky, soft human form half over him.

"Why, Mr Smith!" the Russian mistress exclaimed,

practically breathing in the science master's ear. "What a pleasant surprise!"

In the capsule, it was again becoming hot.

"Surely, comrade," Igarovitch was saying, "we could do with some more fresh air."

"I hope you're not thinking of . . . *running away*, Comrade Igarovitch," Yuchevski said slowly. "In that case I would have to report you."

Igarovitch laughed without conviction. "Of course not, comrade," he said. "We've shared the cabin for the past two weeks, why not another few hours?" He grinned disarmingly.

"It may be days," Yuchevski reminded him.

Igarovitch laughed again. "Days, hours—what's the difference?" He loosened the clamps and swung the hatch open. "Just some fresh air, is all . . ." Igarovitch peered out into the darkness. Any thoughts of escape from his claustrophobic environment were dispelled when he found that the ladder rungs that were set in the side of the vehicle before takeoff had been melted away by the reentry heat. Yuchevski joined him, and together they peered out of the hatchway, down to the ground some distance below.

They were just in time to see Smith running around the capsule, on his first circuit. A moment later the Russian mistress passed underneath. Then Smith, once again, immediately returning from the opposite direction. The cosmonauts witnessed the two school staff colliding and falling to the ground in a heap.

"Strange," murmured Yuchevski. "Some kind of primitive peasant fertility rites, perhaps?"

"Certainly," said Igarovitch, "they don't seem to realise the nature of our space vehicle. Otherwise, they would treat it with more awe and respect." He seemed pleased with the infallibility of his logic.

"You're quite right," Yuchevski replied. "We seem to be in a very backward area. It would be prudent, considering the ignorant nature of the inhabitants of this area, to keep ourselves safely shut up until help arrives." He

pulled the hatch shut once more. "Savages are notoriously unpredictable."

In a way, he was right.

Brogan's trip in the Land Rover had finally ended when he encountered another vehicle, in the car park of the Fox and Hounds, one of the much frequented pubs of Willy-in-the-Mud. Having smashed into a shiny white Austin Cambridge, the Land Rover stalled with an air of finality. Brogan jumped from the driving seat and walked round to look at the damage, seconds before the owner of the car in question approached.

"Whose is that Land Rover?" he demanded.

"Belongs to Farmer Knight," Brogan replied, misleadingly but truthfully.

"And where's this maniac Knight run off to, after ramming my car?"

Brogan scratched his head. "I thought I saw him run off up the fields," he said, gesturing out of the car park.

The car owner was a heavy-set, heavy-drinking individual of the kind who stands for no nonsense from anyone. The beer he had been drinking served to accentuate his natural aggressiveness. "Thanks," he said. "Can't let the bastard ram my car and then run off, trying to get away with it." He turned and walked a little unsteadily, but with great purpose, out across the road and into the fields.

Brogan shook his head. Everything was happening, it seemed. He hadn't really wanted to shift the blame for ramming that man's car on to Farmer Knight, but it was the only way out under the circumstances.

He looked around vaguely, uncomfortably aware of something nagging at his memory. What was it that bearded man had told him to do? Phone the papers, that's what it was. Tell them the Russians had invaded, or something. It sounded peculiar but, thinking back to the strange figure that had given the command, Brogan thought he ought to do something about obeying, just in case it was important. If the Russians were invading, he supposed it must be important, though he was not quite sure why.

By this time Knight, too, had decided to put through

his phone call. He had, after obtaining two wrong numbers from the new Leyworth automatic telephone exchange, succeeded in getting through to the police.

Leyworth police station was a quiet affair. It was faced by noticeboards protected by dusty glass panels, where posters exhorting the public to exterminate rats and vaccinate their children were on permanent display, and had been for the past ten years. The force of twenty constables, two plain-clothes men and a sergeant was on constant alert every Saturday night, when the local yobbery often made merry in and around the fountain in the town's public gardens, but during the rest of the week cycling-without-lights was practically the only offence they ever had to deal with.

