

NEW WORLDS

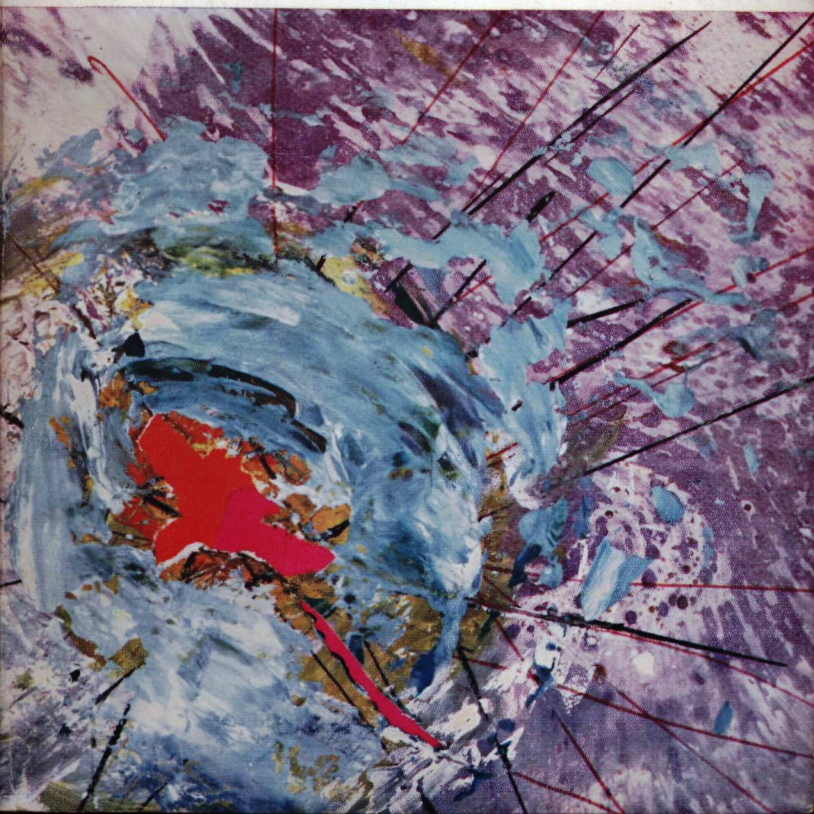
COMPACT
SF

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TRANSIENT

LANGDON JONES

After Death comes memory . . .



NEW WORLDS



DECEMBER 1965
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CONVENTIONS AND CONVENTIONS



THE MOOD OF this year's World Science Fiction Convention, held over the August Bank Holiday in London this year, was perhaps a trifle less convivial on the whole and a trifle more business-like than previous conventions held in this country, but what marked it was the interest shown by writers, readers, publishers and editors in the improving of the overall level of the field. Complacency and cynicism were both markedly absent; literate, realistic opinions and suggestions were very much there. There were very few who disagreed that the field could not do with extra sophistication, though, sadly, weary cries of 'Shame!' were heard, notably from John W. Campbell, editor of *ANALOG* (which won this year's Hugo again) who spoke for some length at the opening discussion ('Science Fiction, the Salvation of the Modern Novel'), telling us that Homer was a simple Bronze Age barbarian who told a good story and that no-one read him for the poetry—or, indeed, because of the poetry. Luckily, the voices of hope predominated, principally in the shape of Miss Judith Merril, Mr. Brian W. Aldiss and Mr. Harry Harrison. Hope was, in fact, fully restored by John Brunner's erudite talk on certain marked aspects of science fiction, a talk which we hope to reprint in a slightly abridged form in a later issue. Other items on the programme included auctions and social events such as the Fancy Dress Parade, in which some beautiful and masterly costumes were displayed. At previous sf conventions the attitude has been, rightly or wrongly, 'don't rock the boat too much, it's fairly small', but at this convention it had evidently been decided that the boat was big enough now and that some of its less attractive cargo could be dispensed with. Some further interesting talks were given at the banquet, by this year's Guest of Honour, Brian W. Aldiss, and Arthur C. Clarke. On the last day, Monday, a

panel of politics in science fiction found John W. Campbell advocating slavery as a reasonable system ('There are always bad masters—like the fool of a farmer who beats a good horse to death—but . . .') and what he called 'benevolent dictatorship'. The panel soon developed into a discussion between Mr. Campbell and John Brunner, who make excellent opponents, and, with some interesting opinions coming from the floor, showed that whilst the majority of people there disagreed with Mr. Campbell, he had certainly succeeded in provoking an interesting discussion. What did emerge from the discussion was that science fiction does contain implicit political messages, no matter how rarely it produces an actual Utopian novel nowadays.

This panel, the last item on the programme, wound up an extremely satisfying and stimulating convention which had been attended by, among others, Poul Anderson, Frederik Pohl, Arthur Sellings, James Blish, James White, John Carnell, Jack Williamson, George O. Smith, Donald Wollheim, E. C. Tubbs, Kenneth Bulmer, John Wyndham, Robert Silverberg, Mack Reynolds and many more. An international flavour was given to it by the many attendees from Scandinavia, Germany, Holland, France, Italy, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, as well as Great Britain and the United States. The attendance was exceptionally large—showing, among other things, how much more popular sf had become—and it was a shame that several authors who had intended to come had been forced to stay behind for various reasons. We think they might have found it the most invigorating convention yet to be held.

Certainly invigorating, and happily just produced in time to be distributed at the convention, was the second issue of SCIENCE FICTION HORIZONS, which this time has an interview with William Burroughs and a long assessment of the current state of British sf by Brian W. Aldiss as its main features. Also in the second issue were articles by James Blish, Harry Harrison, Okuno Takeo (on Japanese sf) and Francesco Biamanti (Italian sf). The stringent, yet sympathetic, article by Aldiss is perhaps the best piece of criticism, although James Blish's review of the critical works of sf is also interesting. It does not, perhaps, have the humanity of Aldiss, who

(Continued on page 123)

James Colvin's

THE WRECKS OF TIME

2nd of 3 parts

seven

Cardinal Orelli's Camp

IN A MANNER that was at once studied and awkward, Steifflomeis pointed the gun at Faustaff's head while the professor tried to think of the best action to take. He could rush Steifflomeis or throw himself to one side, risking falling off the mountain ledge. It would be best to rush him.

He probably would not have succeeded if Steifflomeis hadn't looked up at the moment he ran forward, crouching to keep as much of his great bulk out of the line of fire as possible. Steifflomeis had been distracted by the sound of a helicopter engine above him.

Faustaff knocked Steifflomeis's gun to one side and it went off with a bang that echoed around the peaks. He hit Steifflomeis in the stomach and the bearded man went down, the gun falling out of his hand.

Faustaff picked up the gun and levelled it at Steifflomeis. Steifflomeis frowned and gasped in pain. It was obvious that he expected Faustaff to kill him and a peculiar expression came into his eyes, a kind of introspective fear.

The helicopter was nearer. Faustaff heard it behind him and wondered who the pilot was. The noise of its engine became louder and louder until it deafened him. His clothes were ruffled by the breeze created by its rotors. He began to sidle round Steifflomeis, keeping him covered, so he could see the occupant of the helicopter.

There were two. One of them, wearing a smile of infinite

cruelty, was the red-robed Cardinal Orelli, his laser rifle pointing casually at Faustaff's stomach. The other was a nondescript pilot in brown overalls and helmet.

Orelli shouted something through the roar of the motor, but Faustaff couldn't hear what he was saying. Steiffloimeis got up from the ground and looked curiously at Orelli. Momentarily Faustaff felt more closely allied to Steiffloimeis than to Orelli. Then he realised that both were his enemies and that Steiffloimeis was much more likely to side with Orelli. Orelli must have come looking specifically for him, Faustaff decided, watching the pilot skilfully bring the helicopter down on the slope a little below him. Orelli's rifle was still pointing at him.

The engine noise died and Orelli climbed from the cockpit to the ground, walking up towards them, the fixed, cruel smile still on his lips.

"We missed you, professor," he said. "We were expecting you at our camp much earlier. You lost your way, eh?"

Faustaff could see that Orelli had guessed the truth; that he had deliberately chosen to enter the mountains rather than join the malicious ex-clergyman.

"I haven't had the pleasure," said Orelli, turning a wavier smile on Steiffloimeis.

"Steiffloimeis," said Steiffloimeis looking quizzical. "And you are ——?"

"Cardinal Orelli. Professor Faustaff calls me a 'salvager'. Where are you from, Mr. Steiffloimeis?"

Steiffloimeis pursed his lips. "I am something of a wanderer," he said. "Here today, gone tomorrow, you know."

"I see. Well, we can chat at my camp. It is more comfortable there."

Faustaff realised that there was little point to arguing. Orelli kept him and Steiffloimeis covered as they walked down to the helicopter and climbed in, squeezing into the scarcely adequate back seats. With the gun cradled in his arm so that the snout pointed in their general direction over his shoulder, Orelli settled himself in the seat next to the pilot and closed the door.

The helicopter took the air again, banked and began to fly back in the direction from which it had come. Faustaff, grateful for his reprieve, though expecting a worse fate,

perhaps, from Orelli, who hated him, looked down at the grim mountains that stretched, range upon range, in all directions.

Quite soon he recognised the valley, and Orelli's camp came into sight, the collection of grey dome-tents hard to make out against the scrub of the valley floor.

The helicopter descended a short distance from the camp and landed with a bump. Orelli climbed out and signalled for Steifflomeis and Faustaff to go ahead of him. They got down on to the ground and began to walk towards the camp, Orelli humming faintly what sounded like a Gregorian chant. He seemed in good spirits.

At Orelli's signal they bent their heads and entered his tent. It was made of material that permitted them to see outside without being visible themselves. There was a machine in the centre of the tent and Faustaff recognised it. He had also seen, once before, the two bodies that lay beside it.

"You recognise them?" Orelli asked casually, going to a large metal chest in one corner of the tent and producing a bottle and glasses. "A drink? Wine only, I'm afraid."

"Thank you," said Faustaff, but Steifflomeis shook his head.

Orelli handed Faustaff a glass filled to the brim with red wine. "St. Emilion, 1953—from Earth Two," he said. "I think you'll find it pleasant."

Faustaff tasted it and nodded.

"Do you recognise them?" Orelli repeated.

"The bodies—they're D-squaders, aren't they?" Faustaff said. "I saw some like them on E-15. And the machine looks like a disrupter. I suppose you have plans to use it in some way, Orelli."

"None as yet, but doubtless I shall have. The D-squaders are not dead, you know. They have been at a constant temperature ever since we found them. We must have passed through that camp of theirs on E-15 shortly before you. The body temperature is low, but not that low. Yet they aren't breathing. Suspended animation?"

"That's nonsense," said Faustaff, finishing his drink. "All the experiments tried in that direction have proved disastrous. Remember the experiments at Malmo in '91 on E-1? Remember the scandal?"

"I would not remember, of course," Orelli pointed out, "since I am not a native of E-1. But I read about it. However, this seems to be suspended animation. They live, and yet they are dead. All our attempts to wake them have been useless. I was hoping that you, professor, might help."

"How can I help?"

"Perhaps you will know when you have inspected the pair."

As they talked, Steiffomeis had bent down and was examining one of the prone D-squaders. The man was of medium height and seemed, through his black overalls, to be a good physical specimen. The thing that was remarkable was that the two prone figures strongly resembled one another, both in features and in size. They had close-cropped, light brown hair, square faces and pale skins that were unblemished but had an unhealthy texture, particularly about the upper face.

Steiffomeis pushed back the man's eyelid and Faustaff had an unpleasant shock as a glazed blue eye appeared to stare straight at him. It seemed for a second that the man was actually awake, but unable to move. Steiffomeis let the eyelid close again.

He stood up, folding his arms across his chest. "Remarkable," he said. "What do you intend to do with them, Cardinal Orelli?"

"I am undecided. My interest is at present scientific—I wish to learn more about them. They are the first D-squaders we have ever managed to capture, eh, professor?"

Faustaff nodded. He felt strongly that the D-squaders should have fallen into any hands other than Orelli's. He did not dare consider the uses which Orelli's twisted mind could think of for the disrupter alone. With it he would be able to blackmail whole worlds. Faustaff resolved to destroy the disrupter as soon as he received a reasonable opportunity.

Orelli took his empty glass from his hand and returned to the metal chest, pouring fresh drinks. Faustaff accepted the second glass of wine automatically, although he had not eaten for a long time. Normally he could hold a lot of liquor, but already the wine had gone slightly to his head.

"I think we should return to my headquarters on E-4," Orelli said. "There are better facilities for the necessary

research. I hope you will accept my invitation, professor, and help me in this matter."

"I assume you will kill me if I refuse," Faustaff replied tiredly.

"I would certainly not take it kindly," smiled Orelli, sharklike.

Faustaff said nothing to this. He decided that it was in his interest to return to E-4 with Orelli since once there he would stand a much better chance of contacting his own organisation once he had escaped.

"And what brought you to this barren world, Mr. Steifflo-meis?" Orelli asked, with apparent heartiness.

"I had word that Professor Faustaff was here. I wanted to talk to him."

"To talk? It appeared to me that you and the professor were engaged in some sort of scuffle as I came on the scene. You are friends? I should have thought not."

"The argument was temporarily settled by your appearance, cardinal," said Steifflo-meis, his eyes matching Orelli's for cynical guile. "We were discussing certain philosophical matters."

"Philosophy? Of what kind? I myself have an interest in metaphysics. Not surprising, I suppose, considering my old calling."

"Oh, we talked of the relative merits of living or dying," Steifflo-meis said lightly.

"Interesting. I did not know you were philosophically inclined, Professor Faustaff," Orelli murmured to the professor. Faustaff shrugged and moved closer to the prone D-squaders until his back was to Steifflo-meis and Orelli.

He bent and touched the face of one of the D-squaders. It was faintly warm, like plastic at room-temperature. It didn't feel like a human skin at all.

He had become bored with Orelli's and Steifflo-meis's silly duelling. They evidently enjoyed it sufficiently to carry on with it for some time until Orelli theatrically interrupted Steifflo-meis in the middle of a statement and apologised that time was running short and he must make preparations for a tunnel to be made through subspace to his headquarters on E-4. As he left the tent a guard entered, covering the two men with his gun. Steifflo-meis darted Faustaff a sardonic

look but Faustaff didn't feel like taking Orelli's place in the game. Although the guard would not let him approach too closely to the disrupter he contented himself with studying it from where he was until Orelli returned to say that a tunnel was ready.

e i g h t

The D-squaders

EVEN MORE TIRED and very hungry, Faustaff stepped through the tunnel to find himself in what appeared to be the vault of a church, judging by the Gothic style of the stonework. The stone looked old but freshly cleaned. The air was cold and a trifle damp. Various stacks of the salvagers' field equipment lay around and the room was lighted by a malfunctioning neon tube. Orelli and Steifflomeis had already arrived and were murmuring to one another. They stopped as Faustaff arrived.

The D-squaders and the disrupter arrived soon after Faustaff, the prone D-squaders carried by Orelli's men. Orelli went ahead of them, opening a door at the far end of the vault and leading the way up worn, stone stairs into the magnificent interior of a large church, alive with sunshine pouring through stained glass. The only obvious change in the interior was the absence of pews. This gave the whole church an impression of being even larger than it was. It was a place that Faustaff could see easily compared to the finest Gothic cathedrals of Britain or France, an inspiring tribute to the creativeness of mankind. The church furniture remained, with a central altar and pulpit, an organ, and small chapels to left and right, indicating that the church had probably been Catholic. The wine was still affecting Faustaff slightly and he let his eyes travel up the columns, carved with fourteenth-century saints, animals and plants, until he was looking directly up at the high, vaulted roof, crossed by a series of intricate stone cobwebs, just visible in the cool gloom.

When he looked down again he saw Steifflomeis staring at him, a light smile on his lips.

Drunk with the beauty of the church Faustaff waved his hand around at it. "These are the works of those you

would have destroyed, Steifflomeis," he said, somewhat grandiosely.

Steifflomeis shrugged. "I have seen finer work elsewhere. This is pitifully limited architecture by my standards, professor—clumsy. Wood, stone, steel or glass, it doesn't matter what materials you use, it is always clumsy."

"This doesn't inspire you, then?" Faustaff asked rather incredulously.

Steifflomeis laughed. "No. You are naïve, professor,"

Unable to describe the emotions which the church raised in him, Faustaff felt at a loss, wondering to what heights of feeling the architecture with which Steifflomeis was familiar would raise him if he ever had the chance to experience it.

"Where is this architecture of yours?" he asked.

"In no place that you are familiar with, professor." Steifflomeis continued to be evasive and Faustaff once again wondered if he could have any connection with the D-squads.

Orelli had been supervising his men. Now he approached them. "What do you think of my headquarters?"

"Very impressive," said Faustaff for want of something better to say. "Is there more?"

"A monastery is attached to the cathedral. Those who live there follow somewhat different disciplines to those followed by the earlier occupants. Shall we go there now? I have a laboratory being prepared."

"I should like to eat before I do anything," Faustaff said. "I hope your cuisine is as excellent as your surroundings."

"If anything it is better," said Orelli. "Of course we shall eat first."

Later the three of them sat in a large room that had once been the abbott's private study. The alcoves were still lined with books, primarily religious works of various kinds; there were reproductions framed on the walls. Most of them showed various versions of *The Temptation of St. Anthony*—Bosch, Brueghel, Grunewald, Schöngauer, Huys, Ernst and Dali were represented, as well as some others whom Faustaff did not recognise.

The food was almost as good as Orelli had boasted and the wine was excellent, from the monastery's cellar.

Faustaff pointed at the reproductions. "Your taste, Orelli, or your predecessor's?"

"His and mine, professor. That is why I left them there. His interest was perhaps a little more obsessive than mine. He went mad in the end, I hear. Some thought it possession, others—" he smiled his cruel smile and raised his glass somewhat mockingly to the Bosch—"delirium tremens."

"And what caused the monastery to become deserted—why isn't the cathedral used now?" Faustaff asked.

"Perhaps it will be obvious if I tell you our geographical location on E-4, professor. We are in the area once occupied by North Western Europe. More precisely we are near where the town of Le Havre once stood, although there is no sign of the town and none of the sea, either, for that matter. Do you remember the U.M.S. that you managed to control in this area, professor?"

Faustaff was puzzled. He had not yet seen outside the monastery walls and where, logically, windows should look beyond the cathedral or the monastery, they were heavily curtained. He had assumed he was in some rural town. Now he got up and went to the window, pulling back the heavy velvet curtain. It was dark, but the gleam of ice was unmistakable. Beneath the moon, and stretching to the horizon, was a vast plain of ice. Faustaff knew that it extended through Scandinavia, parts of Russia, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and parts of Austria and Hungary, covering, in the other direction, half of Britain as far as Hull.

"But there is ice for hundreds of miles about," he said, turning back to where Orelli sat, sipping his wine and smiling still. "How on earth can this place have got here?"

"It was here already. It has been my headquarters since I discovered it three years ago. Somehow it escaped the U.M.S. and survived. The monks fled before the U.M.S. developed into anything really spectacular. I found it later."

"But I've never heard of anything quite like this," Faustaff said. "A cathedral and a monastery in the middle of a waste of ice. How did it survive?"

Orelli raised his eyes to the ceiling and smirked. "Divine influence, perhaps?"

"A freak, I suppose," Faustaff said sitting down again. "I've seen similar things—but nothing so spectacular."

"It took my fancy," Orelli said. "It is remote, roomy and, since I installed some heating, quite comfortable. It suits me."

Next morning, in Orelli's makeshift laboratory, Faustaff looked at the two now naked D-squaders lying on a bench in front of him. He had decided that either Orelli was playing with him, or else Orelli believed his knowledge to extend to biology. There was very little he could do except what he was doing now, having electroencephalographic tests made on the subjects. It was not expedient to disabuse Orelli altogether, for he was well aware that, if there was no likelihood of his coming up with something, Orelli would probably kill him.

The skins still had the quality of slightly warm plastic. There was no apparent breathing, the limbs were limp and the eyes glazed. When the assistants had placed the electrodes on the heads of the two subjects he went over to the electroencephalograph and studied the charts that began to rustle from the machine. They indicated only a single wave—a constant wave, as if the brain were alive but totally dormant. The test only proved what was already obvious.

Faustaff took a hypodermic and injected a stimulant into the first D-squader. Into the second he injected a depressant.

The electroencephalographic charts were exactly the same as the previous ones.

Faustaff was forced to agree with Orelli's suggestion that the men were in a total state of suspended animation.

The assistants Orelli had assigned to him were expressionless men with as little apparent character as the subjects they were studying. He turned to one of them and asked him to set up the X-ray machine.

The machine was wheeled forward and took a series of X-ray plates of both men. The assistant handed the plates to Faustaff.

A couple of quick glances at the plates were sufficient to show that, though the men on the table seemed to be ordinary human beings, they were not. Their organs were simplified, as was their bone structure.

Faustaff put the plates beside the D-squaders and sat down. The implications of the discovery swam through his mind but he felt unable to concentrate on any one of them.

These creatures could have come from outer space, they could be a race produced on one of the parallel earths.

Faustaff clung to this last thought. The D-squaders did not function according to any of the normal laws applied to animals. Perhaps they *were* artificial; robots of some kind. Yet the science needed to create such robots would be far more advanced than Earth One's.

Who had created them? Where did they come from? The extra data had only succeeded in making everything more confusing than it had been.

Faustaff lit a cigarette and made himself relax, wondering whether to mention any of this to Orelli. He would discover the truth for himself soon enough anyway.

He got up and asked for surgical instruments. With the aid of the X-ray plates he would be able to carry out some simple surgery on the D-squaders without endangering them. He cut through to the wrist of one of them. No blood flowed from the cut. He took a bone sample and a sample of the flesh and the skin. He tried to reseal the incision with the normal agents, but they refused to take. Finally he had to cover the incision with ordinary tape.

He took his samples to a microscope, hoping he had enough basic biology to be able to recognise any differences they might have to normal skin, bone and flesh.

The microscope revealed some very essential differences which didn't require any specialised knowledge for him to recognise. The normal cell structure was apparently totally absent. The bone seemed composed of a metal alloy and the flesh of a dead, cellular material that resembled foam plastic, although the cells were much more numerous than on any plastic he was used to.