Sergeant Vickers had been preparing to go home when the phone rang. He was, in fact, half into his raincoat. Consequently his attention to Farmer Knight was vague, and unhelped by Knight's own incoherence.

After listening patiently for a while, the Sergeant carefully put the receiver down on the table. "Constable Brown," he called, "man by name of Knight ringing from Willy-in-the-Mud. Something about someone running off with his Land Rover. Probably it's that school again—you remember they're in the habit of herding his cows around?"

"I'll see to it, sir," Brown said wearily, putting down his comic book and picking up his helmet. He followed the sergeant out into the cold and windy night. Having checked carefully that both front and back lights on his bicycle were functioning, he mounted the machine, and pedalled laboriously off towards the scene of the crisis.

Smith tried to squirm free from under the heavy Russian mistress. Somewhat grudgingly, she allowed him to get up. What had the woman been up to, he wondered, evading him like that? As if she hadn't wanted to be seen near the Russian space ship? Was she, could she be, something more than a simple Russian mistress? Could there even be an element of collusion here?

"Have you any idea what this is?" Smith asked her.

"I should have thought it was clear," she replied, stand-

ing close to the science master. A dark, lonely night, she thought—what a wonderfully romantic situation! If only he wouldn't evade her in his shy English manner. "It must be the Russian capsule we, er, the Russian people, sent up to the moon, a few days ago. It must have been thrown off course somehow, landing here instead of the USSR. It's the only explanation."

"I hadn't heard about a Rusisan moon shot," Smith said suspiciously.

"There was a hint in last week's *Pravda*," the Russian mistress said, moving still closer to the man. His black beard fascinated her.

"A hint, eh?" said Smith. It sounded horribly like a poor excuse to explain what was in fact restricted information. How closely, he wondered, becoming more nervous every minute, was this woman in contact with the hierarchy of the Party?

"But let's not worry about politics," she said, "not while there's just you and I out here alone."

Smith stepped back from her abruptly. "It won't work you know," he said in a high-pitched Welsh voice. "I'll remind you I'm happily married!"

"You silly English," she murmured, placing her hands gently on his shoulders and drawing him firmly to her. "Always so worried about marriage."

Smith was on the verge of panic. It was, he realised, too much of a coincidence, the Russian space ship landing a mere two or three weeks after the woman had joined the staff at St Nicholas'. Up until now the possibility of her being an agent had been mere fantastic speculation. Now she was trying to use seduction to keep him quiet, and he wasn't so sure!

He tried to pull free, but he was a small man, and her Russian arms, her muscular Russian arms, held him firmly.

"Let go!" he gasped. "Let me go!" But in her passion she had squeezed most of the breath out of him.

"There he is!" came a voice from out of the darkness. "Carrying on with another woman, now—shameless!"

Smith twitched in fear. It was his wife, it must be his

wife! The woman's arms relaxed slightly, and with the strength born of fear, Smith pulled himself free.

But it was not his wife, it was Janet Glass, pounding up the fields, now in a new, untorn skirt, her parents close behind her.

"There's Bob Brogan!" she screamed. "There's the one who tried to rape me!"

Science master Smith looked to either side of him. He glanced behind him. There was no one else in sight, other than the Russian mistress. It had to be him they were accusing—of rape? What was going on?

"I warned you, Bob Brogan," the girl was shouting, "I warned you I'd fetch my dad on to you, after what you tried to do to me!"

"It's a mistake!" Smith cried, backing away. The girl's father was an unhealthily muscular individual, gaining on him fast. "It wasn't me!"

Smith started running down the hill, glancing back over his shoulder. He collided violently with the large motorist whose car had been rammed by the Land Rover.

"Aaaggh!" the man grunted, grabbing Smith in a stranglehold as they collapsed on the ground. "Got you, you bastard!"

"No, no," Smith shouted. "It's not me, it's not me!"

"Who is it, then?" the man grunted, relaxing the hold very slightly, so Smith could just manage to talk. The little science master was, for a moment, totally bewildered by the question.

"Who am I?" he gasped.

"Your name Knight?" the man pressed him.

"No!" yelled Smith. "Farmer Knight, he went up that way!" He gestured up the hill, concerned only with gaining release from the stranglehold.

"Sorry, mate," his assailant grunted, and started blundering on further up the hill. He encountered Janet Glass's father, and grappled with him.

"So here you are, yer car-smasher!" he growled, making a grab for the man.

"Wants a fight, does yer?" said Mr Glass, under the impression, in the darkness, that it was Smith who had

stopped running and come back for a set-to. "Then I'll give yer one, yer sex-mad cradle-snatcher!"

"No one calls me that and gets away with it," the car-owner shouted, and soon they were grappling on the ground, oblivious of the girl, who kept screaming, over and over again, in a hysterical voice. "But dad, he's not Bob Brogan, Dad, he's not the one! Dad, he's not . . ."

Smith got to his feet shakily and staggered down the hill. How many more people would he meet tonight, for heaven's sake?

He paused at the road at the bottom. Along it, painfully slowly, cycled Constable Brown, his dynamo lighting set flickering a dim yellow.

"The strong arm of the law," Smith thought to himself, sighing with relief. Perhaps now something could be sorted out.

"What's the trouble, then, Mr Knight?" Brown enquired, dismounting and parking the bicycle carefully at the kerb.

"My name's not Knight!" Smith shouted, tearing at his beard. "My name's Brogan. No, no, I mean, my name's Smith—Isaac Smith!"

"There's no need to shout," said Brown, pulling out his notebook. "Now, which is it to be?"

"Smith, Isaac Smith."

"You're sure of that?" Brown poised his pencil over a fresh page.

"For God's sake!" Smith shouted, "do you think I don't know my own name?"

Constable Brown thought for a moment. He still wrote nothing in his notebook. "What exactly has been going on, here?" he asked, changing a subject which he considered delicate.

Smith took a deep breath. "There's a man who claims his daughter's been assaulted, a young lad ran off in a Land Rover, there's a drunkard staggering about claiming Farmer Knight rammed his car, Farmer Knight himself is worked up about his damaged fields, and on top of that, there's a Russian space ship up there, and some woman who I suspect to be in collusion with the people inside . . ."

"Let's have one thing at a time, sir," the constable inter-

rupted. "What was the registration number of the stolen vehicle?"

Smith didn't have to answer. Knight himself had arrived on the scene.

"There's the man!" he shouted, glaring at the science master. "Thank God the police are here! This is the one from that school, the man responsible for all the trouble. Here, just you come and look at my Land Rover. No, on second thoughts, see the hole it smashed in my fence. Or rather, just you look at what this maniac and his school-children have got up there on my pasture!"

"Just a moment, just a moment," said Constable Brown. "Let's have your name and address, shall we, sir?"

At that moment Brogan emerged from the pub, where he had been trying to get through to the *Evening News,* it being the only paper whose telephone number he could remember. Unfortunately he had been ringing the staff of the 'Small Ads' section, who had gone home long since, but blamed his lack of success on the STD system that had been recently installed.

"I tried to get through, sir," he said, seeing Smith, the bearded man who had first spoken to him, "but . . ."

At that moment he made out the forms of Constable Brown and Farmer Knight standing behind Smith. Without needing further prompting, he fled down the road.

"Arrest that man!" Knight yelled, while Constable Brown looked vaguely around him. He need not have bothered; from the fields came Janet Glass's hysterical voice, calling, "There, that's Bob Brogan!" and her father was running after Brogan, felling him with an expert rugby tackle.

"Now I've caught up with you; *you're* the one who assaulted my daughter!"

"No, he's not," came another voice, "he's the one who set me chasing round the fields looking for a man called Knight."

"My name's Knight, over here—did you want to speak to me?"

Constable Brown and Chemistry Master Smith were abruptly on the scene of a seething mass of people.

"You backed your Land Rover into my car!"

"Trying to rape my daughter, is what . . ."

"She seemed to know too much about that Russian space ship . . ."

"It was him—his kids, and their practical jokes, I've had enough . . ."

"She tore her *own* dress!"

"I ought to punch you in the teeth, mate . . ."