The only conclusion he could draw from this evidence was that the D-squaders were not living creatures in the true sense and that they were, in fact, robots—artificially created men.

The appearance of the materials that had gone into their construction was not familiar to Faustaff. The alloy and the plastic again indicated a superior technology to his own.

He began to feel perturbed for it was certain that the creatures had not been manufactured on any Earth that he

knew. Yet they were capable of travelling through subspace and had obviously been designed for the sole purpose of manipulating the disrupters. That indicated the only strong possibility—that the D-squaders were the creation of some race operating outside subspace and probably from a base in normal space, beyond the solar system. The attack, then, probably did not come from a human source, as Faustaff had always believed. This was the reason for his uneasiness. Would it be possible to think out the motives of an unhuman race? It was unlikely. And without an indication of why they were trying to destroy the worlds of subspace, it seemed impossible to invent ways of stopping them for any real length of time.

He came to a decision then. He must destroy the disrupter, at least. It lay in one corner of the laboratory, ready for investigation.

To destroy it would at least stop Orelli using it, or threatening to use it in some attempt at blackmail. That would get rid of one of the factors bothering him.

He walked towards it.

At that moment he felt a tingling sensation on his wrist and the room seemed to fade. He felt sick and his head began to ache. He found it impossible to draw air into his lungs. He recognised the sensations.

He was being invoked.

n i n e

E-Zero

DOCTOR MAY LOOKED relieved. He stood wiping his glasses in the bare concrete room which Faustaff recognised as being in Earth One's headquarters at Haifa.

Faustaff waited for his head to clear before advancing towards May.

"We never thought we'd get you back," said May. "We've been trying for the last day, ever since you disappeared in the break-up of E-15. I heard our adjustor was destroyed."

"I'm sorry," said Faustaff.

May shrugged and replaced his glasses. His pudgy face

looked unusually haggard. "That's nothing compared to what's going on. I've got some news for you."

"And I for you." Faustaff reflected that May's invocation had come at exactly the wrong time. But it was no use mentioning it. At least he was back at his own base and could perhaps conceive a plan that would permanently put Orelli out of action.

May walked towards the door. Technicians were disconnecting the big invoker which had been used to pull Faustaff through subspace once they had picked up the signal from the invocation disc on his wrist.

Faustaff followed May out into the corridor and May led the way to the lift. On the fourth floor of the building they came to May's office.

Several other men were waiting there. Faustaff recognised some of them as heads of Central Headquarters departments and others he knew as communications specialists.

"Have you something to tell us before we begin?" May said, picking up a phone after introductions and greetings. He ordered coffee and replaced the phone.

"It won't take me long to fill you in," Faustaff said. He settled himself into a chair. He told them of Steifflomeis's attempt to kill him and how it was plain that Steifflomeis knew much more about the worlds of subspace than he had admitted, that he had referred to his 'powerful principals' and indicated that the Faustaff organisation couldn't stand a big attack—and neither could the worlds of subspace. He then went on to describe Orelli's 'specimens' and what he had discovered about them.

The reaction to this wasn't as startled as he had expected. May simply nodded, his lips set tightly.

"This fits in with our discovery, professor," he said. "We have just contacted a new alternate Earth. Or I should say part of one. It is at this moment being formed."

"An alternate actually being created!" Faustaff was excited now. "Can't we get there—see how it happens. It could tell us a lot . . ."

"We've tried to get through to E-Zero, as we've called it, but every attempt seems to have been blocked. This Earth isn't being created naturally—there is an intelligence behind it."

Faustaff took this easily. The logical assumption now could only be that some non-human force was at work not only, as was now obvious, destroying worlds, but creating them as well. Somewhere the D-squaders, Steifflomeis and Maggy White fitted in—and could probably tell them a lot. All the events of recent days showed that the situation was, from their point of view, worsening. And the odds that faced them were bigger than they had guessed.

Faustaff helped himself to a cup of coffee from the tray that had been brought in.

Doctor May seemed impatient. "What can we do, professor? We are unprepared for the attack, we are certainly ill-equipped to deal with even another big D-squad offensive of the kind you have just experienced on E-15. It is obvious that up to now these forces have been playing with us."

Faustaff nodded and sipped his coffee. "Our first objective must be Orelli's headquarters," he said. He felt sick as he made his next statement. "It must be destroyed—and everything that is in it."

"Destroyed?" May was well acquainted with Faustaff's obsessive views about the sanctity of life.

"There is nothing else we can do. I never thought—I hoped I would never find myself in a situation like this, but we shall just have to follow the line of killing a few for the sake of the many." Even as Faustaff spoke he heard his own voice of a short time ago talking about the dangers of justifying the taking of life under any conditions.

Doctor May seemed almost satisfied. "You say he's on E-4. The area would be covered by grid sections 38 and 62 roughly. Do you want to lead the expedition? We shall have to send copters and bombs, I suppose."

Faustaff shook his head. "No, I won't go with it. Give them a five-minute warning, though. Give them that, at least. That won't allow them time to set up a tunneler and escape with the disruptor. I told you about the place—it'll be easy to spot, a cathedral."

After Doctor May had gone off to arrange the expedition Faustaff sat studying the information that had so far been gathered about Earth Zero. There was very little. Apparently the discovery had been almost accidental. When E-15 was

breaking up and it was becoming increasingly difficult to get tunnels between the worlds the technicians on E-1 found data being recorded on their instruments that was unusual. A check had led to contact with E-0. They had sent out probes and had found a planet that was still unstable, at that stage only a sphere consisting of elements still in a state of mutation. Soon after this their probes had been blocked and they had been unable to get anything but faint indications of the existence of the new body. All they really knew was that it was there, but they did not know how it had come there or who was responsible for it. Faustaff wanted to know *why* above everything else.

It was perhaps an unscientific attitude, he reflected as he got up. He had never before had quite such a strong sense of being unable to control a situation he found himself in. There was so little he could do at this stage. Philosophically he decided to give up and go to his house in the outer suburbs of Haifa, get a full night's sleep—the first he would have had in some time—hoping to have some ideas in the morning.

He left the building and walked out into the midday sunshine of the busy modern city. He flagged down a taxi and gave his address. Wearily he listened to the taxi driver talking about the 'crisis' which seemed to have developed in his absence. He couldn't quite follow the details and made no serious attempt to, but it appeared that the East and West were having one of their periodic wrangles, this time over some South East Asian country and Yugoslavia. Since Tito's death Yugoslavia had been considered fair game for both blocs and although the Yugoslavs had steadfastly resisted any attempts at colonialism on the part of both East and West their situation was getting weaker. A revolution—from what appeared to be an essentially small group of fundamental Communists—had given the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. an excuse for sending in peace-keeping forces. From what the taxi driver was saying there had already been open fighting between the Russians and the Americans and the Russian and American ambassadors had just withdrawn from the respective countries. Faustaff, used to such periodic events, was not able to feel the same interest in the situation as the taxi-driver. In his opinion the man was unnecessarily excited.

The thing would die down eventually. It always had. Faustaff had more important things on his mind.

The taxi drew up outside his house, a small bungalow with a garden full of orange blossom. He paid the driver and walked up the concrete path to the front door. He felt in his pockets for the key, but as usual he had lost it. He reached up to the ledge over the door and found the spare key, unlocked the door, replaced the key and went in. The house was cool and tidy. He rarely used most of the rooms. He walked into his bedroom which was in the same state as he'd left it several weeks before. Clothes lay everywhere, on the floor and the unmade bed. He went to the window and opened it. He picked a towel off the television set that faced the foot of his bed and went into the bathroom. He began to shower.

When he returned, naked, to his room, there was a girl sitting on the bed. Her perfect legs were crossed and her perfect hands lay folded in her lap. It was Maggy White, whom Faustaff had encountered at the same time as he had first met Steifflomeis in the desert motel on E-3.

"Hello, professor," she said coolly. "Do you never wear clothes, then?"

Faustaff remembered that the first time he'd met her he had been naked. He grinned and in doing so felt immediately his old relaxed self.

"As rarely as possible," he smiled. "Have you come to try to do me in, too?"

Her humourless smile disturbed him. He wondered if making love to her would produce any real emotion. Her effect on him was far deeper than Steifflomeis's. She didn't reply.

"Your friend Steifflomeis had a bash at it," he said. "Or have you been in touch with him since then?"

"What makes you think Steifflomeis is my friend?"

"You certainly travel together."

"That doesn't make us friends."

"I suppose not."

Faustaff paused and then said: "What's the latest news concerning the simulations." The last word was one Steifflomeis had used. He hoped that he might trick her into giving him more information if he sounded knowledgeable.

"Nothing fresh," she said.

Once again Faustaff wondered how a woman so well-endowed on the surface could appear to be so totally sexless.

"Why are you here?" he asked, going to the wardrobe and getting fresh clothes out. He pulled on a pair of jeans, hauling the belt around his huge stomach. He was putting on weight, he thought, the belt could hardly be pulled to the first notch.

"A social visit," she said.

"That's ridiculous. I see that a new Earth is taking shape. Why?"

"Who can explain the secrets of the universe better than yourself, professor, a scientist?"

"You."

"I know nothing of science."

Out of curiosity Faustaff sat on the bed beside her and stroked her knee. Once again she smiled coolly and her eyes became hooded. She lay back on the bed.

Faustaff lay beside her and stroked her stomach. He noticed that her breathing remained constant even when he stroked her breasts through the cloth of her buttoned-up grey suit. He rolled over and stood up.

"Could you be Mark Two?" he asked. "I dissected a D-squader a while ago. They're robots, you know—or androids, I think the term is."

Perhaps he spotted a flash of anger in her eyes. They certainly widened for a moment and then half-closed again.

"Is that what you are? An android?"

"You could find out if you made love to me."

Faustaff smiled and shook his head. "Sweetheart, you're just not my type."

"I thought any young woman was your type, professor."

"So did I till I met you."

Her face remained expressionless.

"What are you here for?" he asked. "You didn't come because you felt randy, that's certain."

"I told you—a social visit."

"Orders from your principals. To do what, I wonder."

"To convince you of the silliness of continuing this game you're playing." She shrugged. "Steifflo-meis was unable to convince you. I might be able to."

"What line are you going to take?"

"A reasonable one. A logical one. Can't you see that you are interfering with something that you will never understand, that you are just a minor irritant to the people who have almost total power over the parallels——"

"The simulations? What do they simulate?"

"You are dull, professor. They simulate Earth, naturally."

"Then which Earth is it that they simulate. This one?"

"You think yours is any different from the others? They are all simulations. Yours was, until recently, simply the last of many. Do you know how many simulations there have been?"

"I've known of sixteen."

"More than a thousand."

"So you've destroyed nine hundred and eighty-six altogether. I suppose there were people on all of them. You've murdered millions!" Faustaff could not stop himself from feeling shocked by this revelation.

"They owed their lives to us. They were ours to take."

"I can't accept that."

"Turn on the television. Get the news," she said suddenly.

"What for?"

"Turn it on and see."

He went to the set and switched it on. He selected the English-speaking channel for convenience. Some people were being interviewed. They looked grim and their voices were dull with fatalism.

As Faustaff listened he realised that war must have been declared between the East and the West. The men were not talking about the possible outcome. They were discussing which areas might survive. The general effect was that they didn't expect anywhere to survive.

Faustaff turned to Maggy White who was smiling again. "Is this it? The nuclear war? I didn't expect it—I thought it was impossible."

"Earth One is doomed, professor. It's a fact. While you were worrying about the other simulations your own was nearing destruction. You can't blame anyone else for this, professor. Who caused the death of Earth One——?"

"It must be artificially done. Your people must have——"

"Nonsense. It was built into your society."

"Who built it in?"

"They did, I suppose, but unknowingly. It is not in their interest, I assure you, to have this happen to a planet. They are hoping for a utopia. They are desperately trying to create one."

"Their methods seem crude."

"Perhaps they are—by their standards, but certainly not by yours. You could never comprehend the complicated task they have set themselves."

"Who are they?"

"People. In the long run your ideals and theirs are not so different. Their scheme is vaster, that is all. Human beings must die. It is thought to be unfortunate by many of them. They aren't unsympathetic . . ."

"Not unsympathetic? They destroy worlds casually, they let this happen—this war—when from all you say they could stop it. I can't have much respect for a race that regards life so cheaply."

"They are a desperate race. They are driven to desperate means."

"Haven't they ever—reflected?"

"Of course, many thousands of your years ago, before the situation worsened. There were debates, arguments, factions created. A great deal of time was lost."

"I see. And if they are so powerful and they want me out of the way, why don't they destroy me as they destroy whole planets? Your statements appear to be inconsistent."

"Not so. It is a very complicated matter to eliminate individuals. It must be done by agents, such as myself. Usually it has been found expedient to destroy the whole planet if too many irritating individuals interfered in their plans."

"Are you going to fill me in—tell me everything about these people. If I'm going to die because of a nuclear war, it shouldn't matter."

"I wouldn't run the risk. You have a large share of pure luck, professor. I would suffer if I told you more and you escaped."

"How would they punish you?"

"I'm sorry. I've told you enough." She spoke rapidly, for the first time.

"So I'm to die. Then why did you come here to dissuade me if you knew what was going to happen?"

"As I said, you may not die. You are lucky. Can't you simply accept that you are complicating a situation involving matters that are completely above your head? Can't you accept that there is a greater purpose to all this?"

"I can't accept death as a necessary evil, if that's what you mean—or premature death, anyway."

"Your moralising is naïve—cheap."

"That's what your friend Steifflomeis says. But it isn't to me. I'm a simple man, Miss White."

She shrugged. "You will never understand, will you?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"That's what I mean."

"Why didn't you kill me, anyway?" He turned away and began to put on a shirt. The television continued to drone on, the voices becoming hollower and hollower. "You had the opportunity. I didn't know you were in the house."

"Both Steifflomeis and myself have a fairly free hand in how we handle problems. I was curious about these worlds, particularly about you. I have never been made love to." She got up and came towards him. "I had heard that you were good at it."

"Only when I enjoy it. It seems odd that these people of yours understand little of human psychology from what I've gathered."

"Do you understand the psychology of a frog in any detail?"

"A frog's psychology is a considerably simpler thing than a person's."

"Not to a creature with a much more complex psychology than a person's."

"I'm tired of this, Miss White. I must get back to my headquarters. You can write me off as an irritant from now on. I don't expect my organisation to survive the coming war."

"I expected you to escape to some other simulation. It would give you a respite anyway."

He looked at her curiously. She had sounded almost animated, almost concerned for him.

In a softer tone he said: "Are you suggesting that?"

"If you like."

He frowned, looking into her eyes. For some reason he suddenly felt sympathy for her without knowing why.

"You'd better get going yourself," he said tersely, turning and making for the door.

The streets outside were deserted. This was unusual for the time of day. A bus stopped nearby. He ran to catch it. It would take him close to his headquarters. He was the only person on the bus apart from the driver.

He felt lonely as they drove into Haifa.

t e n

Escape from E-1

FAUSTAFF AND DOCTOR May watched as men and equipment were hurried through the tunnel which had been made to E-3. The expression on May's face was one of hopelessness. The bombs had already started to drop and the last report they had seen had told them that Britain had been totally destroyed, as had half of Europe.

They had given themselves an hour to evacuate everything and everyone they could. Doctor May checked his watch and glanced at Faustaff.

"Time's up, professor."

Faustaff nodded and followed May into the tunnel. It took a great deal to depress him, but to see the organisation he and his father had built up crumbling, forced to abandon its main centre, made him miserable and unable to think clearly.

The trip through the grey tunnel to the familiar gilt and plush dance hall of The Golden Gate which was their main transceiving station on E-3, was easily made. When they arrived, the men just stood around, murmuring to one another and glancing at Faustaff; he knew that he was expected to cheer them up. He forced himself out of his mood and smiled.

"We all need a drink," was the only thing he could think of to say as he walked towards the dusty bar. He leaned across it and reached under, finding bottles and glasses and setting them on the counter. The men moved forward and took the glasses he filled for them.

Faustaff hauled himself up so that he was sitting on the bar.

"We're in a pretty desperate situation," he told them. "The enemy—I've hardly any better idea of them than you have—have for some reason decided to launch an all-out attack on the subspacial worlds. It's plain now that all their previous attacks, using the D-squaders, have hardly been serious. We underestimated the opposition, if you like. Frankly my own opinion is that it won't be long before they succeed in breaking up all the subspacial alternates—that's what they want."

"Then there's nothing we can do," Doctor May said wearily.

"Only one thing occurs to me," Faustaff said. "We know that the enemy considers these worlds as something to be destroyed. But what about E-Zero? This has just been created—either by them or by someone else like them—and I gather they aren't normally willing to destroy a recently created world. Our only chance is in getting a big tunnel through to E-Zero and setting up our headquarters there. From then on we can evacuate people from these worlds to E-Zero."

"But what if E-Zero can't support so many?" a man said.

"It will have to." Faustaff drained his glass. "As far as I can see our only course of action is to concentrate everything on getting a tunnel through to E-Zero."

Doctor May shook his head, staring at the floor.

"I don't see the point," he said. "We're beaten. We're going to die sooner or later with everyone else. Why don't we just give up now?"

Faustaff nodded sympathetically. "I understand—but we've got our responsibilities. We all took those on when we joined the organisation."

"That was before we knew the extent of what we'd let ourselves in for," May said sharply.

"Possibly. But what's the point of being fatalistic at this stage? If we're due to be wiped out, we might at least try the only chance we have."

"And what then?" May looked up. He seemed angry now. "A few more days before the enemy decides to destroy E-Zero? Count me out, professor."

"Very well." Faustaff glanced at the others. "Who feels the same as Doctor May?"

More than half of the men there indicated that they shared May's views. At least half of the remainder seemed undecided.

"Very well," he said again. "It's probably best that we sorted this out now. Everyone who is ready to start work can remain here. The rest can leave. Some of you will be familiar with E-3, perhaps you can look after those who aren't."

When May and the others had left, Faustaff spoke to his chief of Communications on E-3, John Mahon, telling him to call in all operatives from the other subspacial alternates and get them working on an attempt to break through to E-Zero.

Class H agents—those who worked for the organisation without realising what it was—were to be paid off. When Faustaff brought up the subject of Class H, Mahon snapped his fingers. "That reminds me," he said. "You remember I put some Class H men on to checking up on Steiffloimeis and Maggy White?"

It seemed a long time ago. Faustaff nodded. "I suppose nothing came of it."

"The only information we got indicates that they have a tunnel of their own—or at least some method of travelling through the subspacial levels. Two Class H agents followed them out to L.A. to a cottage they evidently use as their base on E-3. They never came out of that cottage, and a check showed that they weren't there. The agents reported finding a lot of electronic equipment they couldn't recognise."

"It fits with what I found out," Faustaff said. He told Mahon about his encounters with the two. "If only we could get them to give us more information we might stand a better chance of getting a concrete solution to this mess."

Mahon agreed. "It might be worth going out to this cottage of theirs, if we could find the time. What do you think?"

Faustaff debated. "I'm not sure. There's every likelihood that they'd have removed their equipment by now anyway."

"Right," said Mahon. "I'll forget about it. We can't spare anyone now to go out and have a look for us."

Faustaff picked up a tin box. It contained the information gathered about E-Zero. He told Mahon that he was going

to his apartment to go through it again and could be contacted there.

He drove his Buick through the sunny streets of Frisco, his enjoyment of the city's atmosphere now somewhat tainted by his mood of unaccustomed grimness.

It was only as he entered his apartment and saw how tidy the place was that he remembered Nancy Hunt. She wasn't there now. He wondered if she had given him up and left, although the indications were that she was only out temporarily.

He went to his desk and settled down to work, the phone beside him. As he studied the data, he phoned ideas through to his team at The Golden Gate.

Nancy came in around midnight.

"Fusty! Where have you been? You look dreadful. What's been happening?"

"A lot. Can you make me some coffee, Nancy?"

"Sure."

The redhead went straight into the kitchen and came out later with coffee and doughnuts. "Want a sandwich, Fusty? There's Danish salami and liver sausage, rye bread and some potato salad."

"Make me a few," he said. "I'd forgotten I was hungry."

"There must be something important up, then," she said, laying the tray down on a table near him and returning to the kitchen.

Faustaff thought there might be a way of creating a new kind of warp in subspace, something they'd thought of in the past but dismissed since their methods had then been adequate. He phoned through to The Golden Gate and spoke to Mahon about it, telling him to find all the notes that had been made at the time. He realised that it was going to be several days before anything could be worked out properly and more time would be wasted in adapting the tunnelers, but his team was good, if depleted, and if anything could be done, they'd do it.

His brain was beginning to get fuzzy and he realised he would have to relax for a while before continuing. When Nancy came back with the sandwiches he went and sat next to her on the couch, kissed her and ate his way through the food. He sat back feeling better.

"What have you been doing, Nancy?"

"Hanging around, waiting for you. I went to see a movie today."

"What was it about?"

"Cowboys. What have *you* been doing, Fusty? I was worried."

"Travelling," he said. "Urgent business, you know."

"You could have phoned."

"Not from where I was."

"Well, let's go to bed now and make up for all that time wasted."

He felt even more miserable. "I can't," he said. "I've got to go on with what I'm doing. I'm sorry, Nancy."

"What's all this about, Fusty?" She stroked his arm sympathetically. "You're really upset, aren't you? It's **not** just a business problem."

"Yes, I'm upset. D'you want to hear the whole story?" He realised that he needed Nancy's comforting. There would be no harm now in telling her the whole story. Briefly he outlined the situation.

When he'd finished she looked incredulous. "I believe you," she said. "But I can't—can't take it all in. So we're all going to die, is that it?"

"Unless I can do something about it. Even then, most of us will be destroyed." The phone began to ring. He picked it up. It was Mahon. "Hello, Mahon. What is it?"

"We're checking the new warp theory. It seems to be getting somewhere, but that wasn't why I called. Just thought I'd better tell you that E-14 and E-13 are in Total Break-up. You were right. The enemy's getting busy. What can we do?"