The constable was strangely aloof from the confusion. From the pub across the road, Fielding, the roadsweeper, staggered out, by this time totally drunk. Seeing the police uniform, he staggered across the road, almost in tears.

"It's a fair cop," he mumbled. "I done it, I ran into his Land Rover on me bike. It's all right, I'll go quietly . . ."

He faltered and Constable Brown supported him with one hand.

"At what time did the accident take place, sir?" he said, preparing to make the entry in his notebook.

Up on the fields, the Russian mistress had tapped insistently on the shell of the space vehicle. Against his better judgement, Yuchevski had once more opened the hatch.

"Were you tapping?" he enquired in his native Russian.

"I was, comrade," the woman replied, also in Russian. Yuchevski brightened at the sound of his own language."

"Which part of Russia are we in?" he asked.

The woman turned and looked back down the hill to the gesticulating crowd outside the pub. Suddenly, as a mass, they moved across the road and into the pub, still shouting, preferring to sort things out inside rather than out in the chill Hertfordshire air. Only Constable Brown and Fielding, the roadsweeper, were left standing outside, the policeman slowly taking notes.

She turned back and looked up at Yuchevski, leaning out of the hatch. "You are not in the USSR," she said.

"Oh?" Yuchevski said. "Then where have we landed, comrade?"

The Russian mistress laughed. She laughed for some time. "England," she said finally. "England, comrade cosmonaut—where else?"

PAPERBACKS

Reviewed by James Colvin

IN CONTRAST TO a few months ago there have been quite a few decent paperback sf titles published recently. Penguin's nicely-balanced release of five new titles simultaneously has helped increase the over-all standard.

Fifth Planet by Fred and Geoffrey Hoyle (Penguin, 3s. 6d.) is better than *The Black Cloud* and *Ossian's Ride* but still not much to my taste, I'm afraid. Fred Hoyle is one of my heroes, but as a scientist rather than a novelist. I would much rather read his speculative articles on quasars or Galactic Information Exchanges than his fiction. Although a worthy attempt has been made towards producing some sort of characterisation in this book, it is rarely ever more than well-painted cardboard and many of the passages describing the characters are often as heavy and poorly fitted into the construction as the long chunks of scientific explanation and extrapolation at the beginning. A star, Helios, is going to pass through the outer limits of our solar system, bringing its planets with it. An expedition is launched to the fifth planet, Achilles, an extraordinarily Earth-like planet, it seems. Once the expedition lands and the action gets under way the book improves. The second half is much better. The landing on Achilles is made and the planet turns out to be not all it seems. We next have a taste of the old alien-possession theme, with a twist that helps justify much of the sexual triangle stuff we have to wade through at the beginning. In spite of its rather flat style and somewhat stale ideas (both plot-ideas and ideas about the human condition in general) the book convinces on a superficial level most of the time. A good cover—one of Magritte's most successful paintings, *L'Oisseau Fleur*.

All the Penguin covers are good, often better than the

books. A detail from Miro's *La Course de Taureaux* is on the cover of the best of the Penguin batch, *Cat's Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut (3s. 6d.). When this book was first published reviewers called it 'profound' and a 'wild and savage satire' among other things. Vonnegut shares Nabokov's sardonic humanism, but lacks the power and depth of Nabokov. He's still pretty good—and an sf novel which even begins to match Nabokov is something to talk about. I got a quiet enjoyment from *Cat's Cradle*'s solid common-sense, just as I did from the more spectacular but not so successful *Sirens of Titan,* but it didn't—and doesn't —stir me to extravagant praise. The book is primarily about man's stupidity to man, about irresponsibility of scientists (in this it is a refined extension to *Player Piano*) and the foolishness of religion. The protagonist is writing a book about the events that took place on the day Hiroshima was bombed. His investigations throw him in with the family of 'the father of the bomb', Dr Felix Hoenicker who just before he died invented a potential world-destroyer, the chemical *ice-nine*. Later events take place on the banana-republic island of San Lorenzo where the hero discovers Bokonism. The first sentence in *The Books of Bokonon* reads: 'All of the true things I am about to tell you are shameless lies'.

There are some amusing episodes which justify the use of the term 'satire' to describe this book. Revelations about the characters come by means of a series of short vignettes. The conclusion, where *ice-nine* destroys the world, is nicely and farcically led up to. The main emphasis of the novel is on Bokonism, an easy-going, practical kind of humanism that, in my experience, many ordinary people already practise in real life. Why the critics should have been moved to shout 'Profound!' and clap their foreheads puzzles me. There is nothing 'deep' in *Cat's Cradle* and its message seems a fairly conventional and common-sensical one, though the presentation is good. Maybe there's something in Vonnegut I miss. He still hasn't written a book I have enjoyed as much as his non-sf novel *Mother Night*. In comparison to the pretentious and unsophisticated 'satires' of a Heinlein, this is a master-work, of course, and while I found it not much better than the

work of some of Vonnegut's American contemporaries, like De Vries or Southern, it is thoroughly recommended as above-average sf.

In *New Maps of Hell,* Kingsley Amis saw fit to say that *The Space Merchants* by Pohl and Kornbluth (Penguin, 3s. 6d.) had 'many claims to being the best science fiction novel so far'. Amis's tastes must be limited, for though this book is slickly-written, fast-moving and fairly mature in its outlook, its main target—the advertising world—is an old, tired target and no really original shots are fired at it. In the fairly near future the world is overcrowded and the machinery of running it is almost entirely in the hands of titanic advertising agencies whose methods of persuading the population of the world are sophisticated versions of present-day techniques, coupled with some hallucinogenic drug work and audio-visual stimulii. The plot is the standard sf one—young man originally a zealous worker for the cause realises that things are not as they should be and sets about trying to put things right, with the help of a good woman. Plenty of gimmick-ideas and invention make this a very entertaining book, however. Is it 'satire'? Since the fears it expresses and the dangers it warns against have been the subjects of numerous newspaper leaders, Sunday Supplement articles, daily paper features, not to mention articles in the weekly reviews, novels and short stories. I can't call it satire as I think of the term. To me satire should point out what is *not* obvious, and everybody's suspicious of the advertising companies, aren't they? Amis also gave the impression that Kornbluth was the passenger in the team. A reading of stories written independently by the two writers, a glance at Pohl's work since Kornbluth died, should right that impression immediately. Reading *The Syndic,* for instance, clearly shows that Kornbluth had a talent for invention and, yes, satire, but was a bit shaky on plot-construction. It would appear to me that Pohl's big contribution to the team was his ability to construct a balanced plot. As light-reading, *The Space Merchants* is recommended.

I'm not a great fan of Theodore Sturgeon, finding his writing emotionally imprecise and his characterisation

often corny, but *More Than Human* (Penguin, 3s. 6d.) is perhaps his best book and the first section, *The Fabulous Idiot* which describes a moron with a hypnotic power to make people do whatever he wants, two girls brought up in a house by a paranoid father to whom sexual desire is the greatest of many evils and will not let them see or even touch their own bodies, is as powerful and horrifying a piece of writing as I have ever come across in sf. A strangely assorted group of people all have particular psi-powers or are otherwise 'more than human'. As the story progresses, first describing their lives individually, they come together and form a 'gestalt'—a single entity in which all their powers are combined. The 'head' of this entity is a mongoloid baby, while its 'hands' are Lone, the moron. Its conscience is supplied by someone else, and so on. Primarily the story describes the slow coming to maturity of this 'gestalt' and it holds its interest and suspends disbelief throughout. Another recommended book. It has undertones which succeed in stimulating the psyche as well as the emotions.

The re-issue of Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (Penguin, 3s. 6d.) is perhaps justified by the new translation which is much more readable than any previous translation I have seen. If you want a copy for your collections or are curious to read this book—it's only real merit lying in the fact that it was the first of its kind—then this is the edition to get.