Faustaff sighed. "Assign emergency teams to evacuate as many as possible from the deeper worlds. Evidently the enemy are working systematically. We'll just have to hope we can consolidate on here and E-2 and make a fight of it. Better order all the adjusters brought to E-2 and E-3. We'll spread them out. There might be a chance. We'll have to fight."

"There was one other thing," Mahon said. "I think May organised an expedition to E-4 before you left E-1."

"That's right. They were going to bomb Orelli's headquarters. Were they successful?"

"They couldn't find it. They came back."

"But they must have found it—they couldn't have missed it."

"The only thing they found was a crater in the ice. It could just be that the whole cathedral had vanished—been shifted. You said Steifflo-meis was with them, they had two D-squaders and a disrupter. It could easily mean that Steifflo-meis is helping Orelli. He probably knows the potentialities of the disrupter. Or maybe something went wrong and the cathedral was destroyed in some way. The only thing that's certain is that they've vanished."

"I don't think they've destroyed themselves," Faustaff replied. "I think we'll have to watch for them in the near future. The combination of Orelli and Steifflo-meis is a bad one for us."

"I won't forget. And I'll get the evacuation scheme moving. Any more details for us?"

Faustaff felt guilty. He'd spent too much time talking to Nancy.

"I'll let you know," he said.

"Okay." Mahon put the receiver down.

"Got to get on with it now, Nancy," he said. He told her what he'd heard from Mahon.

He settled himself at his desk and began work again, making notes and equations on the pad beside him. Tomorrow he would have to go back to the centre and use the computers himself.

As he worked, Nancy kept him supplied with coffee and snacks. By eight the next morning he began to feel he was getting somewhere. He assembled his notes, put them in a folder, and was about to say goodbye to Nancy when she said:

"Mind if I come along, Fusty. I wouldn't like to have to hang around here for you again."

"Okay," he said. "Let's go."

As they arrived at The Golden Gate they found that the place had a visitor. It was Gordon Ogg. He came forward with John Mahon, through a confusion of technicians and machinery that now filled the dance hall.

"Mr. Ogg wants to see you, professor," Mahon said. "He's got some news about Orelli, I think."

"We'd better go upstairs, Gordon," Faustaff said. They climbed the staircase to the second floor and entered a small, cluttered room where old furniture had been piled. "This'll have to do," Faustaff said as they sat down where they could. Nancy was still with them. Faustaff didn't feel like asking her to wait anywhere else.

"I must apologise for leaving you behind on E-11." Ogg stroked his long moustache, looking even more mournful than usual. "But then I had no conception of what was going on. You know it all, I suppose—the destruction of E-14 and E-13, the war that is destroying E-1?"

"Yes." Faustaff nodded.

"And you know that Orelli has leagued himself with this chap with a funny name——?"

"Steiffloimeis. I suspected it. Though I'm still unable to think what mutual interest they have. It is in yours and Orelli's for things to remain basically unchanged."

"As salvagers, yes. But Orelli has other schemes. That's why I came to see you. He contacted me this morning, at my base on E-2."

"So he is alive. I thought so."

"This other chap—Steiffloimeis—was with him. They wanted my help. From what I can gather Steiffloimeis was working for another group, but he's turned traitor. That was a little obscure. I couldn't quite make out who the other group were. There's a new parallel been formed, I gather. . . ."

"E-Zero, that's right. Did they tell you anything about it?"

"Nothing much. Steiffloimeis said something about its not having been 'activated' yet, whatever that means. Anyway they have plans for going there and setting up their own government, something like that. Orelli was cautious, he didn't tell me much. He concentrated mainly on telling me that all the other worlds are due to break up soon and nothing will be able to stop this happening, that I might just as well throw in my lot with him and Steiffloimeis since I had everything to lose and something to gain. I told him that I wasn't interested."

"Why did you do that?"

"Call it a psychological quirk. As you know, professor,

I have never felt any malice towards you and have always been careful never to attack you or any of your men by using violence. I preferred to leave you and work on my own—that's part of the same psychological quirk. But now it looks as if the crunch is coming, I wondered if I could help."

Faustaff was touched by Ogg's statement. "I am sure you could. Just the act of offering has helped me, Gordon. I suppose you have no idea how Orelli and Steiffromeis intend to get through to E-Zero?"

"Not really. They did refer to E-3 at one point, I think they might have had some equipment here. They certainly boasted of a refined tunneler—Steiffromeis seemed to link it with a disrupter that Orelli had captured. They can shift much bigger masses through subspace, I gathered."

"So that's what happened to the cathedral. But where is it now?"

"The cathedral?"

Faustaff explained. Ogg said he knew nothing of this.

"I have the feeling," Faustaff said, "that the shifting of the cathedral has no real significance. It would have been done simply to exhibit the power of the new tunneler. But it is difficult to see why Steiffromeis has reneged on his own people. I'd better fill you in on this." He repeated all he knew about Steiffromeis and Maggy White.

Ogg took all the information expressionlessly. "An alien race manipulating human beings from somewhere beyond Earth. It sounds too fantastic, professor. Yet I'm convinced."

"I think I've been foolish," Faustaff said. "You say they mentioned a base on E-3. We know about it. There might be a chance of finding something after all. Do you want to come and see, Gordon?"

"If you'd like me along."

"I would. Come on."

The three of them left the room. Faustaff enquired about air transport, but there was none available. He did not dare wait on the off-chance of a copter coming through and he was not sure enough of himself to requisition one being used for evacuation purposes. He got into his Buick and they drove out of San Francisco, heading for Los Angeles.

They looked a strange trio, Faustaff driving; his huge body squeezed into the inadequate seat of the car, Nancy

and Ogg in the back seats. Ogg had insisted on bringing the antiquated machine gun he always carried. His tall, thin body was held erect, the gun cradled in his arm. He looked like a Victorian nobleman on safari, his eyes staring straight ahead down the long road that stretched into the Great American Desert.

eleven

The Way Through

THEY FOUND THE house that had been marked for them on their map by Mahon before they left.

It lay in a quiet Beverley Hills cul-de-sac about fifty yards from the road. A well-kept lawn lay in front and a gravel drive led to the house. They drove up it. Faustaff was too tired to bother about secrecy. They got out of the car and a couple of heaves of Faustaff's body broke the door open. They moved into the hall. It was wide and an open staircase led up from it.

"Mahon said they'd found the equipment in the back room," Faustaff said, leading the way there. He opened the door. Orelli stood there. He was alone, but his rifle was pointing straight at Faustaff's head. His thin lips smiled.

"Professor Faustaff. We'd missed you."

"Forget the villainous dialogue, Orelli." Faustaff skipped suddenly to one side and rushed at the ex-cardinal who pulled the trigger. A beam went high and pierced the outer wall. Faustaff began to grapple the gun from Orelli who was now snarling.

Orelli plainly hadn't expected such sudden action from Faustaff who was normally loathe to indulge in any sort of violence.

Ogg stepped in behind him while Nancy hovered in the doorway. He pushed the muzzle of his machine gun into Orelli's back and said softly: "I shall have to kill you unless you are sensible, Orelli. Drop your rifle."

"Turncoat!" Orelli said as he dropped the gun. He seemed offended and surprised by Ogg's allying himself with Faustaff. "Why have you sided with this fool?"

Ogg didn't bother to reply. He tugged the laser rifle's cord from the power pack on Orelli's back and threw the gun across the room.

"Where's Steifflomeis and the rest of your men, Orelli?" Faustaff asked. "We're impatient—we want to know a lot quickly. We're ready to kill you unless you tell us."

"Steifflomeis and my men are on the new planet."

"E-Zero? How did you get through when we couldn't?"

"Steifflomeis has far greater resources than yours, professor. You were stupid to offend him. A man with his knowledge is worth cultivating."

"I wasn't interested in cultivating him. I was more interested in stopping him from killing me, if you remember."

Orelli turned to Ogg. "And you, Gordon, taking sides against me, a fellow salvager. I am disappointed."

"We have nothing in common, Orelli. Answer the professor's questions."

Just then Nancy shouted and pointed. Turning, Faustaff saw that the air behind him seemed to glow and the wall beyond became hazy. A tunnel was being formed. Steifflomeis must be coming through.

He picked up the useless laser rifle and stood watching the tunnel as it shimmered and took shape. It was of a glowing reddish colour, unlike the dull grey of the tunnels he was used to. Out of it stepped Steifflomeis, he was unarmed. He smiled, apparently unperturbed, when he saw what had happened.

"What are you trying to do, professor?" Behind him the tunnel began to fade.

"We're after information primarily, Herr Steifflomeis," Faustaff answered, feeling more confident now that it was plain Steifflomeis had no more men with him. "Are you going to give it to us here, or must we take you back to our headquarters?"

"What sort of information, Professor Faustaff?"

"Firstly we want to know how you can get through to E-Zero when we can't."

"Better machines, professor."

"Who made the machines?"

"My erstwhile principals. I could not tell you how to build one, only how to work one."

"Well, you can show us."

"If you wish." Steifflo-meis shrugged and went to a machine that was evidently the main console for the rest of the devices in the room. "It is a simple matter of tapping out a set of co-ordinates and setting a switch."

Faustaff decided that Steifflo-meis was probably telling the truth and he didn't know how the advanced tunneler worked. He would have to get a team down here immediately and have them check it over.

"Can you keep them covered, Gordon?" he said. "I'll phone my headquarters and get some people here as soon as possible."

Ogg nodded and Faustaff went into the hall where he'd seen the phone.

He got through to the operator and gave her the number he wanted. The phone rang for some time before someone answered. He asked for Mahon.

At length Mahon came on the line and Faustaff told him what had happened. Mahon promised to send a team up by copter right away.

Faustaff was just going back into the room when he heard footsteps on the path outside. He went to the door and there was Maggy White.

"Professor Faustaff," she nodded, as seemingly unsurprised by his presence as Steifflo-meis had been. Faustaff began to think that all his recent actions had been anticipated.

"Were you expecting me to be here?" he asked.

"No. Is Steifflo-meis here?"

"He is."

"Where?"

"In the back room. You'd better join him."

She went ahead of Faustaff, looked at Nancy curiously and then stepped into the room.

"We've got them all now," Faustaff said, feeling much better. "We'll wait for the team to arrive and then we can get down to business. I suppose." He turned to Steifflo-meis "you or Miss White wouldn't like to tell us the whole story before they come."

"I might," Steifflo-meis said, "particularly since it would now be best if I convinced you to throw in your lot with Cardinal Orelli and myself."

Faustaff glanced at Maggy White. "Do you feel the same as Steifflomeis? Are you prepared to tell me more?"

She shook her head. "And I shouldn't believe too much of what he tells you, either, professor."

Steifflomeis glanced at his wristwatch.

"It doesn't matter now," he said, almost cheerfully. "We appear to be on our way."

Suddenly it seemed that the whole house was lifted by a whirlwind and Faustaff thought briefly that Orelli had rightly called him a fool. He should have realised that what could be done with a gigantic cathedral could also be done with a small house.

The sensation of movement was brief, but the scene through the window was very different. Amorphous, it gave the impression of an unfinished painted stage set. Trees and hedges were there, the sky, sunlight, but none of them seemed real.

"Well, you wanted to get here, professor," smiled Steifflomeis, "and here we are. I think you called it E-Zero."

Concluded next month.

NEXT MONTH

A SPECIAL NEW YEAR ISSUE

Next month's issue will be a special one, with an impressive range of stories by Roger Zelazny, David Masson, Charles Platt and E. C. Tubb, also a special feature by John Brunner and one of the best poems by one of our best contemporary poets, Peter Redgrove, *The Case*. James Colvin's *Wrecks of Time* reaches its bizarre and magical conclusion. We think you'll find it an exciting issue on many levels. That's issue 158, out at the end of December. We're sure you'll more than like it.

LANGDON JONES

TRANSIENT

CONSCIOUSNESS HAS FADED.

I exist in a world of darkness; all I can hear is a loud buzzing. It is increasing in volume, forcing out everything else. My life is over; I am a living corpse. But a corpse is not necessarily what it seems. Signs of brain activity have been observed in bodies for some considerable time after death. Even a body can't be left in peace, without *them* coming like spiders and trapping it in a web of encephalograph wires. They believe that this activity could be taking place in the memory centres. In other words, these dead brains could be remembering . . . After death comes memory, fading out to nothing.

And in these last few seconds, that is what I'm doing. Remembering . . .

After the confusion which paralysed my mind for at least half an hour, the first thing I noticed as I regained consciousness was the ceiling. It was white and sterile, and it meant far more to me now than it ever could before. White—hospital—sickness—security—hurting—the whiteness of mothers' milk—the whiteness of dead flesh—the white flash of sexual pain—the shroud—the essential paradox of life summed up in one pure colour.

There were memories, of course, bland, light-and-dark memories of affection and hatred, but they were all far away from me now. I remembered what had been done to me. My brain still swam in a sea of facts that had been impressed, electronically on to it, in the same way that one may impress a complicated pattern on a piece of heat-soft lead. My tongue

found itself twisting naturally into the positions that would be required to form the words of their language.

I turned my head on the pillow and regarded the large and grotesque body of a nurse as she tucked in the bedclothes. Some sense told her that I was watching her, and she looked up, meeting my gaze. She jumped with shock, then recovered, and quickly moved to a telephone on the table by my bed.

"He's woken up, Doctor Grant," she said.

I decided to try out my new knowledge of their language.

"So it appears that your little experiment has worked perfectly."

The voice was far from musical, but the resultant sound was quite intelligible. However, I could see that my remark had shocked her. She had probably been prepared for it, intellectually, but actually to witness it must have been something of a shock.

"Er—yes; it has." She was obviously embarrassed. I did not wish to make her any more uncomfortable, and so I feigned a yawn and snuggled down in the bedclothes as if I were still drowsy from the effect of the drugs, although in truth I was wide awake.

I heard the door whisper open, and opened my eyes. Two men were standing by my bed. They were dressed in white coats. Ah, how easy to read are the symbols of life! They regarded me with dispassionate faces, as befitted the role they played.

I sat up in bed and offered my hand.

"How do you do," I said. "I gather that you are the gentlemen who are supervising my—er—case."

They too, seemed rather disconcerted at seeing this, but the moment passed, and the nearer held out his hand.

"Good afternoon. My name is Grant; this is my colleague, Doctor Lloyd."

The other man, slightly younger I would guess, shook my hand.

"You gave us something of a surprise," he said. "You've only been out of the theatre an hour. You should really be fast asleep at the moment."

"A side effect I guess." I reached out and took a grape from the bowl by my bed.

"Well," I said. "What shall we talk about? This is really rather an historic occasion. When am I allowed to get up?"

"In a few minutes; you'll be a bit weak at first."

"My wife," I said. "She'll be worried. Is it all right if she comes in?"

Grant flashed a look at the other.

"Of course," said Lloyd. "I'll fetch her."

And soon he came back with my wife. How can I say what I felt when I saw her there? She was frightened, and she gripped Lloyd's arm tightly. She was just as beautiful; she meant just as much to me as always she had done. But now I looked at her with eyes turned sour by my treacherous gift. In a way, I was nearer the doctors than to her.

"Oh, God," I said.

"What is it?"

"What have you done to me?"

There was an embarrassed silence.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I realise, of course, that the effects of this experiment are only temporary. It's just that it's all been something of a shock." My wife came over to my bed, and looked at me with eyes that expressed at the same time her compassion for my unhappiness, which she sensed easily, and also her gladness to see me again. I gripped her hand, and pressed it gently.

"Those tapes you impressed on my mind."

"Yes?"

"You forget to tell me how long the effects of this experiment would last."

"Two hours."

"Oh."

SILENCE!

SILENCE!

SILENCE!

"Can you—can you leave me to—er—think, for a few minutes?"

The doctors moved to the door, gliding in their shrouds. As the door opened, a cold ether death-wind blew into the room.

Later, Doctor Grant came to give me some psychological tests. I don't think I did as well as I could, as far as the intelligence tests were concerned, for the lights, set up for the film cameras, tended to distract me slightly. After the tests,

I was free! Lloyd took me on a guided tour of the Institute—the IEP—Institute of Experimental Psychology. From the little I saw, I picked up a fascinating amount of information about this civilisation, and the more I saw the more I realised my own place in it. I was torn in the most strange way between two powerful feelings; my longing to be back in my own state, my natural state, and the terrible dragging realisation of what I would become.

What was worse was that there was no-one to blame. How could they be expected to know what they had done? There was only one person who could appreciate the enormity of their crime. Me. I liked Lloyd very much; I could tell that he was listening very carefully to all my comments, waiting for the least sign to show him that he had done wrong. How could I possibly tell him?

I didn't want anything to eat. At lunch time, Lloyd went off to the canteen and I went back to my room, making the excuse of tiredness. Once on my own, the feelings I experienced were even stronger. I looked at the clock on the wall; one more hour to go. I thought of my dear wife, in my eyes so wonderful and at the same time, so insignificant. I thought of the abrupt change that would occur in such a short time. I was *alive*, for the only time in my life, and when I went back this brief period would cease to have existed. What is worse than being given the greatest happiness in the world, only to have it taken away? Answer: to lose not only the happiness, but also the memory of it.

I found that I had instinctively crept into a corner of the room. I stared at the pattern of the wallpaper, so artificial, representing something that I could never attain. I thought again of my wife: oh my darling, if you could only comprehend what has been done to me!

When Lloyd came back into the room, he found me, I, who could never be human, in that most human act.

"Good God, what is it? You're crying!"

"Yes, I'm crying, damn you, crying!"

When he had spoken, the quaver in his voice had told me how already he was blaming himself.

He picked me up and sat me on the bed. I stared down at my legs, the thick hair catching the light from the windows.

"What's the matter?" I said. "Have you never seen a chimpanzee cry before?"

When I had calmed a little I began to speak, to try to erase the agonised expression on his face.

"What do you expect?" I said. "You take a chimpanzee from your cage downstairs, and you decide to give me an IQ of over a hundred. I have a course of injections; a six-month course. In my misty little world I come to expect, and to fear the injections. But then, even that passes and I soon get used to them. The drug causes changes in the nature of my cortical neurones; dendrites multiply and form pseudo-connections within my brain. Then you operate. You remove a tiny gland, and thereby activate the electrical potential of the pseudo-connections. You stamp your own circuits electrically on my mind. I speak your language, I understand what I am and what has been done to me. And for the first time I come alive. You don't understand that; you have had intelligence all your life; you don't know what it's like to be as I was. I see how shallow was the life before this moment. You do see, don't you? Intelligence is intelligence, no matter what form it takes, or how it was created. Do you think I want to go back and live in the shadowed world I used to inhabit? And yet I am not happy as I am. How could I be when I can look at my wife, whom I love—yes, love—and yet whom I find as being something so far beneath me as to be laughable? And yet at the same time, the thought of returning to that state of mindless half-life fills me with dread.

"And I—and I—don't—I . . ."

Lloyd looked up with alarm on his face, then quickly went across and pressed a bell push by the side of the bed.

"I hate to say this," he said, "but it looks as though the effects are beginning to wear off earlier than we expected."

"Oh God!" I heard myself say. I began to cry again.

He stood looking at me with concern and compassion in his eyes, and I gripped his hand and held it tightly.

A nurse with a trolley came into the room, followed closely by Grant.

"Already?" he said.

"Y—yes," I replied, fighting as hard as I could. "The power of—sp—speech is det—det—al-ready."

The nurse professionally swabbed my arm with cold liquid. I felt the needle sliding into my flesh.

I looked at Lloyd and struggled to speak.

"D—d—don't . . . blame . . ."

I wondered what this was like for him. To Grant, this was just an experiment, the first of many, but Lloyd, I think knew what he had done. A sudden thought washed down my back.

"When—when I—go . . . back . . . no . . . no . . ."

"It's all right," said Lloyd. "There will be no more experiments of any sort on either you or your wife. They will live out the rest of their lives comfortably. I shall ensure that."

He had said 'they'. He understood. I relaxed. As consciousness began to fade, I took a last look at Lloyd.

There was cold fear in his eyes.

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E. C. TUBB

J IS FOR JEANNE

THE DREAM WAS always the same. There were lights and a hard, white brightness and a soft, constant humming which seemed more vibration than actual sound. There was a sense of physical helplessness and the presence of inimical shapes. But, above all, was the ghastly immobility.

She told Paul about it.

"It's as if I know that something terrible is going to happen to me and I want to escape it but I simply can't move. It goes on and on and then, suddenly, I'm awake and everything's all right again." She shuddered. "It's horrible!"

"It's only a dream," soothed Paul. "Just a nightmare. They are quite common."

"Maybe." She wasn't comforted. "But why should I have nightmares? And why always the same one?"

"Are you certain that it is the same one?"

"Positive. Paul, you must help me!"

He smiled and leaned back and looked at her over the desk. Paul—Slavic Caucasian, intermediate type, male, blood group O. He would live to be seventy-three point six years of age, father two point three children, have one major and two minor operations and ran a nine per cent risk of cancer.

"Of course I'll help you, Jeanne," he said. "Now let's tackle this thing logically. What is the one point which bothers you most?"

"About the dream?"

He nodded.

"The immobility," she said quickly. "I want to escape and I can't. It's as if I'm——"

"Paralysed?"

"I suppose so," she said, and frowned, thinking about it.

"I just seem solid, like a building, without any ability to move at all. I—I can't describe it."

"You don't have to," he said easily. "The sense of paralysis is a common feature of most nightmares. You are threatened by some danger and want to escape it. You can't and this increases the horror. There is a school of thought which claims that this sensation is a facet of the guilt-complex. You can't escape because you don't really want to. You want to be punished." He looked down at something on the desk. "Do you want to be punished, Jeanne?"

"No."

"A pity, it would help if you did." He looked up at her and resumed his smile. He had a nice smile. He was a nice man. "Don't worry about it. Let's tackle it from another angle. You know what a nightmare is?"

She knew. Nightmare—oppressive or paralysing or terrifying or fantastically horrible dream. Also—a haunting fear or thing vaguely dreaded.

"Then you know that, mixed up with the apparent inconsistencies and seemingly illogical events there is a thread of truth and logic. Freud—"

"I am not sexually maladjusted," she said firmly. He shrugged.

"Of course not but, ignoring Freud, there are certain pressures which betray themselves in sleep. Perhaps a traumatic scar received when a child then makes its presence known. Or an unresolved problem disguises itself to plague our rest. Or we enter a private world of escape-fantasy there to do battle with monstrous creatures of our psyche. But everyone has dreams. They are essential."

"Paradoxical sleep," she said. "I know about that."

"You know a lot about everything, Jeanne."

"That is true."

"So you must know why you have dreams."

"And nightmares?"

"A nightmare is just a bad dream."

"A recurrent nightmare?"

"That," he said slowly, "is the thing which bothers me, I think that we should both see Carl."

Carl—East-European/Caucasian, abdominal type, male,

blood group A. He would live to be sixty-eight point three years of age. He had fathered one point nine children, had had one major surgical operation, had suffered from three mildly contagious diseases. He ran a fifteen point seven risk of cancer, a twenty-three per cent risk of angina. He was almost totally bald.

"This dream which troubles you," he said to Jeanne. "Tell me about it again."

"But I've told it a dozen times already."

"Once again, if you please." He was very firm, very intent on getting his own way. He listened as she retold her nightmare.

"Do you ever have other kinds of dream? No? Only this special one? I see." He sat, eyes introspective, his hand absently massaging the tip of his chin. "Odd," he mused. "Very odd."

"The nightmare?"

"No, Paul. The fact that she has never had any other kind of dream."

"Perhaps she has but hasn't remembered them on waking," suggested Paul. His eyes sought hers for confirmation, dropped as she gave none. "Many people dream without ever knowing it."

"True." Carl released his chin, his eyes becoming alive again. "This place," he said. "The place where you dream that you are being held. Describe it." He checked her protest. "Yes, again, if you please. In detail." He smiled a little at her hesitation. "Take your time and don't be afraid. We are here to help you."

She did not have to take her time.

"Somewhere underground," said Paul. "No windows. No doors. Just bare, white-painted walls."

"Underground or totally enclosed." Carl was more precise. "There are lights and we can assume that they are artificial." He looked at her. "Have you ever been inside such a place?"

"In real life, you mean? No."

"You are certain as to that?"

"I'm certain." His insistence was beginning to annoy her. "If I say a thing then that thing is so. I cannot lie."

"There is more than one way of avoiding the truth," said Carl. He didn't press the point. "The sound which you say

is more like a vibration than actual noise. Have you any idea of what it could be?"

"Machinery," she said.

"Of what kind?"

"It could be almost anything. Pumps or a motor or—"

"Or anything that makes a repetitive, unobtrusive noise," interrupted Carl. "A heartbeat, even. You agree?"

She nodded.

"Your own heartbeat, perhaps?"

She hesitated before nodding agreement. Paul moved quietly to her side.

"What are you getting at, Carl?"

"Perhaps nothing but there is a theory that, during times of sleep, the psyche has the ability to traverse time. Dunne wrote a book—"

"I know the theory," she said quickly. "Dreams are supposed to foretell the future."

"Is that what you think?" Paul looked at the older man. "That Jeanne, while asleep, is somehow transposed into a future time?"

"I mention it as a possibility only," said Carl. "But the evidence seems to fit such a supposition. A bare, enclosed place. Artificial light. A constant vibration which could be the pulse of a machine or the beat of a heart. Jeanne's heart. Does that not sound to you like a prison cell?"

"Or a laboratory cage for experimental animals?" Paul frowned then shook his head. "The shapes—"

"Yes," said Carl. "The shapes. The inimical shapes which are never wholly seen. They represent a threat from which it is impossible to escape. They—"

"No," said Paul.

"It is a tenable theory," said Carl. He looked at Jeanne. "The shapes are important," he said. "You said that they were inimical. Did you feel any actual fear for your physical well-being?"

"I must have done," she said slowly. "Why else would I want to escape?"

"I can answer that," said Paul. "The shapes represent truth. You are afraid of the truth and yet you need to recognise it both at the same time. That is why you wanted to escape but could not."

"Truth," she said wonderingly. "What is truth?"

"Truth is fact," said Paul.

"Of course. Could there be anything else?"

"Perhaps." He did not meet her eyes. "A distortion of the truth is always possible. A juggling of basically true data could give a true, but distorted picture. Or there could be deliberate invention."

"A lie?"

"A subconscious denial. I think that somehow, somewhere, you have lied to yourself and—"

"No!" The concept was monstrous. "You are wrong! Wrong!"

It was a relief to find that she could escape.

The sun—a yellow, G-type star powered by the phoenix reaction, one astronomical unit from the third planet called Earth—was golden in the azure sky. It should be something else and she thought about it. Warm. The sun should be warm.

She faced it and wondered.

"Unfiltered radiation can cause great and permanent damage to optical units," said Paul. He rested beside her on the soft—soft?—grass. She had not known that he was there. She was not surprised to find that he was.

"You ran," he said. "Why?"

She turned from the sun and saw nothing but flaring images. She wondered if she was blind.

Blind—deprive of sight; rob of judgement—deceive.

Deceive?

"I asked you why you ran," said Paul. "Was it because of what I said?"

"I cannot lie."

"Truth can be a variable depending on its correlation to the information at hand. From one fact it is theoretically possible to imagine the universe—but the universe so imagined need have no relation to reality. Did you run because of fear?"

"I do not know the meaning of the word."

"The emotional meaning? Perhaps not. But fear is the reaction felt by any thinking entity at an attack on its survival

in the broadest sense." He looked at her, his eyes oddly penetrating. "Jeanne! Why can't you be honest with me?"

"I am!" She fought the desire to run. He would only follow. "Paul! That dream——"

"Yes?"

"I've solved the problem. I am never going to sleep again. If I don't sleep then I can't dream. You agree?"

"Your logic is unassailable."

Naturally—it could be nothing else. She looked at him and felt an overwhelming desire never to be parted from him again. She wondered if she was in love.

"As your logic is unassailable," he said. "You must agree that your dream cannot be ignored."

"I've told you—that problem is solved."

"By pretending that it does not exist?" He looked up at her, his eyes narrowed against the sun. She felt a sudden concern for his sight and wished that he would shield them against the direct radiation. Obediently he moved so that his face was in shadow. "I was talking to Carl after you left. He is convinced that your recurrent dream is symbolic of an attack——"

"Nonsense!"

"—or of a warning. Jeanne, you must realise how important it is that you know yourself. You cannot escape the truth by flight."

Or by fanciful theories?

Why had she thought of that?

It was Paul's fault. He was talking too much and she wished that he would stop and let the peace and silence of the place enfold them and soothe away all fear.

Fear—apprehend; have uneasy anticipation—

What had she to fear?

The silence became unbearable—she wished that he would talk.

There is so much that we could do together, Jeanne," he said instantly. "So much to explore and share—an infinity of learning and growth with an entire universe to explore . . ."

He looked so appealing.

". . . so come on, darling, don't let me down this time. Please don't let me down. Please, Jeanne!"

Jeanne—Latin/Caucasian, mammalian female, blood group—.

She would live to be seventy-nine point six years of age. She would mother two point three children, run a seventeen per cent risk of having at least one child by caesarian section, a forty-one point eight risk of divorce. She would have one serious illness, two minor motoring accidents, run a ten point three per cent risk of developing cancer of the breast or womb.

A one hundred per cent certainty of having her likeness pinned to a wall.

"No!" She rose and looked at the sun.

"Come on, Jeanne. For me, baby. Please!"

"No!" She began to run, faster, faster . . .

"Jeanne!"

"No!"

Around her the ground heaved, the sun winked in the sky, grass showered like emerald rain.

The world changed.

The lights were the same and the hard, bright whiteness and the soft, constant humming which was more vibration than actual sound. The beat of a heart, Carl had suggested, and he should have known. The beat of her heart—the pumps within her body circulating the coolant through the massed bulk of her memory banks.

The vibration was as familiar as the ghostly immobility.

As the picture on the wall—Latin/Caucasian, mammalian female, blood group—

As were the inimical shapes.

"That about wraps it up," said Paul. He looked tired yet happy as if having just solved a difficult problem. "I thought for a minute she was going to be a stubborn bitch but she came through like a thoroughbred. I tell you, Carl, I should have been a ladies' man. I can talk them into anything—well, almost."

Carl made a sound like a disgusted snort.

"All right," said Paul. "So you've got no romantic imagination. To you this is just a hunk of machinery."

"And to you it's a woman." Carl repeated his snort. "It

must be the spring. Are you sure there will be no more shut-downs?"

"I'm sure. The overheating problem is licked and will stay that way."

"Good," said Carl. He sounded relieved. "I'm glad we got it finished in time for the inspection. You know how they are, everything on schedule and no excuses. They think that adjusting a thing like this is as simple as fixing a tank."

"They should try it sometime," said Paul. Carl shrugged.

"Well, they pay the money so I guess they have the right to call the tune." He looked at the picture on the wall. "You'd better get rid of that—they might not share your taste in art."

"Jeanne?" Paul grinned and twitched down the picture. "Who could possibly object to a girl like that? Old ironsides?" His grin grew wider as he slapped the metal on her flank.

"Well, old girl, this is it. No more bye-byes. From now on you stay switched to full operation twenty-four hours a day. Have fun."

A computer can't cry.

That was the worst of it.



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THE CONFLICTING TIME STREAMS OF THE 20TH CENTURY WERE MIRRORED IN JERRY CORNELIUS

Reader response to "Preliminary Data" (NW 153) has been encouraging, so here is some . . .

FURTHER INFORMATION

Michael Moorcock

Illustrated by Douthwaite

JERRY CORNELIUS STEERED the boat towards the light that had suddenly flashed out from a point near his port. Illuminated by the greenish glow from his controls his face looked stranger than ever to the others who waited on the deck outside his cabin.

Miss Brunner, most prone to that sort of thing, reflected that the conflicting time-streams of the second half of the twentieth century were apparently mirrored in him and it seemed that the mind behind cried forward while the mind in front cried back.

Was time, as she understood it, disintegrating? That was what Cornelius had been getting at. She had never read one of his books, but she had heard of them. Didn't some of them postulate a Cyclical Time theory rather like Dunne's? The ultimate point in the past would therefore be the ultimate point in the future. But what if something interrupted the cycle? A historical event, perhaps, of such importance that

the whole pattern was changed. The nature of time, assuming that it was cyclical, would be disrupted and you would get a kind of temporal dispersal. It would certainly make Spengler look silly, she thought, amused.

If Cornelius was right, even assuming that his speculation had been idle, then something had to be done, something saved from the wreckage. Yet, if she could get that computer built and get some work done on her other proposition, she might be the person to consolidate what was saved. The final programme, she thought.

Cornelius was bringing his boat up alongside the bigger hoverlaunch. He watched as his passengers boarded the circular vessel. He did not join them. He preferred to have his own boat waiting for him when the expedition was over. The hoverlaunch whispered away towards Normandy and he followed behind, slightly to one side to avoid the main disturbance of the boat's wake. The launch belonged to Smiles, who, like Cornelius, had invested his money in tangibles while it still had some value.

Soon the Normandy coastline was in sight and both boats cut their engines, though the hoverlaunch's could easily be mistaken for the faint note of the breeze. A line was shot back to Jerry who made it fast. Then the hoverlaunch's motor started up again and, with Jerry in tow, headed towards the cliff where the fake Le Corbusier mansion stood, a silhouette in the moonlight. There was a chance that the bigger boat wouldn't register on the house's radar. Jerry's didn't, but then it was much lower in the water. The hoverlaunch's control tower was what might just blip off the radar.

Old Cornelius's microfilms were buried deep within the centre of the house, in a strong-room that would not resist a high explosive blast but would, if attacked in this manner, automatically destroy the film. The information the intrepid band required was probably there, too. The only sure-fire means of getting the film was to open the strong-room in the conventional way and this was why Frank, who knew the various codes and techniques necessary, had to be preserved and tortured until the strong-room could be cracked. The whole of the house had been prepared to make sure that no-one reached the microfilms. Virtually every room, every passage-way had its own system of traps, which was why

Jerry was so valuable to the expedition since though he didn't know the strong-room combination, he knew the rest of the house well, having been brought up there. If he hadn't left to join the Jesuits after his father had found him with Catherine, he would have inherited the other secret as his birthright, since he was the elder son, but Frank had received that honour.

Suddenly searchlights came on. They were mainly concentrated on the house itself. Only one began to move across the water.

Cornelius shouted: "Keep your eyes off the roof. Remember what I told you."

From the roof three circular towers had risen. They began to rotate in the blue beam of a searchlight. They looked rather like big, round machine-gun bunkers, with slots located at intervals down their length but, from central columns, a multitude of different coloured lights flashed. Cornelius knew what the giant towers were—Michelson's stroboscope (Type 8).^{*} The lights made bright patterns and the eye was automatically drawn to them. Cornelius knew the danger—first the eye and then the mind with a chance of pseudo-epilepsy as the end result unless the eye could be forced away. Already one of the mercenaries on the boat stood transfixed, glazed, unblinking eyes staring up at the huge stroboscope stiff as a rock lizard. The searchlight found him and, from two concrete-emplacements on the cliff, machine-guns smacked a couple of dozen rounds into him. His body softened and collapsed.

Jerry hadn't expected violence so soon, but evidently Frank wasn't taking chances. He huddled down behind the cabin as the boats drifted towards the cliffs which offered them some shelter. The towers were no longer visible within a minute as they had been designed for use against land attack. Jerry's boat bumped the hoverlaunch and he sprang from his deck to theirs, needle-gun in hand.

A grenade exploded nearby, then another. Jerry pointed out the cliff-door to the darkly-tanned mercenary holding the suction-mine intended to destroy the door. The man clapped it on the spot Jerry indicated and they ran up to the other end of the deck. The mine exploded, bits of wreckage

^{*}*Courtesy W. Burroughs and J. Colvin.*

pattered down, the door was open. Jerry led the way in. The main force of mercenaries, dressed in the lightweight khaki they were never without, followed behind with their machine-guns ready. Behind them stepped not so swiftly Mr. Smiles, Miss Brunner and Dimitri, Mr. Crookshank and Mr. Powys. All had machine-pistols.

"Let's hope they don't spend too much time on the boats," Mr. Smiles looked back as fire erupted over the dark water. He spoke adenoidally since his nostrils were stuffed with filters which Jerry had issued to them all.

Jerry reached the inner room and pointed at two places on the walls. The leading soldier raised his gun and shot out the two tv cameras. By way of retaliation from the control chamber above the lights were switched off.

The mercenaries immediately unhooked helmets from their belts and put them on. Each helmet was equipped with a miner's lamp. One soldier had a long coil of nylon rope over his shoulders.

"Maybe the lift's still working," Mr. Powys suggested as Jerry set foot on the ladder.

"It probably is." Jerry began to climb. "But we'd look great if when we were half-way up they switched the power off."

They all started up. Miss Brunner went last. As she climbed the first rung she said thoughtfully: "Silly—they forgot to electrify the ladder."

Jerry heard sounds above and a light went on in the shaft. He saw a German looking down at him, sighting along his weapon. Jerry snapped up his needle-gun and shot him full of steel. He paused, arm curled around the ladder, to re-pressure the gun. He shouted "Look out!" as the guard rolled off the edge and fell down the shaft.

Frank had only spared one guard here, being sure that the maze would serve him best.

At the entrance to the maze the soldier with the nylon cord paid it out to them and they roped up. Jerry led them into the maze with a reminder to keep their mouths tightly shut and their minds on following him whatever happened.

They had only been in the maze for five minutes, shooting out the cameras as they went, when the first wave of gas hissed into the passage-ways. It was lsd gas, sophisticated by old

Cornelius who was responsible for all the hallucinatory protective devices in the house—Frank had added the guns and guards. Hallucinogenic gases had been old Cornelius' speciality, though an off-shoot had been his hallucinomats like the roof-top stroboscopic towers. Old Cornelius had exhausted and killed himself searching for the ultimate hallucinogenic device, just as his son Frank destroyed himself slowly by looking for the ultimate kick in the veins.

Jerry looked back as he heard someone giggling. It was Mr. Powys. He had his arms high and was shaking just as if someone were tickling his arm-pits. Every so often he would make pushing motions. He began to skip about. Mouths thin and firm now that they had seen Mr. Powy's example, the others strove to hold him down. Jerry made the expedition stop, unhooked the rope and went back to hit Mr. Powys on the back of the neck with his pistol barrel.

In silence they continued through the faintly yellowish gas hanging in the close air of the maze. Mr. Smiles and Mr. Crookshank carried Mr. Powys who would soon have breathed enough lsd to kill him.

Jerry hesitated twice at junctions and occasionally a shot would sound as a camera was put out of action. It was a little ironic, he thought, that his father should have become so obsessed with the problem of increased neurotic disorders in the world that he himself went round the bend towards the end. Now Jerry went round the last bend and the door of the control chamber was ahead of him. So far only two casualties and only one of those actually dead.

About fifteen yards before they got to the door Jerry stopped and a bazooka was passed down the line to him. Leaving him and his loader the rest retreated back around the corner. Jerry got the bazooka comfortably on to his shoulder and pulled the trigger. The rocket bomb whooshed straight through the door and exploded in the control room itself. A booted foot came sailing out and hit Jerry in the face. He kicked it to one side, his mouth still tightly shut, and waved the others on. The explosion had wrecked the control panel but the opposite door was still intact. Since it would only open to the thermal-code of someone it knew they could either blast through into the library or wait for someone to blast through to them. Someone was definitely waiting in the

library if Jerry's guess were right. The other members of the expedition were unhooking their ropes and dropping them to the floor. It was unlikely they would be leaving by the same route and therefore wouldn't need the ropes again. Jerry pondered the problem as Miss Brunner squeezed into the room and studied the wreckage on the panel. Her big eyes looked at him quizzically. "A nice little board—and this is only a minor control panel?"

"Yes—there's a large roomful in the basement. That's got to be our first objective."

"So you said. What now?"

Jerry smoothed the hair at the side of his face. "There's an alternative to waiting for them. We could try the bazooka but there's another door behind this one and I doubt if a rocket would go through both. If it didn't we'd get the worst of the explosion. They must be waiting there—probably with a grenade-thrower or a big Bren or something. It's stalemate for the moment."

"You should have anticipated this."

"I know."

"Why didn't you?"

"Someone else should have done." She turned accusingly to look at the others.

Dimitri was kneeling beside Mr. Powys trying to revive him. "You, too," he said.

"I thought it had been too easy," said Mr. Smiles.

"I've got it." Jerry looked up. Over the door was a metal panel. He pointed to it. "It's an air-condition unit. A grenade-thrower, a single neurade and a good eye should do it if the grill at the other end isn't closed." He singled out a big South African, taller than he was. "I'll stand on your shoulders. Who's got a grenade-attachment?" One of the Belgians handed the attachment over. He fitted it to the automatic rifle and detached the ammunition clip. The Belgian handed him a different clip. He fitted this to the rifle, too. Then he took a neurade out of his pocket and popped it into the thrower's basket. "Give me a hand up." Someone helped him on to the South African's shoulders. He pushed back the metal panel and began to bash in the wire grill with the gun-butt. He could see down the pipe to where the lights of the library shone. He heard muted voices. He put the rifle

to his shoulder and shoved the barrel into the pipe. The space between the fan blades was just big enough for it. Now if the neurade wasn't deflected by the grill at the other end—which wasn't likely—they'd have a chance of getting the guards there in silence, and have time to blast open the doors with small charges of explosive before anyone realised that the detachment in the library was out of action.

He squeezed the trigger. The neurade burst through the grill. Someone at the other end shouted in surprise. He heard dull thumps and knew that the neurade had exploded. He jumped off the South African's shoulders and handed the Belgian's gun back to him.

"Right—let's get these doors open. Hurry."

The charges burst both locks and they were through. Only three men jerked on the floor of the library beside an overturned machine-gun, their faces inhuman as the gas worked on their nerves. It was a mercy to bayonet them, so they did.

They tumbled out of the library and in to the ground floor hall as the ceiling suddenly rose and the walls widened out. All but Jerry were startled. Around them the quality and colour of the light flickered rapidly through the spectrum and one wall suddenly became opaque. Behind it a huge black-and-white disc began to whirl and a rhythmic boom swam up the decibel scale, almost to pain-level. It seemed that the largened room swayed like a ship as they staggered after Jerry who was none-too-steady on his pins himself, heading towards the disc.

Jerry grabbed a gun from one of the dozen men and fired an entire magazine into the wall. Plastic cracked and the disc stopped whirling. Jerry kicked a larger hole in the wall and smashed at the edges with his gun-butt until the hole was large enough for him to pass through easily. Then he suddenly leapt back and dropped to the floor.

From the other side of the wall a large black ball shot. Jerry yelled "Nerve bomb, close your mouths."

The bomb bounced on the opposite wall and its sides opened out. Jerry got up and peered into the room beyond the wall. The booby-trap had been automatic. The bomb had been launched from some sort of spring device. If they didn't get out shortly, their nose-filters wouldn't help them. He went through and they followed him.

The room behind the wall was small and there was a camera panning around close to the roof. One of the mercenaries shot it. A normal door, unlocked, opened on to a flight of stairs leading upwards.

There wasn't another door. They went up the stairs. At the top three men waited. Frank was spreading his guards thin.

The first burst missed Jerry but shot the big South African's head to bits. Jerry felt panicky and dropped down, hugging one wall. He raised his needle-gun and shot the guard in the throat. Behind him the leading mercenaries opened up. One guard fell at once, blood spurting from his stomach. The second fired down the stair-well and got two more mercenaries, including one of the Britons. Jerry, rapidly repressuring his gun, shot him, too.

On the first floor landing everything was suddenly silent and Jerry relaxed his lips which he had automatically kept shut. The mercenaries with the civilians behind them, moved up on to the landing and looked at him questioningly.

"The main control room, and doubtless my brother, is two floors down now and there'll be extra guards turning up at any moment." Jerry pointed at another camera near the ceiling. "Don't shoot it—he isn't using it at the moment for some reason and if we put it out he'll know we're here."

"He must have guessed surely," said Miss Brunner.

"You'd think so. Also he would have sent some reinforcements here by now. This landing is equipped with a Schizomat in a panel in the wall—my father's crowning achievement he always thought."