Men, Martians and Machines by Eric Frank Russell (Panther, 3s. 6d.) is a collection of Russell's best stories. I am not a great fan of Russell's rather facetious style which imitates a similar American style that isn't to my taste, but the stories are all readable, well-polished jobs, from the well-known *Jay Score*—about a superman who turns out to be something more or less than a superman—to the other, not so well-known Jay Score stories, *Mechanistria, Symbiotica* and *Mesmerica*. Perhaps the publisher's manner of thickly disguising this as a novel is excused by the fact that the stories are loosely connected through the person of Jay Score.

Not having much taste for 'horror' fiction I approached *Weird Shadows from Beyond* (Corgi, 3s. 6d.) with the

conscientious notion of reading it through in spite of my dislike. But don't be fazed by the title, as I was. I found this collection of short stories, edited by John Carnell, the best I have read for a very long time. It is not the usual old rubbish at all, but a nicely-balanced collection of off-beat stories that are no more like the conventional horror story than they are like the conventional sf story. In some ways a combination of the best of both, they are almost all taken from the Carnell-edited SCIENCE FANTASY—always the best of the Nova trio, in my opinion, with an original atmosphere that I haven't found in a magazine before or since. It became top-heavy towards the end, with too much emphasis on 'sword and sorcery' stories (in particular, Moorcock's 'Elric' series) but even this made it different to the rest and it published my first story, which gives me even more affection for it. Moorcock is represented, as it happens, by the only sword and sorcery story he didn't publish in SCIENCE FANTASY and the only one I have really been able to read—*Master of Chaos*. This has many of the elements of his Elric stories but they are crystallised into a shorter length, the writing is better controlled and the metaphysical theory of Earth's creation (cut from 'the stuff of Chaos' by heroic men with imagination who have sufficient force of personality to exert an influence on 'unformed matter' and turn it into organised landscapes of plains and trees and the like) less outrageous than usual. More classical in approach than his usual Schauer-Romantik-influenced fantasies. Mervyn Peake is the star of the book, represented by two short stories that are slighter in tone than his wonderful 'Titus Groan' trilogy but are very good, nonetheless. *Danse Macabre* is written in a traditional style reminiscent of Poe at his best. It is about a man who wakes to see his own evening clothes dancing out of their wardrobe and follows them to a forest glade where he sees them dancing with those of his wife. The story leads to an excellent, though conventional, twist which inspires the shudder it was meant to. I enjoyed *Same, Time, Same Place* even more. This is a story reminiscent of Bradbury, but much better. It is not a 'fantasy' at all, but a 'grotesque'. A man falls in love with a woman he meets every day at a restaurant. He never

sees her anywhere else, but eventually proposes marriage. On the day of the wedding he sees her and her friends from the top of a bus. They are in the room where the wedding is to take place. What he sees horrifies him. I think you will be horrified, too. E. C. Tubb's well-known *Fresh Guy*, the story of the ghouls waiting for the people to come back from their underground shelters after an atomic war, makes excellent re-reading. I have never enjoyed a Tubb story so much. It is written with a combination of humour and horror that is very successful. *Blood Offering* by John Kippax is the least satisfying story. It has a much more conventional theme than the others, about a sceptical white man on a South Seas island and how a native superstition turns out to have more foundation than he thought. This could be found in the usual sort of horror collection and seemed a bit out of place here. *Wednesday's Child* by William Tenn is about a girl with no navel, who feels she is not meant to have a baby. Robert Presslie's *Dial 'O' For Operator* is about a switchboard operator who gets a call in the night from a woman who tells him there is a black thing waiting outside the box for her. A well-handled story. Brian Aldiss's *Flowers of the Forest* is a nicely written story set in the jungles of Sumatra. It is about a man who kills a jungle witch and the price he pays. There is a stronger than usual depth to this story and a better sense of character than the type usually has. Eric Williams' *Garden of Paris* is another more conventional story written in a somewhat archaic style about a man-eating, Triffid-like plant. Theodore Sturgeon's *The Graveyard Reader* is about a man who goes around not reading gravestones —but the characters of the buried. Another unconventional and refreshing story.

For some reason writers who write bad sf, quite often write good off-beat fantasy, and I found myself puzzling why this should be. It might be that the gimmickry of the average sf story is overpowering and makes their writing clumsier, or perhaps because they are appealing more to the instinct of the reader than his intellect they find the writing easier. It's hard to say. Whatever the reason this collection is well worth getting. It doesn't deserve the lousy title.

Marooned (Corgi, 5s.), the story of an astronaut stranded in a capsule and the attempts to get him back, may be good technically (the author, Martin Caidin, is, I believe, a technical writer) but it's a bore to wade through.

Prodigal Sun by Philip High (Compact, 3s. 6d.) is one of those run-of-the-mill British novels which isn't particularly bad and not particularly good. A lone hero, Peter Duncan, comes from the planet Mattrain with the object of saving the human race from destruction. This is the second title from Compact and the second to have this basic theme. Whereas *The Sundered Worlds* had freshness of imagery and location, *Prodigal Sun* doesn't have this to recommend it. A good cover.

The Demons by Kenneth Bulmer is more encouraging. Also from Compact (3s. 6d.), also with an excellent cover, it is one of Bulmer's best. Tightly-written, it describes a strange underground world terrorised by gigantic 'Demons'. Bit by bit the mysteries of the environment are solved and the whole thing winds up on a well-sustained climax. Very entertaining, if somewhat standard in treatment.

Compact's second novel in the Michael Kane series, *Blades of Mars* (3s. 6d.), by E. P. Bradbury, emulates Burroughs, even down to the latter's reactionary, Victorian-style philosophising. I suspect that parts of this have been written with tongue in cheek, but perhaps I am doing Mr Bradbury more justice than he deserves. A colourful, action-packed romance, it has a pace that never falters and a clean, old-fashioned style that carries you along in spite of yourself. This, I gather, is what they call the work of a natural story-teller. I read it feeling I shouldn't be wasting my time, but I did find it hard to put down. With its spider-men, its monsters, its happily fortuitous discoveries, its coincidences and its 'atmosphere of pure love and pure action' as one reviewer commented on the previous title, it is harmless and unpretentious enough, I suppose.

James Colvin

"SORRY ABOUT THE SOUND EFFECTS, DADDY."

NEW WRITINGS IN SF 5 (Dobson, 16s.), John Carnell's latest collection of new sf stories, is a lively, varied collection of seven stories by Mackelworth, Malcolm, Harding, Baxter, Stringer, Williams and Green. The book proves that whether or not the standard of sf writing is improving, the number of ways of writing it is increasing. From the plain tale—Malcolm's story of the man dreaming in communication with a computer—to the poetic—Harding's story of the death of a city—to the mood story—Mackelworth's impressive shot at describing the reactions of scientists to the death of the sun—all the tales are different. None of the stories, to my mind, were wholly memorable, but how many are? And yet I felt that five out of the seven, with a little more imagination, a little more intellectual hard work and more concrete visualisation, could have been more than good. Secretly I have the feeling that if sf writers would follow their own star a little more, and cling less to the work of other sf writers, the standard would improve. If they dropped this I'm-just-a-craftsman, less-literary-than-thou pose, sf might make a sudden jump forward.

Robert Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* (Dobson, 21s.) is not, to my way of thinking, a very good book. Essentially it is a shelter story with the twist that when the inhabitants of the shelter emerge they are in the same spot—but in an alternate world. The two halves of the book do not jell very efficiently, nor is this particular alternate world very credible as an alternative, but the book has one, not-to-be-sneered-at, merit—you read on to find out what happens next.

And yet—and yet—Heinlein is an sf Great, but his writing is mediocre, his dialogue banal and his imagination sparse. As so often in sf a ghastly facetiousness comes over the characters in times of crisis. Have people facing death ever spoken like this?: "Are you breaking it to me gently

that we are going to be baked alive?" And: "Any time I'm too hot to put my arm round a girl I'll know I'm dead and in hell." In contrast the classic war-film dialogue "Sarge, Sarge, help me! I don't want to die! I don't want to die!" seems refreshingly naturalistic.