"Why isn't Frank using it?" Miss Brunner pushed her long red hair back from her face.

"I had to leave Mr. Powys behind I'm afraid." Dimitri leaned on a wall. "This house certainly is full of surprises Mr. Cornelius."

"Could your brother be planning something?" Miss Brunner sighed.

"He's got a great sense of humour—he *may* have cooked up a new ploy."

The house was still very quiet as Jerry led them along the landing until they reached a point where they looked down through what was evidently a two-way mirror, into the hall

where the nerve bomb had exploded. Stairs led down alongside the far wall.

"These stairs normally lead to the basement," Jerry told them as they began to descend, "but there are steel gates that can shut off any part. Remember what I told you about using your guns to stop them fully closing."

No shutters came down, but on the first floor, in a curiously narrow passage, obviously created by the widening of the hall earlier, they saw Mr. Powys staggering towards them.

"It's haunted. It's haunted."

How he'd got there Jerry couldn't work out on the spot. Now, when he thought about it, could he guess how Mr. Powys had survived the lsd, not to mention everything else.

"It's haunted. It's haunted."

"Powys!" Jerry grabbed him. "Mr. Powys. Pull yourself together."

Mr. Powys gave him an intelligent look that was suddenly sardonic. "Too late for that, Mr. Cornelius. This house—it's like a giant model of my own skull. Or is it my skull? If it is, what am I?"

"What's the matter, Mr. Powys?" Dimitri slid up. "Can I help?"

"It's haunted. It's my mind haunted by me, but that can't be right. It must be my mind haunting me. That must be it."

Dimitri looked at Cornelius. "What do we do with him?"

"He needs a converter." Cornelius smiled at Powys, raised his gun and shot him in the eye.

The party stopped.

"It was for the best," Cornelius said. "His brain was already badly damaged and we couldn't have him running around."

"Aren't you being exceptionally ruthless, Mr. Cornelius?" Mr. Smiles took a very deep breath.

"Oh, now, Mr. Smiles."

They pressed on until they reached a big metal door in the basement. "This is where he should be," said Jerry, "But I can't help thinking he's cooked up a big surprise." He signalled to the surviving Briton and a couple of Belgians. "Have a go at that door will you?"

"Any particular method, sir?"

"No—just get it down. We'll be round the corner."

They retreated while the soldiers got to work.

There came a tremendous explosion—far bigger than the soldiers had planned—there was blood all over the walls, but very little recognisable of the soldiers.

"Thank goodness soldiers have this thing about orders," said Jerry and then they were all stumbling backwards as a sub-machine-gun began to bang rapidly from within the room. Through the smoke, and from behind a South African, Jerry saw that Frank was in there. He seemed alone. Crookshank got in the path of one of the bursts, made a ludicrous attempt to duck the bullets even as they danced into his chest. Two soldiers collapsed on top of him.

Frank was chuckling away as he fired.

"I think he's gone barmy," said Mr. Smiles. "This poses a problem, Mr. Cornelius."

"Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!" sang Frank from within the room. "What do you want Jerry—a time fix? Tempodex is my remedy for one and all—it'll turn you on lovely, sport—can't you feel those millions of years just waiting in your spine—waiting to move up into your back-brain—" the gun stopped altogether and they began to move cautiously forward until Frank picked up an identical weapon that was fully loaded, he began emptying it, "—your mid-brain, your fore-brain—all your many brains, Jerry—when the tempodex starts opening them up?"

"He *is* in a jolly mood," said Miss Brunner from somewhere well behind the front line.

Jerry just didn't feel like doing anything except duck bullets at that moment. He felt very tired. Another couple of mercenaries piled themselves neatly up.

"Can't we throw something at him? Isn't there any more gas?" Miss Brunner sounded vexed.

"Well, I mean, he's got to run out of bullets at some stage." Mr. Smiles always believed that if you waited long enough the right situation would present itself. A thought struck him and he turned angrily to the mercenaries. "Why aren't you retaliating?"

They began retaliating.

At length Mr. Smiles realised why and shouted "Stop! We want him alive."

They stopped retaliating.

Frank sang and kept his finger on the trigger.

"He'll get an overheated barrel if he's not careful," said Mr. Smiles remembering his mythology. "I hope he doesn't blow himself up."

Miss Brunner was picking her nose. She discarded the filters. "I don't care if there is any more gas," she said, "I'm not having the filthy things up there any longer."

"Well look," said Jerry, "I've got one neurade left, but it could kill him in the state he's in."

"It wouldn't do *me* much good now. You might have warned me." Miss Brunner scanned the floor.

Another mercenary groaned and went down.

"*And* we're running out of troops," she added.

The sub-machine-gun stopped. The last bullet ricocheted off the wall. There came the sound of sobbing.

Jerry peered round the corner. Among his guns, Frank sat with his head in his hands.

"He's all yours." Jerry walked towards the stairs.

"Where are you going?" Miss Brunner took a step after him.

"I've done my bit, Miss Brunner. Now there's something else I've got to do. Goodbye."

Jerry went up to the first floor and found the front door. He still felt nervous and realised that not all Frank's guards had been accounted for. He opened the door and peered out of the house. There didn't seem to be anyone about.

Gun still in his hand, he walked down the sloping drive towards the lodge where John ought to be with Catherine.

The lights were out in the lodge, but he didn't think it strange in the circumstances. He looked down the hill towards the village. All the lights were out there, too. Smiles had paid someone to fuse the power-supply. Jerry found the lodge door open and walked in.

In a corner a bag of bones gave him a welcoming groan. "John. Where's Catherine?"

"I got her here, sir. I——"

"But where is she now? Upstairs?"

"You said after ten, sir. I was here by eleven. Everything went smoothly. She was a weight. I'm dying, sir, I think."

"What happened?"

"He must have followed me." John spoke with increasing faintness. "I got her here . . . Then he came in with a couple of the men. He shot me, sir."

"And took her back to the house?"

"I'm sorry, sir . . ."

"So you should be. Did you hear where he was taking her?"

"He . . . said . . . putting her . . . back to . . . bed . . . sir."

Jerry left the lodge and began to run up the drive. It was odd how normal the house looked from the outside. He re-entered it.

On the ground floor he found the lift and discovered it was still operating. He got in and went up to the sixth. He got out and ran to Catherine's bedroom. The door was locked. He kicked at it but it wouldn't budge. He reached into his top-pocket and fished out an object the same size as a cigarette. Two thin wires ran from it. He uncoiled the wire. Its other end was attached to an object as big as a match-box. He put the slim object into the keyhole of the door and walked backwards a yard or so with the box in his hand. It was actually a tiny detonator. He touched the wires to the detonator and the explosive at the other end burst the lock with a bang.

He entered to find Frank. Frank did not look at all nice. In his right hand was a needle-gun, twin to Jerry's. There were only two and their father had made them both.

"How did you get away?" Jerry inquired.

"Well actually I was hoping to get *you*, Jerry. As it was I got all your military friends, though I think I missed the others. I'm not sure why I bothered with the shooting—possibly just because I enjoyed it—but if you'd crossed into the room you'd have found that a couple—ha, ha—of my men were on either side of the door. You certainly made a good try to get our sister didn't you? Look—I've woken the sleeping beauty up."

Catherine looked dazed, propped on pillows. She smiled when she saw Jerry. But the smile wasn't all that confident. Her skin was more than naturally pale and her dark hair was tangled.

Jerry's gun-hand rose a trifle and Frank grinned. "We've one shot each, Jerry, really."

He began to back round the bed in order to get on the other side of Catherine. Jerry was trembling. "You bastard."

Frank giggled. "That's something we all have in common." Frank's junky's face was immobile. The only movement in it was when the light caught his bright, reptilian eyes. Jerry did not realize Frank had pulled the trigger until he felt the sting in his shoulder. Frank's hand wasn't as steady as it seemed. Frank didn't repressure his gun at once. Jerry raised his arm to shoot Frank.

Then Catherine moved. She grabbed at Frank. "Stop it!"

"Shut up," said Frank. His left hand began to go towards the needle-gun's pressure lever.

"Jerry!" she screamed, kneeling on the bed.

"That needle could work into your heart, Jerry," smiled Frank.

"So I'll need a magnet." Jerry fired and ran towards the window as a needle grazed his face. He repressured and turned. Frank ducked, Catherine rose and Jerry's needle caught her. She collapsed. Jerry repressured and shot at the same time as Frank. They both missed again. Jerry began to feel puzzled. This was going on for too long. He jumped towards Frank and grabbed at his body. Frank's weak-fists struck him on the head and back. He punched Frank in the stomach and Frank groaned. They stepped apart. Jerry felt dizzy, saw Frank grin and wheel.

"You had something in those needles . . ."

"Find out," grinned Frank and sprang from the room.

Jerry sat himself down on the edge of the bed.

He was riding a black ferris-wheel of emotions. His brain and body exploded in a torrent of mingled ecstasy and pain. Waves of pale light flickered. He fell down a never-ending slope of obsidian rock surrounded by clouds of green, purple, yellow, black. The rock vanished, but he continued to fall. World of phosphorescence drifting like golden spheres into the black night. Green, blue, red explosions. Flickering world of phosphorescent tears falling into timeless, spaceless wastes. World of Guilt. Guilt—guilt—guilt . . . Another wave flowed up his spine. No-mind, no-body, no-where. Dying waves of light danced out of his eyes and away through the dark world. Everything was dying. Cells, sinews, nerves, synapses—all crumbling. Tears of light, fading, fading. Brilliant rockets

streaking into the sky, exploding all together and sending their multicoloured globes of light—balls on a Xmas tree—x-mass—drifting slowly. Black mist swirled across a bleak, horizonless nightscape. Catherine. As he approached her she fell away, fell down like a cardboard dummy. Just before his mind cleared he thought he saw a creature bending over them both—a creature without a navel, hermaphrodite and sweetly smiling . . .*

He felt weaker as his head cleared, realising that some time must have passed. Catherine lay on the bed in much the same position as he'd seen her earlier. There was a spot of blood on her white dress, over the left breast. He put his hand on it and noticed that the heart wasn't beating. He had killed her.

In agony he began to caress her stiff.

Meanwhile, Frank was also in agony as Miss Brunner gave his genitals a cruel squeeze. They were in a room on the second floor and Dimitri and Mr. Smiles stood just behind him.

"Look here," said Frank. "I've got to fix myself up."

"Where is the microfilm?" Dimitri gave Mr. Smiles an ironic smile. "Where is the microfilm, eh, Mr. Smiles?"

Mr. Smiles got the joke and laughed.

"This is serious," said Miss Brunner and gave Frank another squeeze.

"I'll tell you as soon as I'm fixed up."

"Mr. Cornelius, we can't allow that. Come along, let's hear where it is."

Mr. Smiles hit Frank clumsily on the face. He got a taste for it and did it several more times. Frank didn't seem to mind.

"Pain doesn't have much effect," Miss Brunner said thoughtfully. "We'll just have to wait and hope he doesn't become too incoherent."

"Look at him slaver!" Dimitri pointed.

Eyes unblinking, Frank wiped his grey mouth. A great shudder brought his body to life. He was then still. After a moment he shuddered again.

**Courtesy of W. Burroughs and J. Colvin.*

"The microfilm is in the strongroom," Frank told them between shudders.

Mr. Smiles smacked his leg. "Of course! We guessed that!"

Dimitri frowned. "So we did."

"Only you can open the strongroom, is that right, Mr. Cornelius?" Miss Brunner sighed rather disappointedly.

"That's right."

"Will you take us there and open the strongroom. Then we will let you go and you can fix yourself up."

"You can go now," she told Frank as he showed her the racks of metal files in the safe. "We'll find what we want."

Frank skipped off, out of the littered room and up the stairs.

"I think I'll just pop after him and check he hasn't got something up his sleeve," Mr. Smiles said.

"We'll be waiting."

Dimitri began to help her lift the files from the safe. When Mr. Smiles had disappeared, Miss Brunner began to stroke Dimitri. "We've done it Dimitri!"

Soon Dimitri had forgotten the boxes and had become totally absorbed in Miss Brunner.

When Mr. Smiles came back he looked upset and said: "I was right. He's left the house and is talking to his guards. Where's Jerry Cornelius?"

"We should have asked him. Silly of me," said Miss Brunner.

"Where's Dimitri?"

"He gave up."

Mr. Smiles looked puzzled. He glanced round the strongroom. On the floor, in a dark corner, was a neatly folded Courrèges suit, a shirt, underpants, socks, shoes, tie, valuables.

"Well, he must have gone for an early morning swim," said Mr. Smiles with a shudder.

It was dawn as Jerry walked down the stairs. On the second floor he found Miss Brunner and Mr. Smiles going through a big metal box-file. They were sitting on the carpet with the file between them studying the papers and microfilm they had removed from it.

"I assumed you were dead," said Miss Brunner. "We're the only survivors I'm afraid."

"Where is Frank?"

"We let him go after he'd opened the strongroom for us. It was a mistake." She looked pettishly at Mr. Smiles. "They aren't here are they?"

Mr. Smiles shook his head. "It doesn't look like it, Miss Brunner. We've been fooled by young Frank. At the rate he was shaking and drooling you'd have thought he was telling the truth."

"What happened to Dimitri?" Jerry looked at Miss Brunner. For a moment, in the dawn-light, he had half mistaken her for the Greek.

"He disappeared," said Mr. Smiles. "After I went to check on Frank. I didn't realise the strength of character of your brother, Mr. Cornelius."

"You shouldn't have let him go." Jerry kicked at the papers.

"You told us we mustn't harm him."

"Did I?"

"I'm not sure he *was* lying," said Miss Brunner to Mr. Smiles. She got up, dusting off her skirt as best she could. "I really think he believed the stuff was in there. Do you think it exists?"

"I was convinced. Convinced. This is a great disappointment. A lot of time, energy and money has been wasted and we're not even likely to survive now."

"Why not?" Jerry asked.

"Outside, Mr. Cornelius, is the remainder of your brother's private army. They have ringed the place and are ready to shoot us. Your brother commands them."

"I must get to a doctor," said Jerry.

"What's the matter?" Miss Brunner's voice was not sympathetic.

"I'm wounded in a couple of places. One in the shoulder—not sure where the other one went in, but I think it must be very bad."

"What about your sister?"

"My sister is dead. I shot her."

"Really, then you must—"

"*I want to live!*" Jerry rushed towards the window and looked out into the cold morning. Men were waiting there,

though Frank could not be seen. The grey bushes seemed made of delicate stone and grey gulls wheeled in a grey sky.

"By Christ I want you to live too!" Miss Brunner grasped him. "Can you think of a way we can all get out?"

"There is a chance." He was speaking calmly. "The main control chamber wasn't destroyed was it?"

"No—perhaps we should have . . ."

"Let's get down there. Come on Smiles."

Jerry sat limply in the chair by the control board. He checked that the power was on first, then he switched on monitors so that they had a view all round the house. He locked the monitors on the armed men who were waiting outside.

His hand reached for another bank of switches and flipped them over. "We'll try the towers," he said. Green red and yellow lights went on above the board. "They're working, anyway." He stared carefully at the monitors. He felt very sick.

"Towers are spinning," he said. "Look."

The armed men were all gaping at the roof. They could not have had any sleep all night, which would help the process. They stood transfixed.

"Get going," Jerry leaned on Smiles. "But once out of the house don't look back or you'll be turned into a pillar of salt."

They helped him up the stairs and cautiously opened the front door.

"How are we going to get down to the boats?" asked Miss Brunner as they helped him round the side of the house towards the cliff edge.

"We'll have to hope the tide hasn't dropped too low," he said. "We'll have to jump."

"It's a long way down and I'm not so sure I can swim." Mr. Smiles slowed his pace.

"You'll have to try," said Miss Brunner.

They got to the edge. Water still washed the cliff. Behind them a strong-minded guard had spotted them. They could tell this by the way his bullets whined past them.

"Are you fit enough, Mr. Cornelius."

"I hope so, Miss Brunner."

They jumped together and fell together towards the sea. Mr. Smiles did not follow them. He looked back, saw the stroboscopes and could not turn away. A smile appeared on his lips. Mr. Smiles died smiling, at the hands of the strong-minded guard.

Jerry, now unaware of who or where he was, felt himself being dragged from the sea. Someone slapped his face.

"You're going to have to drive, I'm afraid, Mr. Cornelius. I can't."

She was kind enough to help him to the cabin. Tired but happy, unconvinced by the reality of his hallucination, he started the boat up and swung her out to sea.

He would never have a memory of what happened until he cried "Catherine!" and woke himself up to find himself in a very comfortable bed.

"If you don't mind me asking," he said politely to the lemon-faced woman in uniform who entered after a while, "where would I be?"

"You are in the Sunnydale Nursing Home, Mr. Cornelius, and you are much better. On the way to recovery they say.

"Are all Nursing Homes called Sunnydale?"

"Most of them I would guess. People must feel confident about the name."

"Am I receiving the very best medical attention? Will there be any complications? When will I be fit enough to leave?"

"You are receiving the very best attention. I don't think there are any complications and you will not leave until you are fit enough which will probably be in several weeks' time."

"You have my word of honour—I shan't leave until I'm fit enough."

"Good. If there are any business matters you need arranging—any relatives?"

"I am a self-employed fratricidal maniac and that answers both points."

The nurse said: "Try getting some sleep."

"I don't need any sleep."

"Patients rarely do. Hospitals order it for their own convenience. Now I've let you into the secret you can do me a favour. Groan, beg for medical details, tell me they're killing you in here, but don't try to make me laugh."

"I wouldn't dream of it." Jerry wondered why he felt so fresh and relaxed considering his guilt. If the nurse were true to her word, he'd have several weeks in which to work it out. He knew he was fighting trauma on all fronts and the long coma had equipped him to do it well.

As best he could, he began putting his mind in order. During the weeks in the hospital all he asked for was a tape-recorder, tapes and an ear-bead so there wouldn't be any trouble when he turned the sound right up in moments of heavy concentration.

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JOSEPH GREEN

DANCE OF THE CATS

THE VERY AUGUST August Dearing sat behind the vast acreage of his shiny desktop and regarded his visitors with a coldly aloof expression. Their application for a permit to land on Epsilon Eridani Two was in one pudgy hand. Silva de Fonseca and Aaron Gunderson waited in silent nervousness. Their previous experience with the conscientious but bureaucratic little undersecretary of the Space Service had proven him a fair but hard-minded man. It was quite possible he would deny their application . . . especially if he had seen the full-length feature they had filmed on Procyon Nine, which was playing in an arthouse just down the street.

"Gentlemen," Dearing's frigid clarity of speech matched his face, "at your express invitation I went to see the short feature made from your filming work on Procyon Nine when it appeared at the U.N. University. I have also, *without* your invitation, attended the somewhat longer version now showing down the street at the Nature Gardens Theatre." An involuntary look of apprehension flitted across both young masculine faces. "There is little resemblance between the feature shown at the university level, with appropriate lectures and explanations concerning the culture of the Golden People, and the somewhat more artistic but highly erotic version released to the general public. I am well aware that you told me the perfect truth on your Procyon application, but nevertheless you deceived me. Now you state a second time that you wish to perform 'cultural studies' on a semi-primitive planet. I have just one question. Do you intend a 'double movie' deal again?"

Silva boiled to his feet, and Aaron's frantic grab for his lean friend's arm came a second late. "Yes!" Silva said

angrily, slapping a hand on Dearing's desktop for emphasis. "We plan to film the dances of the Cat-people for the art-houses as well as a more scholarly work for the universities. May I ask what is *wrong* with making money out of extra-terrestrial ethnology? Of *course* we're going to make two films again if we get our permit!"

Aaron's agonized motions for Silva to calm down were ignored; the stubby partner sat back with an exasperated sigh. Quicksilva's mercurial temper had just blown their project sky-high, but there was little point in remonstrating with him. As counterbalance the slim man possessed a sensitivity, an instinctive understanding of aliens Aaron knew he could not match. You had to take the bitter with the sweet.

"As I said," Dearing went on coldly, ignoring Silva, "I saw both shows. The university film was incredibly dull. I enjoyed the longer arthouse feature immensely."

Silva almost staggered back to his chair, his face sagging in amazement. Aaron could hardly believe his ears. So Dearing was human after all!

The bureaucrat leaned forward, his round face earnest, his controlled voice suddenly warm and friendly. "I think you should know that I have already issued a permit to land on Epsilon Eridani Two, three days ago. It was to Danyel Burkhalter, the son of the famous Interworld Circus owner. He graduated from the same university as yourselves. Do you two know him?"

Aaron shot a troubled glance at Silva. They both knew the man slightly and neither liked him.

"I thought you might. It may interest you to know young Burkhalter's mission is to persuade a troupe of the Cat-dancers to return with him to Earth and join his father's circus. Similar attempts have been made before, and failed. I gave him a permit because," he shrugged rounded shoulders, "his father is a personal friend of the Space Secretary and I had no say in the matter. Now that it's done I'd like someone who is a bit more, ah, responsible, checking on his actions. Verify that he doesn't intimidate or browbeat those people, or lie to them. Would you two young scamps be willing to keep an eye on him while you're there?"

"No, we certainly are *not* willing!" Aaron got to his feet.

"We're going to select another planet instead. Why should we take a chance that Burkalter won't succeed in bringing back a troupe and make our films worthless?"

"Gentlemen," said August Dearing softly, and his voice was so low and pleasant it was almost sweet, "you have absolutely no choice in the matter."

Epsilon Eridani Two, more familiarly known as Cat-and-Dog, was a lovely world, a sister to Earth except for its lower median temperature and small habitable area. It had only one continent comparatively free of snow and ice, a small one near the equator. Even there the temperature was cool by Earthly standards, but had the advantage of never changing. The snow was confined to a series of ruggedly beautiful mountain peaks which formed a backbone down the centre of the rectangular land mass, shading off into forest-covered slopes that eventually lowered to grassy plains running down gently to the icy sea. Two types of humanoid lived there. The Dogs, an industrious and hard-working people, lived in farming communities on the plains. The Cats, who managed without the aid of agriculture, occupied the upper zones of the forest. The bare shoulders and peaks were unoccupied. Basically the Cats formed a rectangle around the straight chain of mountain peaks, while the Dogs occupied a much larger rectangle completely surrounding them on the plains below.