This is not a matter of detail, but points up Heinlein's weakness, a sheer paucity of imagination, lack of sense of how people behave, which weakens the whole book. The characters' utterly incredible obsession with their sleeping pills, their sanitation and the question of mixed sleeping and bathing arrangements which permeates the whole shelter sequence again betrays Heinlein, like so many sf writers, as a man who has no competence in dealing with his stock in trade—disturbance, change and crisis and how people react to it.

But this book is not really about any group of people—it is wish-fulfilment of a high order. The central character (revealingly starting as 'Mr Farnham' and then taking over and becoming 'Hugh') is always in control, ditches his old wife, gets the nubile girl, threatens to shoot his son, complacently accepts it when his daughter offers herself to him, comes up trumps every time. In fact the author is so anxious to keep Hugh safe that it weakens the book. Typically, he is discovered in the first and last ten pages of the book in two separate bomb-shelters.

In the middle of the book a character screaming in the agonies of prolonged and eventually fatal childbirth, rallies in true Heinlein fashion and jests: "They went that-a-way. Sorry about the sound effects, Daddy."

It's a horrid thought that if the radiation don't get you, Heinlein's characters will.

Hilary Bailey

Film Review **by Alan Dodd**

COSMONAUTS ON VENUS

THREE RUSSIAN SPACE ships approach Venus. One is destroyed by a giant meteorite, leaving the other two to position for landing as best they can, despite the shock of losing their companion ship. Two men and a robot crash land and leave their ship in charge of Masha, the woman astronaut on board, she in turn controls their only radio link with Earth.

They land, amid the swirling mists of Venus, in a swamp, and battle successively against the torrential rains, the prehistoric creatures living there, and an erupting volcano whose molten lava threatens to engulf them. Using a magnificent air-car they succeed finally in exploring the menacing new world.

The second ship lands its three men on firm ground and with a more luxurious space vehicle they go out to rescue the others when a brontosaurus attacks them and they are nearly mangled by a man-eating plant while strange, human wailing sounds suddenly rend the swirling atmosphere.

Eventually they rescue their companions, and are about to return to Earth convinced that Venus holds no sign of human life, when one of them finds a stone, and on it is a gracefully carved picture of a woman's face.

Following on the lines of *Journey to the End of the Universe*, the Czech film reviewed a few issues ago, this new Russian film has a fascinating air of probability. The scenes on board the ships about to land on Venus are as one would expect them to be, and Venus itself is a combination of all the science fiction stories one has read. While it is difficult for the Russian cast to act from within the confines of the glass-bowls of spaceships, it is pleasant to note that the most lovable character in the film is their robot, a mechanical being of such oiled perfection that even Isaac Asimov would have been proud of him.

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MEETINGS, etc.

THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION is organizing the 1966 SF Convention at Yarmouth at Easter. Membership of the BSFA will allow you a cheaper attendance fee, etc. BSFA offers the regular journal VECTOR, the fiction magazine TANGENT (latest issue contains Moorcock, Tubb, Woods, etc.), postal library, bibliographies, etc. For all details write: Hon. Sec. BSFA, 77 College Road North, Blundellsands, Liverpool 23.

AT THE GLOBE, Hatton Garden, on the first Thursday of every month, an informal gathering of sf fans takes place. All are welcome. Carry a copy of this magazine and people will fall upon your neck and ask you to buy them a drink. They may be famous authors. In which case come well prepared — famous authors are thirstier than most other people. (Issued by the League of Thirsty SF Writers).

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IN THIS ISSUE

NEW WORLDS

COMPACT SF

Strange travesties of the Earth we know, the worlds of subspace hung in limbo, their existence perpetually threatened. They were the Wrecks of Time, and Professor Faustaff was pledged to preserve them as best he could. Steifflomeis, enigmatic, decadent, mysterious connoisseur of death, mockingly opposed the life-loving Faustaff. One fought to preserve, the other to destroy. Who would win?

JAMES COLVIN's
The WRECKS of TIME

Also in this issue:

Langdon Jones's **THE MUSIC MAKERS**

Richard Gordon's **TIME'S FOOL**

Terry Pratchett's **NIGHT DWELLER**

Charles Platt's **CULTURAL INVASION**

Plus more short stories and our usual features