Silva used their multi-f indicator and located Burkalter's ship, but failed to get a response on the radio. Probably, since the first party thought they had the planet to themselves, they had turned it off.

Aaron brought them in to a smooth touchdown not far from Burkalter's yacht. The earlier party had landed near a fair-sized town on the edge of the forest. They undoubtedly had in mind the long hike up to the mountain slopes where the Cat-people dwelt.

The partners climbed down the ladder to the burned ground, to find a reception committee waiting. You could turn off a radio, but the arrival of another ship was hard to ignore.

"Well, I'm damned," said Burkalter with a laugh when Silva reached the ground and turned around. The big man

extended a hand in the ancient custom of Earth, and Silva took it. "Quicksilva and Aaron! The bookworms of U.N.U.! What are you doing here?"

Burkhalter was a tall, handsome former athlete whose muscles were rapidly turning to flab. He had been a swimming star at the U. and one of the most popular men in the class despite his low grades. He had an air of affable friendliness that made him easy to like, but Aaron and Silva had discovered early that it concealed a deep-seated arrogance.

"I'll bet I know," Burkhalter went on as he shook with Aaron. "You two want to film the Cat-dancers, the way you did the Golden Ones on Procyon Nine. I really enjoyed that, by the way. Good as a shot of adrenal-stim." He laughed loudly, and for the first time Aaron felt ashamed of their first effort. It had been made for money, true, but they had felt the finished product contained something more than mere pornography.

Burkhalter introduced them to his companion, Mark Jamison, the crewman who was technically in command of the massive yacht because Burkhalter had failed the pilot's examination. Jamison was a thin-faced man of uncertain antecedents, and Aaron took an instant dislike to him because he almost fawned over his employer. His licence was an excuse, not a command.

Burkhalter glanced toward the forest, where the sun was touching the tops of the trees in a long, slow twilight. "Let's go over to Dad's ship and have a drink for those after-landing nerves. It's too late for you to get started today."

Cat-and-Dog had a 34-hour day, but Burkhalter was right. This one was gone. Aaron looked carefully at the Dog-town, not more than two kilometres away. He could see many people standing by the outermost houses and staring toward the new arrivals, but no one was coming to investigate.

They followed Burkhalter through the sonic barrier-bath in front of one of the yacht's great legs, through a small airlock and into the luxury of a lift. It whisked them, two at a time, 80 metres off the ground, to a combination lounge-dining room. Aaron relaxed in a form-fit chair with a sigh of pleasure, and watched Burkhalter punch for drinks. The big ship had a robochef, and evidently it had been programmed for more than just food. Burkhalter served his guests himself,

stiff cocktails made with a base of the fabulously expensive *maquella*, the drinks in Ganymedian crystal glasses of striking beauty.

Only space-struck idiots or desperate men went into space, but if you just *had* to go, Aaeron reflected, this was the way to travel. Of course Danyel Burkalter had always lived in first-class style. He had been that way in college, when he sent a secretary to attend his lectures and takes notes while he flew small parties to the Caribbean for four-day weekends of fun and games on the beaches. Aaron and Silva had never been invited along.

Silva interrupted the small talk to ask if Burkalter knew when the next Cat-dance would be held.

"Yes, day after tomorrow. I'll introduce you to the Dog-town mayor in the morning and he'll send a guide with you if you want to start negotiating immediately. But let me warn you that Sinumat, the Cat-chief, is a tough, greedy cookie, and his lovely daughter Tiamat, who is high-priestess and also chief dancer, is tougher and greedier. But beautiful! . . . Man, I tell you! And just enough off-human for sauce."

Aaron threw a fleeting look at Silva and saw that he was studiously bending over his drink. He followed suit. Apparently Burkalter hadn't changed at all. The handsome playboy had been a notoriously successful ladies' man at the university, and his speciality had been the seduction of out-worlders sufficiently humanoid for the feat to be possible. The girls were usually from semi-primitive tribal societies, only vaguely familiar with accepted moral behaviour, and easy prey. Burkalter bragged about each success afterwards, in great length and intimate detail.

Silva abruptly put his drink down, still half-full, and muttered that they had to check out the recorders. Aaron hastily drained his before following his partner. The fact that Burkalter made him sick also did not hurt the cocktails, and the little scout sported no alcoholic beverages.

The big man saw them to the lift, and if he resented their abrupt departure he gave no sign of it. But then, his friendliness had always been a very professional affair.

"I could learn to dislike that guy," growled Silva as their own unprotected airlock closed behind them.

"It's an easy emotion to acquire," agreed Aaron, and began unstrapping the recorders. The intricate machines and their control units had self-check circuitry—the pressing of a button verified all systems were operable—but they did need to load them and make the delicate lens adjustments required by Cat-and-Dog's peculiar light. Epsilon Eridani was not an easy sun under which to work.

Both men handled the recorders with loving pride. For men of their modest means they were a tremendous investment. The two had cost almost as much as their battered old scout ship, and were the finest equipment available for mobile photography. They were powered by atomic-electric conversion units, flew by means of a gimble-mounted ducted fan, and contained enough film on a single spool for four hours of 20–20,000 cps sound and 3-D visual recording. Each machine was regulated by a light-weight portable control unit. An operator could stand in one spot and send the flying half anywhere the air was thick enough to support it, seeing the views the camera transmitted and recording only when he chose. Both Silva and Aaron had become adept in their use.

BURKHALTER WAS AS good as his word. Not long after first light next morning the three men were walking down the main street of the clean little town toward the home of the mayor. The Dog-people lived in well-built frame houses of a type similar to those found on earth in the sixteenth-century, the residences grouped around the central square on which the business establishments fronted.

Silva studied the early-morning crowd in the streets as they hurried about their various affairs. As he knew from intensive study of the scant literature available these people were completely human and not dog-like at all. They rated a seven on the Grier civilisation scale, in the beginning of the machine age, and though their progress had been slow it had also been steady. There were no dark ages or repressions of knowledge in their history. But they lived on the same planet with the Cat-people, humanoids with definite feline characteristics, and when the first explorers discovered the hard-working plain-dwellers were a subservient race it had

been inevitable some ironic-minded Earthman would call them Dogs.

An odd situation existed here. The numerous Dogs on the fertile plains supported both themselves and the Cats. Huge amounts of food were taken into the mountains daily and left at designated spots. Early explorers had discovered the Dogs lived in abject fear of the Cats, without apparent cause. They were far more civilized, better organized and better armed, but nevertheless fed and clothed the entire Cat population. The two-legged felines hunted meat, apparently more from pleasure than need, and the entire forest was reserved to them. The plain-dwellers raised livestock.

There was no direct contact between the two races. Those early explorers had claimed the Cats communicated with their servants during the frenzy of the dance, apparently by telepathy. The slim, inhumanly graceful felines had complicated and ritualistic dance routes of overwhelming beauty, for which there was no Earthly comparison. Those dances were what Aaron and Silva had travelled over ten light-years to record.

Evidently it was market day. The town square was piled high with food and goods; a large crowd wandered among the stacked articles making purchases. There was a noticeably pleasant, industrious air about these people, bargains being struck with a minimum of haggling. Most of them made way for the Earthmen with a politeness that held no hint of deference.

Silva, the better linguist, handled the negotiations with the mayor. Both partners had taken hypno-types of the two languages on the trip out, but Aaron's never seemed to penetrate as thoroughly as Silva's. They found the mayor, a plump friendly old man, anxious to help in any dealings with the Cats. He agreed to furnish them a guide and sent a runner off immediately to alert Sinumat. To their surprise he refused the vibra-knife they offered in payment. A nice man with whom to do business.

They stopped at the scout long enough to pocket a few concentrates and Burkhalter left them after pleasant good wishes. He sounded quite sincere—but then, Burkhalter always sounded sincere.

The six hour hike into the mountains was sheer pleasure.

It was a clear and beautiful day, the sun burning with a cool light that brought the tops of the nearby mountains startlingly near. The air had the delightfully crisp taste of evergreens, and the path they followed was well-worn and of gentle gradations. They spent the time talking to their guide, a garrulous oldster whose professional job was carrying part of the daily tribute to the Cats. He provided them with a great deal of information they could use in the more scientific of their two films.

There were two Cats waiting at the point where the supplies were delivered. Their Dog escort was to come no further.

Aaron studied the waiting Cat-men with curious eyes. They were far more human than he had anticipated. The major cat-like attributes were pointed ears, sharply slanted and very bright green eyes, and a thick short covering of hair on the head and nape of the neck. Their faces, strangely enough, were hairless, and the trunk and limbs fully human. They were dressed in warm woven garments similar to those worn by the Dogs, obviously a part of the daily tribute. There was an arrogant watchfulness in their manner that he found distasteful, but they were reasonably courteous.

The village was less than a metre further on, and came as a sad surprise. After the neatness, order and symmetry of the Dog-town it seemed a squalid collection of shacks. The houses were built of the same basic materials as the ones on the lowlands but were put together shoddily, with carelessness and poor workmanship. It seemed obvious the material had been supplied by the Dogs but assembled by unskilled Cat labour. The only building with even the rudiments of elegance was the abode of the chief and his priestess daughter.

Sinumat and Tiamat were waiting inside, seated at a rickety table still cluttered by the remnants of their breakfast. They made no effort to rise, but the lean old man did motion for them to be seated.

Silva handled the negotiations, as usual. Aaron watched father and daughter as his partner started with insignificant gifts and slowly but steadily worked up to more expensive items. Sinumat was a thin, sinewy man, as apparently were all Cats, with a fringe of white around the dark fur of his head. He was a handsome man if you did not object to the obvious cat qualities, and comported himself with a certain

grave dignity. Tiamat was beautiful by almost any humanoid's standards. She was as tall as Silva, with very high cheekbones in a sleek face of almost sinister loveliness. The pointed ears stood sharply erect, the black velvet of her fur accented the whiteness of her clear skin, the close-fitting clothes she wore hugged a figure that would have won nude beauty competitions on Earth. She was a trifle slim for Aaron's taste, but that was the prevailing mode these days.

Sinumat drove a hard bargain, and though he seemed perfectly agreeable to the basic idea of letting recorders watch their famous dances he wanted to be highly paid. Evidently having another race furnish your needs for untold centuries bred greediness in a chief. After some hard sweating Silva finally made an offer the chief seemed disposed to accept, and for the first time Tiamat entered the negotiations, in a very direct fashion. "It is not enough," she said coldly.

Aaron saw Silva's face turn red, but for once the taller partner managed to hold his temper. He resumed the negotiations, and in a few minutes was speaking primarily to Tiamat. Sinumat ruled in name only. Aaron's interest quickened when he realised the priestess was demanding power tools instead of personal luxuries, tools which would be far more useful to the tribe than herself. But these people did not actually need tools because they did little real work.

He was distracted from his thoughts by the realization Silva was about to yield to Tiamat's exorbitant demands. "Ask if they are going to let a dance troupe go to Earth with Burkalter," Aaron said quickly in English. "If they are I don't see how we can go any higher."

Silva put the question somewhat bluntly and the response was electric. Sinumat leaped to his feet, obviously angry, and in ringing tones declared that under no circumstances would their only dance group leave the village, not for any amount of trade goods. To even mention the proposal of the big fat Earthman was an insult.

Satisfied, Silva made a blanket offer of all power tools they possessed and the luxuries already agreed on. Tiamat promptly accepted for both of them.

The details of delivering the goods to the Dogs for transporting to the village were settled, and the partners left. Back at the scout they separated, Silva taking a recorder

into Dog-town for a detailed study of the friendly people, Aaron sending his high for terrain shots and moving toward the forest. The shorter man was careful with his coverage. Audiences back on Earth were interested in the unusual and beautiful, as their first success proved, and background and the more scientific studies would receive short play in the main film. But the justification they used for landing permits was based on serious scientific work, and they had to return with a film that would receive, if not praise, at least acceptance in academic circles. For the shorter effort which would make the university rounds a firm background was essential.

Next morning they held a brief discussion and made their plans. The telepathic exchanges which were supposed to occur would have to be featured in the serious film, and quite possibly short excerpts of the exotic dances would be of interest to a general audience. The commercial film was cut, spliced and distributed by a professional company on Earth, but it seemed a good gamble. After they had agreed to divide forces Aaron chose odd, Silva punched a random equation on the biobrain computer, and when the answer came up even, Aaron sighed heavily and left on the long hike into the mountains.

Silva walked into the town to discuss the filming of the Dogs receiving telepathic messages with the kindly chief. The reaction to his request was vehement and immediate. The kindly chief gave him a very brief time in which to leave town, and reached for a handy ornamental spear when Silva tried a discreet bribe.

He returned to the ship sorely puzzled but not discouraged. The recorders made only a low whirring sound as they worked, and on infra-red operation no lights were visible. Unless the Dog-people were as sharp-eared as their namesakes he would get his film tonight regardless.

Aaron found the now-familiar path dull walking, but moved along determinedly and reached the Cat village in less than the usual six hours. Once there he ate some concentrates and busied himself taking shots of the village, the forest, the near-by mountain peaks, and the people going about their few daily tasks. He could not help but note the low degree of activity, though it did not seem to stem from

lack of energy. Some children were playing complicated and vigorous games among the nearby trees, and most adults moved with an ease and speed when they tackled small tasks that indicated strength in reserve. Apparently these people did little work because little was required of them.

The recorder attracted its usual curious crowd, but interest quickly died when it did nothing but circle through the air and whir at them. They were not aware of the candid shots they were furnishing Aaron.

It was impossible not to be impressed by the physical grace and beauty of these people. The low gravity and their lean frames gave them a bouncy, spring walk that seemed completely effortless, and their outdoor life supplied plenty of exercise. Their intelligence was equally obvious but held back by lack of application. They were basically parasites, and parasites are not required to think. Nevertheless they were a very interesting race, and quite capable in some areas.

The graceful Cat-people ate twice a day, in midmorning and midafternoon, and after the second meal Aaron spotted a party equipped with hunting spears preparing to leave the village. He requested, and received, permission to accompany them. The leader of the hunting party treated him with the customary polite aloofness but did not seem unfriendly.

The trip was a revelation. All the men were eager scouts and excellent hunters. Their spears, apparently made by the Dog-people, were short light shafts with a streamlined rubberoid cup at one end. The spear fitted inside an air-tight wooden box and was propelled by air pressure built up with a simple handpump. The rubber cup slid along a smooth groove, building up terrific speed, and the spear left the box at high velocity. They had an effective range of close to a hundred metres, and except for the slowness of reloading made excellent weapons. But the Dogs were already familiar with gunpowder, and had crude rifles of far greater range. The Cat's mastery of the spear in no way explained their puzzling domination of the lowland race.

The forest abounded with edible game, most of it small. They soon had all the village could eat before it spoiled and the leader stopped the hunt. From what Aaron saw they could have easily killed a few for the Dogs without depleting the game supply; but that idea had never occurred to them.

IT WAS GROWING dark when the hunting party reached the village again, and four fires were lighted at the corners of the central compound. A fairly elaborate orchestra, featuring at least three woodwinds and several types of drums, was preparing to play. The festivities were about to begin.

"Greetings, short Earthman," said a cool voice, and Aaron turned to gaze upwards into the aloofly beautiful features of Tiamat.

"And to you, princess," he replied formally, finding her undoubted beauty disturbing despite the fact he disliked her.

"You will soon see that which only a few of your countrymen have witnessed. Our dances are ageless, reaching further into the past than the memory of the oldest of the oldest, and there is nothing in the universe to match them. And," her slanted eyes drew back even further, "we enjoy them greatly, for reasons I doubt you will fully understand."

Aaron looked a polite inquiry, but Tiamat laughed and declined to elaborate. Instead she strode to the centre of the rough square and suddenly and dramatically raised her arms. The drums struck a long, sustained beat, and people began gathering from everywhere. The ground around the square was soon crowded with sitting figures; more dancers joined Tiamat in the centre. Within five minutes the entire population seemed to be present, with one major exception. Not a child was in sight.

Aaron felt a warning of disaster. If this dance turned into a sexual orgy . . . he could film and use such material on a audience of scientists, but the guardians of public morality would never let it be shown in the arthouses. And that was where the money waited.

He raised the recorder to about four metres, touched the 'lock position' switch, and began recording on infra red. A moment later Tiamat started to dance, and the others slowly fell into her rhythm.

The first part was a simple, almost childish routine, and Tiamat walked through it mechanically. When the drumbeat quickened she became more lively, and in a slow and sinuous strip-tease divested herself of garments. It was quite cool on these mountain slopes but she was active enough to stay warm. When she was completely nude Aaron abandoned the recorder's small televiewer and stared with fascinated eyes

at the full-size woman. Her body was completely human, very slim but tendon-strong, lovely without being dainty or overly feminine. In the bright but flickering light she became a normal and very desirable woman, the faint signs of the cat lost or hidden in the shadows. But she moved with a subtle, effortless grace no fully human woman could match, and even the elementary steps she was doing were a joy to see.

The audience had been rhythmically clapping as the dancers shed clothes, but when the last performer was nude—and Aaron retained enough objectivity to note they were about evenly divided by sex—the sound stopped. The dancers came to a halt. The drums rolled out another long beat, and when it ended the woodwinds sang a low and mournful afterthought. Tiamat suddenly dipped, pirouetted and sprang to one side, arms spread wide as she circled the area inside the fires. The other dancers fell into line behind her, dipping, bobbing, turning in elaborate motions of hands and head, feet and fingers. The dancers seemed to have almost perfect control over their bodies, able to command each individual finger or toe. All motions were studiously graceful, and though there was a definite erotic element in the movements and poses they were not unduly sensual. Aaron began to breathe easier. Unless this degenerated markedly their film was going to be clean enough to show Aunt Martha in London.

It suddenly dawned on him that he had not checked the recorder for several minutes. He found it still well focused catching Tiamat and the entire group from the best possible angle. He realized, as he turned back to watch the dance directly, that he had become slightly drowsy before breaking away. He must be more tired than he had thought.

The music had faded steadily as the dance progressed, and now the drums died away and the other instruments softened until they were only a light background. Tiamat stopped dancing and stood in the centre, small breasts heaving, and began to chant.

"Oh my people!

"I sing the song of our people!

"I sing the song of the lean ones, the tall ones, the hunters of game!

"I sing of love and death, of death and hate, of hate and triumph, of triumph and my people."

Behind her the dancers continued the elaborate steps and movements of the original dance, but now that there was no lead it seemed a smoother, less obtrusive performance. The ear was held by the voice of Tiamat, but the eye took in both her motionless figure and the moving forms behind her.

"Heed my voice, Oh people; hear my song, Oh people; hear me!"

"Follow my lead, Oh people; follow my steps, Oh people; follow!"

"Go where I lead you, people; go where I bid you; people, go!"

"Follow my voice, Oh people; go where it bids you, people; go!"

The strong, sing-song chant went on and on, and Aaron found his will growing numb, his senses subtly and poisonously sleepy though his eyes remained fully open and glued on Tiamat. When he finally realized he was being hypnotized the knowledge came too late. He could not break the spell.

It had to be something very different from hypnosis as he knew it on Earth. He was fully conscious and in control of his mind, but could not shut the monotonous voice out of his consciousness or close his eyes to Tiamat and her dancers.

His senses seemed to be growing in strength, spreading tenuous fingers throughout the fire-lit square, heedless of the part of his mind that frantically tried to recall them. The music had faded completely and he was conscious only of the voice of Tiamat, grown to trumpet proportions:

"Hear me, people!"

"We journey, people!"

"We travel, people!"

"We fly as the birds fly, love as the birds love!"

"Fly, my people; fly, my people; fly!"

And the clearing faded before his eyes, dimmed to a shadowy kaleidoscope of fiery colour and darkest shadow, began to spin slowly as he nodded forward, his head coming to rest on his knees. In his mind the voice of the priestess continued to beat, louder now, drowning out all other sounds, drowning out the universe:

"Fly, my people! Follow, my people! Fly, my people! Fly!"

And Aaron flew.

Silva sat at ease in the scout, the control unit resting comfortably in Aaron's vacant chair, watching the Dogtown with eyes growing wide in wonder. The recorder's infra-red lights showed dozens of people stopping in their tracks and falling to the ground, where they writhed and jerked in what seemed to be epileptic fits. Everyone not affected hurried inside a house and left the sufferers alone.

Nothing more happened for several minutes. Silva, after the spasmodic movements began to grow monotonous, decided to run a check. He turned off the recorder and lowered the unit to housetop height, then went searching for uncurtained windows. From what he saw through them the same random percentage which had been struck in the streets were affected in their homes. About one out of every three persons in town was writhing under this strange compulsion. If this was the telepathic contact with the Cats he had been awaiting it was unlike any extrasensory communication on record. And if it went on every few nights, as the frequency of the Cat-dances indicated . . . it raised his respect for the industrious Dog-people even higher. This was a large handicap in time and energy, and these people were making good progress in spite of it.

Peeping through windows might be immoral, but Silva started filming again. It became obvious, after moving from house to house, that only adults or adolescents were affected, and it was customary to leave the stricken person to jerk and twitch in privacy.

The spasmodic fits gradually quieted. Some individuals seemed to pass into a normal sleep and others awoke. Watchmen began to appear among the people in the streets and shake the sleeping ones. Silva took full coverage of the awakening, but he was actually very disappointed. There hadn't been the slightest physical sign that these people were in communication with the Cats, and the film footage he had just taken was going to be neither revelatory nor attractive. It might interest the scientists if they had some definite proof that mental contact was taking place, but otherwise it meant nothing.

Silva turned off the camera and started the recorder toward the scout.

"Follow, my people! Fly, my people! Follow, my people! Follow!"

And Aaron followed. The voice led him into a shadowland, a formless, shapeless darkness without substance or sanity, where he saw without eyes and heard without ears. He was rushing through blackness and void, himself a shadow and a nothing, trailing a voice that filled the world with sound:

"Follow, my people! I lead you, my people! Follow!"

There were specks of white in his dim and distant sky, and a wavering golden glow, like diffused moonlight, in the air around him. He was floating somewhere between the tops of dark trees and the brightness of heaven, and moving with the speed of the blowing wind through a deep valley hidden among the stars. Dimly he sensed behind him the tops of mountains, ahead the flatness of the lowlands. And steadily the powerful voice called, and there was no resisting it:

"We'll eat, my people! Drink, my people! Feast!"

"Take love, my people! Pleasure, my people! Feast, on pleasure and love!"

"Take joy, my people! Take pleasure, my people!"

"Take, my people! Take!"

His surroundings had grown more and more tangible as he flew, and now Aaron had enough perception to realize he was high in the air and descending swiftly toward dimly visible buildings on the ground. The pattern looked vaguely familiar; a distant twinge of memory said he had seen this same formation two days ago, when landing the scout. The memory faded. He became aware of an odd and disturbing hunger, a sensual need of woman, of exotic food, of a new and nameless desire for an experience equally new and strange. He had not known this hunger existed within him, or that it could be fed. He only knew it had been awakened to life—by the beautiful, compelling voice that still rang in his mental ears:

"Eat, Oh travellers! Drink, Oh travellers! Feast, Oh travellers! Feast!"

The ground was rushing upward. He sensed the entire tribe of Cat-people diving with him. Somewhere ahead he felt the woman who led them reach the ground, and abruptly the sense of communion with her was gone. He was alone,

but it did not matter now. Close beneath him in the darkness, like flickering rosined torches in ancestral castle halls, bright concentrations of *life-force—energy—pleasure* awaited his coming. As he drew close he realized the lights were Dog-people. His headlong rush slowed as he neared them and he exerted some not-understood means of control and veered away from the first one, a male, moved on past the next, an old woman, passed the next, already taken by a companion, and reached a young girl, nubile, strong, and sullenly acquiescent. He entered her quickly, and possession had something of the sensual pleasure of sex, the taste of ambrosia, the pounding excitement of triumph in battle. The total emotional experience was the most pleasing he had ever known, and he ignored the dimly sensed resentment in his captive. He revelled in this new and unexplored wonderland without conscious feeling, without thought, without consideration.

After a long long time, a feeling of hours which had taken only minutes, the sharpness of the sensations began to fade, the sense of the girl's presence to grow stronger. Reluctantly, as though rousing from drugged sleep, he was made to realize she was struggling, pushing gently but insistently against the intruder who shared her body and mind. She was asking if he had drunk enough, eaten enough, at the fountain and garden of her life-force. He heard the dimly transmitted message and knew he could ignore it if he wished, but that the main pleasure was past. He began to withdraw. When he was outside her body again, one with the night, he had a singing sensation of well-being, of happiness, strength, vigour. He did not know what to do with this new strength, or if he wished to do anything at all. Without control on his part, and now without a voice leading the way, he felt himself rising slowly off the ground, moving higher and faster through this valley of shadow, toward the low shoulder of the mountain where his body waited. He knew that he could resist this pull if he wished, prolong his stay outside the bounds of mundane reality. Some instinct urged him not to do so. And seconds later he lost his dim consciousness of time and place, of movement and moonlight, and passed into dreamless sleep.

Aaron was first conscious of being unbearably cold. The fires had burned down, letting the chill of the night creep

into the bodies sprawled around the square. He stirred and sat erect, dangerously chilled but still filled to overflowing with stolen energy. He looked around. On all sides, scattered like carelessly placed Rip van Winkles, the hardier Cats still slumbered, evidently immune to the cold. He knew, with an instinct as certain as knowledge, that many of them were still in the bodies of their reluctant hosts, and those who had consented to leave were roaming somewhere among the stars. They would stay away until the last of their stolen strength, the warmth and ecstasy taken from unwilling donors, had mouldered and died.

Aaron suddenly shuddered and bounced to his feet. The shivering that convulsed his shoulders was not from the cold. Rape! That was what it had been, a poisonous and more subtle kind than he had known existed, but nevertheless a rape. He had invaded the very soul of that girl, in a grotesque and horrible fashion. It had been a damnably pleasure-filled experience for him, and to a lesser extent for her, but it had been all take on his side and give on the girl's. She had seemed to know it was useless to resist and contented herself with asking him to leave only after he had gorged himself on her young strength. But at least he knew now how the numerically weak Cats held the stronger Dogs in easy bondage. That ability to take could as easily have been used to tear and hurt. The Dogs had no way of knowing how limited the Cats were in their ability to use the power they possessed.

It was extrasensory perception of some sort, of course. Many scientists had long claimed all humans possessed dormant esp powers. These slim and beautiful mountain dwellers, by some unknown blend of hypnotism and group mental power, had increased their telepathic strength until even an inexperienced stranger like himself was caught and dragged along. And now he remembered that in psychology class in college he had discovered he was unusually receptive to hypnotism, knew why Tiamat had made that odd remark about doubting he would understand the joy they derived from their dances. She had not expected him to be affected.

He looked around for the priestess and saw to his surprise that she and all her troupe were gone. With a start he remembered his recorder, and quickly checked the control box. The flying unit was still overhead, whirring softly, but

to his disappointment he found it focused on the sky. When he checked the 'lock position' switch, it was off. He had apparently changed it before blacking out, though he had no memory of touching it. Not that it mattered. No material as hypnotic as the Cat-dances could be shown to the general public. This time they were working for the universities.

He shut off the camera and sound, wondering what he should do now. He was far too full of the Dog-girl's stolen vitality to think of sleeping, and very curious as to where Tiamat and her group had gone. He wondered around the shabby village for a few minutes, looking into dark doorways with a handlight, but saw only hairy-headed children, soundly sleeping. The dancers were not in the village. After he became convinced of this he raised the recorder to just above tree-top height and started it along the trail to the lowlands. He followed at a fast walk. This planet had many carnivores, but he was well armed and had both his handlight and the far-seeing eye of the recorder. He would be safe enough.

SILVA WAS INTENTLY studying a tape of the intelligent jellyfish on Tau Ceti Twenty when his attention was caught by the appearance of bright lights in the right viewscreen. The viewer was focused on the trail to the mountains and the lights had just emerged from the trees.

Since the natives possessed no powerlights it had to be Danyel and his crew. He had not seen them since well before dark but had assumed they were in their ship. Curious, Silva turned to the recorder control, still in Aaron's chair, and activated the flying unit. He opened both airlock doors with the master switch on the pilot's console and sent the recorder floating out and toward the lights, keeping it high enough its whirring would not be heard. It was still set for infra-red work and when it reached the Earthmen its invisible light revealed a surprising sight. Danyel's men were pulling a long train of cargo-carriers—ground-effect machines without horizontal propulsion whose air-spilling design kept them close to the ground regardless of load—and unconscious Cat-people were draped over their flat tops. Despite the chill of the night all the captives were nude, and Silva knew without having seen the dances that these must be the performers. This was confirmed when he saw one Cat-woman,

fully clothed, walking at the head of the procession with Burkhalter. It was Tiamat.

Now that they were within a few hundred metres of safety the hurrying Earthmen started to relax. There was some low-voiced talk among the crewmen and a noticeable easing of the fast pace. Silva saw Danyel slip a powerful arm around Tiamat's waist, and she did not reject the familiarity.

He had seen enough. Silva brought the recorder back to the scout at full speed. This was obviously a case of forcible removal for all but Tiamat, and once on Earth these primitives' lack of knowledge and the influence of Danyel's father would keep them captive forever. Any 'exotic' film footage Aaron had taken could be duplicated every day by Interworld Circus. He had to do something.

The obvious answer was to sabotage the big yacht until he could get help from the Dogs and free the Cats. But any damage would have to be temporary, since they couldn't leave the other party stranded here indefinitely. Silva racked his brain as he stowed the flying unit and scrambled down the ladder. He found the yacht's airlock closed but not sealed, and the external control worked. As the outer door swung open an easy answer dawned. He took the lift to the pilot's compartment. An access panel let him get his head and one arm insider the main control console, and by feeling over its face with his free hand he located the underside of the master airlock switch. The cable leading away from it was of the cannonplug type. He broke the lockwire and hastily unscrewed the connector. It was the work of a minute to bend two of the gold-plated pins on the male plug until they touched each other. He replaced the connector and managed to engage two threads before the bent pins stopped it. After the lockwire was twisted back in place the plug looked normal. When Silva pulled his head out of the console and got to his feet a red malfunction light was burning sullenly under the airlock control.

So far so good, but time was running dangerously short. He cursed the slowness of the lift on the way to the ground, and when he stepped outside the approaching lights were very close. He heard someone yell that the airlock was open as he ran under the ship and out on the opposite side, keeping one leg between himself and the Earthmen. He looked back

when he was safely out of range of their lights and saw them searching the nearby area.

He could not find a night-watchman. Silva pounded through the streets, his breath beginning to fail, until he reached the open square and the nearby house of the mayor. He beat on the door and a moment later was facing a sleepy and angry old man.

Silva hastily explained the situation and saw sleep vanish from the mayor's face. Several of his children appeared as Silva finished, and were immediately sent to rouse the neighbours. In a very short time over a hundred Dogs, armed with crude rifles, were following Silva and the mayor toward the two spaceships, and behind them the rest of the town was stirring to life. He had been right in thinking the Dog's fervent desire to please the Cats, so evident in the major when they had spoken to him the day before, would compel them to help his stop this kidnapping.

Even though they were armed with arc-rifles Burkalter and his crew could not fight the entire Dog population. Only Space Patrol ships were allowed outside-mounted armament. Since they could not close the airlock there was little the Earthmen could do except huddle in the living quarters and defend the lift and emergency exit ladder while they tried to find the malfunction he had left them.

Silva's guess was confirmed when they reached the ship's base and found it deserted. As he stood in front of the open airlock, trying to recover his breath, a wondering voice said, "What in the *hell* is going on here?"

Silva turned to Aaron with a gasp of relief. He brought his stocky partner up to date with the fewest possible words, and in turn Aaron quickly told him about being hypnotized for several hours and waking to find the dancers gone and his recorder off focus. "So obviously Burkalter saw me lying there and turned the recorder away so it wouldn't catch them loading on the dancers," finished Aaron.

"According to that we shouldn't have lost anything. The dance would have been over and the performers just lying there when Burkalter arrived. But let's worry about it later. Right now we've got to get inside, and fast. If they find that connector I tinkered with they can close the hatch and lift off."

For answer Aaron stepped into the airlock and on through

it to the lift well. The lift itself was locked in the upper closing off the entrance into the body of the ship. No one could get past it, but neither could the defenders see into the well. And there was an emergency ladder built into one side-wall.

Aaron started up the ladder and Silva followed, puzzled. When Aaron stopped his puzzlement vanished. There was a service door leading into the leg from the elevator well, and the observant Aaron had apparently noticed it during their first visit to Burkalter. And from inside the leg would be other service doors into the ship proper.

This one was small, mechanically installed and not airtight. Aaron worked hastily at the hand-turned wingnuts. A moment later he was inside, crawling rapidly along the service catwalk around the huge air cylinder that positioned the leg. The entrance to the engine-room was easy to find, and of the powered airtight type. It was the work of a minute too short across the crystal solenoid on its motor, and the door slowly swung inward. Luck was with them; the engine-room was deserted.

Aaron led the way to the control-room, which was also hermetically sealed but had a regular pushbutton on the engine-room side. He glanced over his shoulder. Silva was immediately on his heels, a borrowed rifle at the ready, and a line of Dogs stood tensely behind him . . . Aaron touched the button.

The crewmen working on the control console—they had the front and side panels off—looked up in amazement. Burkalter, the only man with a weapon in his belt, spun around and drew it. He hesitated when Silva covered him with the rifle, obviously afraid to fire and equally loath to surrender. When several more Dogs crowded into the room and rifles menaced every Earthman the decision was made for Burkalter. Jamison, standing just beyond, seized his employer's hand and pushed the arc-pistol's barrel downward.

The electric sense of impending violence seemed to discharge. Silva felt a surge of relief. He did not want to shoot a fellow Earthman, even one of Burkalter's arrogant breed.

The crewmen slowly got to their feet, making no attempt to reach the weapons stacked against the wall. As Aaron

stepped across the room to collect them the door to the sleeping quarters opened and Tiamat hurried inside. She took in the changed situation in a brief glance, stopped, and slowly folded her arms across her bosom. Her face was as haughtily disdainful as ever.

The Cat-priestess was wearing a long knife at her belt, and as he relieved her of it Aaron could not resist asking, "Why did you betray your people, Tiamat? Are you so greedy that you would sell them into slavery on Earth?"

The beautiful lean cat-face seemed to grow even colder, but she answered him. "It is you, not I, who have betrayed the Cat-people." As Aaron stared in honest puzzlement she turned away, and suddenly the contempt and pride were gone; he saw unshed tears in her eyes. Her voice was very low and she was not speaking to him when she muttered, "It would have been a start, at least a little start . . ."

Aaron looked up from his work. The dancers, with Tiamat in their centre, had entered the right viewscreen and would soon be out of sight among the trees. He had no way of knowing what her punishment would be, but considering her position it was unlikely to be heavy.

"The power supply is ready," said Silva, pushing a compact metal box toward Aaron. "Good for a flat ten Eryears and guaranteed to fall below critical capacity shortly thereafter."

"Fine," said Aaron absently, and finished soldering a final connection. He lifted the transmitting unit and studied it carefully, then fitted it in its place in the larger metal box in front of him, and added the power supply. Connecting the power leads was the work of a minute, and since the device had no switches it began to operate. It made no sound or motion but grew perceptibly warm to the touch.

Silva was already at the multi-f indicator, adjusting it. As the range grew higher a noticeable hum appeared, and when he said "Ten to the twenty-second," the hum was clear and strong.

"That should do it," said Aaron with satisfaction. "No one knows quite what psi force is, but we know what frequencies it operates on. I declare this planet telepathically mute."

A thunder of rockets cut him off. They both turned to the

left viewer, aimed at the yacht, and watched it lift. Clean and true it clawed its way into the sky, and in a few seconds passed through a cold grey cloud and was gone.

"His father will probably be able to keep him off Prisoner's Planet, but he won't get another landing permit after we report him," said Silva cheerfully. Aaron, busy struggling into a spacesuit, did not answer. The small unit broadcast on a line-of-sight basis and for maximum effectiveness it had to be placed on the highest mountain on the small continent. Silva had punched out another random equation and Aaron had lost again and had to deliver it. He was beginning to wonder if Silva knew some method of insuring the answer also came up odd or even as he chose. He would have to remember to handle the computer next time.

Aaron used the scout's tiny two-man lifeboat for the trip. When he returned Silva had the scout ready for lift-off. He checked on the multi-f indicator again and verified the distorter was working perfectly before strapping himself in the pilot's chair. Five minutes later they were out of the atmosphere and on a course for home, the biobrain computer humming quietly to itself as it held the ship under steady acceleration. There was little for them to do for the next three months, and then only the brief job of reversing the ship for three months of deceleration. Space travel was the most monotonous known means of transportation. The pilot spent perhaps an hour in lifting off, midway turn, and landing. The rest of the time constant accel or decel provided their gravity, and also an immense boredom.

"I suppose if we told dear old Dearing that we had interfered with a native culture again he'd blacklist us as well as Burkalter," said Silva musingly. "We included the bit of stopping the dream machine that was killing the Golden Ones in our first show, but I think it would be smart to omit mentioning our little distorter in this one. The university circuit won't make us any money, but we can comfort ourselves in our declining years by remembering we stopped the parasitism of the Cats and freed the Dogs to lead their own lives."

"Is that how you see it? That we freed the Dogs?"

"Why, of course! What else is there to see?"

A slow, lazy smile of immense satisfaction spread over

Aaron's broad face. For once he, dull, stolid Aaron, by the grace of Silva's skill with the computer and the accident of overhearing Tiamat talking to herself, had arrived at an understanding of a complex situation that had escaped his usually more perceptive partner.

Silva saw the look of smugness and was momentarily bewildered. "I'll bet you think Tiamat turned her dancers over to Burkalter because of his bribes, too," Aaron went on.

The fact that he had missed something important began to reach Silva. He remembered that he had wondered at the time of the negotiations why Tiamat chose power tools for the tribe instead of luxuries for herself, but the oddity had been forgotten in the rush of events afterwards.

"Remember what we learned about the Cats' organization during our studies on the way here? That each village stands completely alone, has nothing to do with the others? Every Dog-town supports a Cat-village, and though the Dogs are organized into a single government with Cats, with all wants provided for, have never felt the need. Sinumat told us he would never let the dancers leave because they were the only group capable of producing the hypnotic effect and he knew it would take years to train another. With Tiamat and her assistants gone the village would have lost its vampiric power and its hold over the Dogs. They would have been thrown on their own resources, have to start using a little of the enormous potential they possess. I told you how competent they were when doing something they enjoyed, such as hunting."

A wry grin twisted Silva's mouth. "I begin to see. The Cats would have to start hunting for the Dogs, trading meat and skins for manufactured goods. They would become producers themselves, and by the time new dancers were ready they might have realized being parasites was destroying them as a people—which it surely was—and given it up voluntarily. Tiamat wanted to make them stand on their own feet at least long enough to find out whether or not they liked it."

"Exactly. As she said, it would have been a start. I think Tiamat will be a very happy priestess when she discovers we've done the job for her, and for the whole planet instead of just her little village. I also predict that the future progress of the Cats will be much faster than that of the Dogs, and

if we come back a hundred years from now we'll find the two races somewhere near equal. And that, my boy, is what we *really* accomplished."

Silva laughed, and reached across the short space to clap his partner on the shoulder. His turn would come.

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Applebee's Journal, October 30th, 1731. "On Imagination."



DAVID NEWTON

TO POSSESS IN REALITY

THE UNICORN GRAZED peacefully in the late afternoon light. The emerald grass of the meadow lay smoother than a billiard table. As the animal ranged head-down for impossible pasturage its ivory hooves made no marks upon the baize. A broad sweep carried the meadow down to the moat, deep and dark, filled with monstrous fishes, viridic pike and great golden carp. From the waters of the profound moat a castle rose, up and up in the soft light towers, fountaining, quivering into turrets; the white marble structure burst into the clouds. Upon the whole citadel there were no signs of battle, no

scars or tar-streaks, no cannon pocks. The stupendous edifice lay untouched by wars.

From the towers silken banners flew the insignia of the Lord and the heraldic colours of the Emperor of the Realm. Upon the highest balcony the Lord regarded his landscape, looking over the meadows on all sides to the forest of giant trees and beyond the villages nestling in the folding foothills to the encircling wall of the world. He was smoking from a golden cigarette holder and sipping wine from a jade cup decorated with diamond butterflies.

At the foot of the Western Tower a Prince stood. His clothes and long auburn hair gilded by the sunset. In his left hand, a lute. At the top of the tower stood a flaxen-haired Princess smiling down upon his singing to the lute.

In the soft air birdsong and the susurrations of bees intermingled. The air was still and the surface of the moat lay unruffled, reflecting the elusively untroubled cumuli. As the sun settled towards the giant pines the whole place was drenched with beauty. Upon his lute strung with heartstrings the Prince played to his love in the dusk. The Lord leaned upon the balcony-rail and dreamed of his own youth, listening to the song which promised his daughter felicity. Far, far away beyond the icewhite mountains a dragon roared . . . And yet not a dragon's roar! A spaceship slid down to the meadow upon a pillar of noisy sunlight. In the dead silence which followed the cutting of the engines the cracking of the rocket-tubes as they cooled was clearly audible on the highest coign of the Castle. The Prince, without a second's hesitation, gallantly leapt into the unicorn's saddle and cantered across to the ship. The Lord watched his future son-in-law's courage with pride, his handwringing daughter with love, awe, fear, hope and despair.

As the unicorn crossed the shrivelled grass-circle to the tail vanes of the vessel its milky paws inked with ash.

Inside the spaceship the pilot, Xavier, unstrapped himself, scratched fiercely under one armpit, rubbed at his shoulder where the webbing had pulled too hard, took a cheroot out of his case, lit it, dragged on it, sighed thankfully—and relaxed.

In the Twenty-Sixth Century after the Crucifixion the Earth received the unwelcome attentions of an alien aggressor

from somewhere in the region of Arcturus. Xavier, a crack pilot and astrogator, was drafted out of a civilian spaceline into the Battle Fleet as a salvager. It was a rough, tough job and though Xavier was a rough, tough man he did not know quite why he loved the work as much as he did. A few hours before he had made this touchdown he had been preparing to return to Earth with a shattered cruiser found on a distant battlefield. He had repaired her as well as he had been able to, welded the gaps in her hull, searched for survivors with little hope and less success, and begun programming the Jump back. One bank of the Hyper-Computer had been holed by Spaceflak and he had had to root through stores for hours before he found the spares he needed to repair it. When he had finished fixing it he was not sure that the right bits were back in the right places. He was, he excused himself, a pilot not a radiomech. As he was making the final linkups an arc of alien ships blipped on the radar screen. He shot into the pilot's couch, strapped himself tight, held his breath, cut in the drive, poured in the juices, crossed his fingers and then thumbed the red button. The ship ducked out of spacetime like a bursting bubble. The aliens threw up their antennae in annoyance. Xavier, hidden in limbo grinned, kissed his rabbit's-foot, jabbed the green button, and blim! blam! he was back in one piece. The stars looked very, very strange, he had not fixed the Jump all *that* well, but, he reflected, though he was lost he was alive and safe. His neck-hair prickled when he remembered the green sickle of aliens in the radar. He fixed the spectroscope on to a nice water-and-air planet and slid in to land to pick up food and water, re-check the hull, take an astrochart, give the works a rest and then head for home sweet home.

As he lay watching the mountains through the ports and puffing on his cheroot, congratulating himself on his luck, a tap-tapping came at the door. Flicking the viewer round he saw the Prince, the unicorn, the wedding-cake Castle. Over the speaker came the Prince's musical voice: "Are you friend or foe? Answer please or absent yourself from these domains!" He yelled back "Friend!" slipped a lasergun into his belt, stubbed the cheroot, pinched himself hard, and then slid the airlock open. As he walked down the steps trying to smile the Prince slid from the unicorn's back and walked

towards him holding out his right hand. Xavier had the curious feeling that he had seen him somewhere before.

At dinner Xavier was still trying to add it all up. Neither the Prince nor the Princess, nor the Lord at the head of the vast table, seemed in the least surprised at his appearance. They sat on either side of him and made polite conversation as they would have done to any other stranger sheltered for the night. He nibbled venison and scrunched chicken anyway, making up for a year's vitamin mush and pep pills. The Princess poured some more wine for him into a crystal goblet and as she did so her hand brushed his. She blushed so slightly that only Xavier caught it in the candlelight. He abandoned astrometaphysics and turned his attention to her. She was a girl about eighteen years old. Her beauty was indescribable. Xavier's mouth watered.

When the Prince got a few glasses of wine inside himself he called for his lute and began warbling lovesongs at the Princess and making dove's eyes. The girl cast *her* eyes down to the silk tablecloth. Xavier risked pressing her knee with his and felt an exquisite pressure in return. The Lord smiled benignly and patted his stomach in time to the song. Turning to Xavier he favoured him with a remark:

"Love, which fills the hearts of all creatures in spring, is perfected in the gentle hearts of noble youths and maidens. It is a salve to my fear of dotage to witness this lovematch knitted together with song."

"Indeed," assented Xavier, "Indeed." He was thinking how very well the Princess was concealing her boredom with this foppish Prince who was stewing in his own bliss.

Night drew on apace and the banquet closed. Xavier thanked his hosts and the Lord offered him a chamber for the evening which he accepted. He was too tired to return to the ship. As in a dream he found himself following a servant through labyrinthine passageways to a room high in a turret. He fell at once into a downy bed and dreamt of the shy Princess.

In the morning he awoke fresh and happy. From the window he could see the yellow sun floating above the skyline. On the lawns far below peacocks were shaking dew from their plumage lest it tarnish. A lark tumbled in the crisp air. Milkmaids ambled into the meadows singing merrily. Dash-

ing rosewater over himself from the bowl in the window-niche he washed quickly, made himself neat, and rang for breakfast. Inside two minutes it came; honey, fresh brown and white bread, strawberries and cherries, milk, wine, and cold cyder. Also several delicacies he could not name. On a salver a thin book of verse and a single rose. The servant bowed and left silently. Xavier lay in bed till noon, and as the sun rose higher the chamber filled with scents from the orchards and rosegardens. Doves in the cedars came to the boil and purred thickly. Far away the nosecone of his ship glittered inexplicably in the dawn.

After breakfast he greeted his hosts who greeted him in return with all show of delight. Thanking them for their kindness he took his leave of them, kissed the hand of the lovely Princess, and strolled across the drawbridge to look over the ship and take his bearings. As he rounded the Western Tower he saw the Prince tuning his lute ready for the day's wooing.

The inside of the vessel was filled with bouquets. Xavier was touched at the noble gesture. He sat down at the scanners and pulled out a cheroot. It would be a long, hard job to settle his position with the ramshackle computer he had. He set to work. Hours later he was worried. The scanners could find no beams of any kind. The InterGalactic beam-grid extended to the limits of the known universe. Space and time were curved and the spacetime sphere was completely gridded with New-Mercator coordinates. It was as impossible to lose the grid as for a sailing ship to sail off the edge of the world! Xavier stripped down the scanners and put them together again. It took him five cheroots. He tried to check his position, again without success. He was as lost as a mariner whose polestar had fallen out of the sky. Well, with the scanners gone subtly haywire the next thing to do would be to try for a star fix. He shot an antigravscope up above the atmosphere and fed the data into the robot-astrogator which began to draw a map with its metal fingers. After two hours he had a finished map of the hemisphere. In the sky of Faryland there was a single constellation—repeated *ad infinitum*! It could mean only one thing, of course . . .

The HyperDrive is a funny beast. If the drive-controls get damaged in battle, or if an amateur engineer like Xavier

messes around inside them, anything is liable to happen; but one thing in particular. The quantum leap will not be through *one* level of spacetime but from a macrocosmic to a microcosmic one; even from macrocosmic to megalomacrocosmic, where the stars and planets of our systems from the atoms of a higher reality. Nor was it an amazing thing, usually. All that the pilot needed to do was to find out which element he had leapt into, get a slide rule out, sweat for a bit and then feed the astral map into the computer and programme it for an element Jump. Xavier figured that he had microjumped—inside an organic molecule. The ‘constellations’ were chains of RNA. Now, Ribonucleic Acid is the basic memory encoder of the human brain. Xavier saw that he had jumped his ship inside one of the memory cells of his own brain! His mind reeled with chinese-boxes and facing mirrors. The memory he had snicked into was no mere fragment of muscular or nervous information, it was a paradisial memory, a wonder deep in his childhood, a composite of all the tales of Castles and Ogres he had ever heard or read. Well, at least he was in the Once-upon-time sweet beginning and nowhere near the dragonfilled and moralizing middle of *this* particular tale.

Once he recovered from the weirdness of his thoughts he began to programme the ship for an RNA macrocosmic Jump, pumping the machine full of information, and cleaning up the bouquets. Then he heard the tap-tapping at the door. The singsong voice of the Prince drifted over the viewer: “Are you friend or foe? Answer please or absent yourself from these domains!”

Xavier’s fingers frose over the typeinput and sweat broke out on his forehead. Outside the sun was setting. He had been in Fairyland a day. The memory was repeating its modified form. “Friend!” he sang out and went down the ladder. He shook hands with the Prince as if for the first time and invited him into the ship.

Xavier had to get rid of him as soon as he could. If he blasted off with him outside it would have killed him and played hell with his own psyche. Memory rules our lives, casually remove a link and sanity’s kingdom falls. The Prince sat down in the second pilot’s couch and made polite conversation. Xavier handed him a tumbler-full of Scotch and

waited until he passed out; Scotch is strong stuff for an infantile memory! The Prince had to be off the ship when the ship got offworld so Xavier shot him full of sedative, carried him out of range of the tailrockets and laid him to sleep it off in a bed of daisies. By the time he came round he would be orbiting Terra.

Xavier was through programming the Jump and actually had his hands on the take-off lever when there was a second tap-tapping on the hull. Opening the lock he saw the Princess teetering on the ladder looking all woebegone and tearful, turning a lace handkerchief in her beautiful fingers. She had got worried when her wooer stayed away from the tower's-foot so long.

"I seek my love chivalrous stranger," she lisped.

"Come *in*," said Xavier.

The Princess did and sat where the Prince had sat. Xavier gave her a double gin, and sat back. The girl drank a little and chattered away gaily. She poured out memories of her lover's deeds, his sonnets and his tourneys, his slaying of dragons and harpies. Watching her flush with pleasure as she talked Xavier's heart rolled over like a dolphin. He moved over on to the couch and urged her to tell him more. She opened her mouth to talk about gryphons and he dropped the last of the liquor into her tumbler. Then he kissed her. The effect of a kiss on a Fairyland virgin was cataclysmic. She flowed into his arms soft as kitten. Xavier dimmed the lights with one hand and laid the couch back into its take-off position with the other. He modified his infantile memory a little more . . .

An hour or so later Xavier was showing the dewy-eyed Princess around the control cabin, scotch in fist, when he thought he heard the sound of marching feet. The Prince had shaken off the sedative, gone back to his tower, missed his maiden, questioned the servants and headed for the phallic vessel where he imagined his true-love raped by the foul and ungrateful spaceman.

"O! Freud!" gasped Xavier. "The Irate Prince! How could I have forgotten *that* cliché?"

Through the viewers he saw the Prince approaching at the head of an immense body of bowmen, infantry and cavalry.

He was still about two miles away but even at that distance his face in the zoom made the Princess, who was peering over Xavier's shoulder, turn pale as snow:

"O! Xavier," she wailed. "Save me! Save me! If he catches us he will drag me apart alive with wild horses, and you he will burn in boiling oil and throw to the vultures!"

Xavier grinned drunkenly and patted her arm. The stuff he had read as a kid! He slapped her down into the seat next to him and strapped her in. He told her to breath deep and not be afraid of the blast. Then he slammed on the rockets and blammed into space. In the meadow the Prince fumed and fretted, his plumes singed by the tailflames. Shaking a jewelled gauntlet at the vanishing ship he silently vowed revenge.

Once in orbit Xavier put the brakes on then steadied the ship for the Jump. The Princess fainted looking prettier than ever after take-off. He hit the Hyperswitch and came back into familiar heavens with Earth on the starboard bow. Xavier smiled contentedly and lit a cheroot knowing he had it made; a blushing bride and a million credits worth of salvaged cruiser home and dry. The ship ran on to Earthport cool as a trout.

The Press, of course, blew in and out on the day of the landing like dead leaves, but the ballyhoo soon died. Xavier was dragged over the coals by the Fleet for importing an alien in time of war, but they had to accept his explanation in the end. When they saw the luscious, unearthly beauty he had slipped back from his unconscious with they really could not blame him for what he had done—played a straight flush.

During her first year on Earth the Princess grew accustomed to the new life and digested Xavier's explanation of it. She made him a good wife and cooked fine lark's-tongue pies and peacock paté. Xavier built up a nice life for them both on the commission from the cruiser and in the back-pay he collected when the aliens were whipped home with their antennae between their mandibles. The Princess and the Starship Pilot were about to write the 'And so they lived happily ever after' to it all when Xavier's work started to go to pieces. He crashed a tanker on Pluto and narrowly escaped. He lost himself in a timewarp for weeks and came out

starving—minus a cargo of californium. He misnavigated for a whole fleet of freighters which disappeared into the nothingness of nothingness. His superiors checked on him.

One dull morning in November 2506 Xavier drifted into the Company Psychotelepath's parlour and slumped into an easy chair. He was smoking a cheroot. The psycho was smoking one too.

"Morning Xavier and 'Snap!' " he said.

"Spare me the wit!" moaned Xavier.

"Ah! I know, I know," murmured the fatherly psycho. Spread out in front of him was Xavier's record. He puffed in silence then began to recite his formal piece:

"The Company is concerned about your present crack-up as you are well aware. The tests have shown that you are in perfectly good physical condition, reflexes and eyesight perfect, IQ actually up a point or two over last year. They naturally assume that your troubles were psychological," he paused, "or criminal."

To all this Xavier said nothing at all. The psycho came and sat on the edge of the desk and asked him about the Pluto crash and Xavier repeated what he had gone over and over in his own mind. His voice was mechanical, bored: "Planetfall calls for a few routine jobs. No brain work really. Just call base to OK the beam and contact the landing bay to warn them you are coming in. The only important thing is manual correction of the landing. There's still manual control on the freighters for the atmospheric rundown, that's why it still takes so long to train pilots. When they are through college they have to be able to handle an ore ship like a feather and drop it in the bay as neatly as an archer hitting bullseye, every time. It's easier and safer to train a pilot than to load a freighter up with millions of credits worth of robot landing gear which would get knocked to scrap in no time the handling heavy duty vessels get."

"I was coming in on Pluto as sweet as you like when my mind drifted off. My concentration went, I think I was thinking about my wife or something. I lost control, of course, panicked and lit out for the lifeboat. The strange thing was I did not really care at all. Two or three years ago I would have been disgusted with myself, ashamed at messing such a delicate thing as manual touchdown. It did not seem

important any more. I hung around in the life-boat for a while until the rescue ship came. I got through fifty cheroots. That's all."

The psycho asked him to relax and sighed a little, Then he read his mind. Then he woke him up and handed him a cheroot. He was grinning.

"You're no criminal, Xavier, at least," he said.

"Mmm?" replied Xavier pulling on the cheroot.

The psycho rolled him off the couch and into a chair. Then *he* lay down on the couch and blew smoke-rings at the ceiling. He crossed his hands on his paunch and began to orate:

"The force which drives men to the stars and into the gulfs of space, Xavier, is neither power-lust nor money-lust nor sublimated libido."

The sentence had a nice rumble to it:

"What draws men out is Mystery. The Unknown which *must* be better and more beautiful than the acrid circle of known worlds. Hope! That the grass will be lusher and greener, that the crock of gold will be bursting with coin at the foot of the rainbow . . ."

He coughed apologetically at these rather vulgar images, Ruminative smokerings rose as he continued:

"Men chase their visions through the abysses. We have built a galactic Empire and fought thousands of interstellar wars to nourish our dream. In this way, with inhuman forces in our human grasp we try to sow the seed which will yield us dreams to crop in reality. And yet you, Xavier, you have lost your fragment of immortality in finding it. You have bathed in your mirage, achieved the impossible, exorcised the miraculous light, denuded the heavens of all seduction; you are, therefore, purposeless. Without pride in your trade and love in your heart, you, a man once heroic in space, are now not even efficient."

The psycho waved his cheroot in Xavier's direction:

"You, Xavier, with a Princess hyperjacked, forgive the neogologism, out of your memory into the cold, cold realities of 2500 AD, are without a dream. The Princess of your childhood, the Muse of your adolescence, sits at home and watches solido."

He abstracted himself a second or so:

"... doing some nice crochet-work and worrying about you

worrying about your job going to pieces in your once capable hands. Yet, why should you *want* to put it all together again, you, the man who first risked the Disintegrator-Drives? What *reason* have you to move out of the sweep of her perfect eyes? What worlds have *you* to conquer? What, beneath the myriad suns of the universe is newer than her?"

The psycho smiles at his own rhetoric, which was his only indulgence and did something to relieve the boredom of verbal symbolism. He concluded quietly:

"You must choose, Xavier; retire and stay at home stewing in bliss; or, return her, somewhere, anywhere, and go back to your old life a whole man. That will be Fifty Credits."

Xavier gave him a cheroot as well and wished him good-day.

Xavier flew home in his gravboat across the city, mind and heart seething like boiling milk; overflowing with anger, love, despair, fear, hope and awe. The logic which the psycho had exposed in his own brain seemed inescapable and vile at the same time. The Power to move Heaven and Earth, The Search for the Beloved, The Journey to the City of Truth, these images had disintegrated for him when he kissed the Princess. For others mirages never became real. Others were never disenchanted. Only he, Xavier, knew the full bitterness of such insight; taste of ashes older than the stars!, gall of the Tree of Knowledge! The Princess' place was on the tower, behind the mirror, over the hill, always beyond reach yet filling life with significance. He fumed and fretted in his little cockpit; another worried commuter.

Halfway across the park the 'boat froze in mid-air. He tried to gun it but could not. Around him—fish frozen in a stream—amazed commuters gazed up into the skies of a glassy November which were filling with million upon million upon million of Starships. The heavens roared!

The Fleet hovered several thousands of feet up in the vitreous grey. No attacks could be launched against them through the force-field which paralyzed Earthport. The flagship broke away and fell slowly, levelled off, and touched down in the park so very neatly that Xavier's professional eye could not but applaud the skill of the pilot; the grass on the fairway was barely disturbed. Xavier drew in his breath

sharply when he saw the insignia on the hull, he could almost have sworn he had seen it somewhere before.

An oval lock in the side of the superb vessel glided back and a golden ramp rolled out. Down it trotted a Prince riding a unicorn. In his right hand he held a needle-laser; in his left—a lute.

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ROBERT CHEETHAM

A MIND OF MY OWN

ON SOCIAL EVENINGS I sometimes sit and watch Juline, surrounded by laughing, husky Travellers; always lovely, always in demand, but still with a sadness in her eyes that is gradually fading. She hasn't favoured any of them yet, but all would gladly die for her. She is a dream, and this dream lived for me through the heart and hands of Mike.

Mike, like the rest, loved Juline but the difference lay in her loving him as well. For some reason she picked him from the whole godlike bunch and gave herself completely. I could feel it when they made love, straining, tearing to get closer to one another both physically and spiritually. I would lie on my bed while they were in Mike's room close by. My body would feel the mounting upsurge of passion, the smoothness and warmth of her under Mike's hands, and eventually the shared ecstasy of an emotional climax that always left me exhausted and drained. Mike and Juline loved with a freedom and complete lack of inhibition that is rare in human relationships these days.

Of course, empathy between Mike and me was just about perfect. That's what made us one of the best exploration teams on Earth. As his Sensitive, I always remained a part of him after we had teleported his magnificent physique across interstellar space. Contact was constant and I served him as a second pair of eyes, although my body and a large part of my mind remained on Earth. As a man he could handle himself in almost any situation. Like all Travellers, he had the trained body and reflexes of a super-athlete. A Traveller must have—or he doesn't last long on an airless heavy-gravity planet, sometimes carrying a hundred and twenty pounds of compressed air and equipment, prey to

anything that might attack him. I could often feel the tremendous physical strain he underwent in one-and-a-half G's, climbing the almost sheer face of an alien cliff.

I also knew the pride he had in his bodily perfection and the lightning brain that controlled it.

Travellers, as you know, are much freer than their Sensitives. They are masculine, extrovert and pretty well lead lives of their own; loving, laughing and weeping by their own direction. We Sensitives, on the other hand, with our empathetic brains have little time for private emotions. We're bound to the stronger impulses of our opposite numbers and almost live their lives at second hand. That's why Travellers and their Sensitives go almost everywhere together. That's why on social occasions when Travellers are milling about, talking, drinking and flirting, the Sensitives are seen lining the walls like so many upright dolls, faces reacting to whatever emotion their Travellers are feeling at the moment.

I remember once when Gorley's Traveller became drunk at a social. The big man staggered around for a while, then decided it was time to go to bed. He set a weaving course for the door and Gorley rose to help him. After two steps he fell flat on his face, completely inebriated. The poor little Sensitive, who hadn't had a drink all evening, was plastered. He'd have his Traveller's hangover next morning too. Mike thought it a huge joke and bellowed with laughter.

Of course, so did I.

Mike and I were a good team in those days. It never took us long during duty spells to get into that state of complete rapport that enabled us to transport him and a quantity of equipment across hundreds of light years in milliseconds. Naturally he couldn't stay out for more than a few hours at a time because, although he was a complete mental and physical unit, my own body remained in a semi-comatose state at the Earth Centre, my mind forming the tenuous thread that linked him to this planet.

Mike could do most of my thinking and feeling for me, but he couldn't feed me second hand nor perform various natural bodily functions for me. So, every eight hours a Traveller would have to return and give his Sensitive a chance to eat and rest, comparatively free from his mind's influence.

When Juline came to work at the Centre, every man in the place attempted to court her. She was a tall, graceful girl with glistening red-gold hair. Her eyes, as I remembered so often through Mike's eyes, were a brilliant green, and her heart laughed easily along with her lovely mouth. She had every free man at her feet.

And she chose Mike, surrendering to him quickly and wholly.

We—that is—Mike was stunned by his good fortune, and at first treated her with the deference one has for a fragile ornament. This did not last long, however, as his natural virility gained the upper hand and his attitude became more one of the dominating male. This was a good thing, for Juline had been too wild and free all her life, used to worship and supplication. She needed a strong arm, not only to support her, but also to direct her. Under this new treatment Juline flowered, and it became apparent to the rest of the field that she was very much Mike's woman. They retired from the contest while the lovers grew closer.

For the first time in my life I was desperately in love.

When the tragedy happened I was entirely cleared of blame. It was, they said, one of the hazards of a Traveller's occupation. We were exploring a completely new and unknown planet in the Sirius sector. The atmosphere was clear and there was a fair percentage of oxygen, although not enough to sustain human life. There was plant growth, and that meant there might be animal life forms as well.

Mike arrived well armed, although somewhat hampered by an oxygen suit and two large tanks of air. We had been covering flat, featureless terrain for about two hours when we came to ground strewn with rough outcroppings of alien rock. The rocks were about twice as high as Mike and seemed a grey-green in the uncertain light. Suddenly, as Mike bent down to examine a patch of unusual vegetation, my mind's eye caught a flicker of movement behind a boulder near by. I dismissed it without telegraphing a warning to Mike—and that was the beginning of tragedy. As Mike straightened up, a huge form moved into the open. He had just enough time to turn and see it and, even in the explosion of terror that followed, his magnificent reflexes were bringing up the hand that held his gun.

It was too late. Just before I broke the thread that bound me to Mike, and him to Earth, I felt the great claws of the beast tear through the fabric of his suit, and the first stinging prick as they began to rip his flesh.

I was unconscious for three days, I am told. Days of delirium, screaming and slowly-fading madness; but I am still alive while Mike is gone. Killed by something on a planet in Sirius. If I had not released him when I did, I would have died with him.

I'm still in love with Juline. It's about all there is left because it was the strongest emotion Mike had before he died. Even that isn't much any more and it doesn't upset me to watch the other Travellers courting her anew. That will soon die, and when it does, I'll die too. Sensitives always do when their Travellers go because, in effect, they're deprived of their souls.

One thing does worry occasionally, though. Why didn't I warn Mike when I saw that movement behind the rock? I always had in the past and yet—something prevented me that last time. Was I subconsciously jealous of Mike? His love for Juline was virile and possessive, therefore so was mine.

Did I want him to be killed?

Of course not! Not even in my most private dreams would an exquisite creature like Juline ever love a wizened, egg-bald, four foot tall Sensitive like me!

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COLIN R. FRY

ERNIE

PHALLUS, I'M GLAD I've given up that job. You know something? It made me almost ashamed of being human.

Mind you, I wouldn't have taken it in the first place if I hadn't gambled myself bankrupt at the New Philadelphia on Mars; but there, I'm not complaining about my own habits. That's a rocket man for you: away among the stars for months at a time, with no money (and nothing to spend it on, so what the hell?) then back at Base, a millionaire for a few weeks. Or a few days. Or, as in my case, a few hours. How can you gamble a fortune away in one evening? I still don't know. I think I must have been drunk.

When I was cleaned out, I started reaching for the memo pad to write IOUs: but the croup stopped me.

"That's against the rules of the house, sir," he said. "IOUs are more trouble than they're worth, to us as well as you." I swore at him, and the beautiful ladies who were circling round the table like birds of prey, fingernails like talons glinting in the soft light, murmured and giggled among themselves.

"You'd better leave, sir," said the croupier.

"Like the little man who makes sunspots I'm leaving," I said; and I just sat there in my hired dickey suit with my cravat hanging down limply in two straight lines (I don't know how it got like that); and then the two mugs hove into view.

They were big, but so was I; and they were in good condition, but I'd been fighting devil fish on Theta; and it was a fair fight. I got one of them with my left foot and the other with the old one-two; and then some more mugs came up from in front and in back and at the side; and I was thrown

out into the road. I lay there looking up at the stars through the plastic dome, and then this man with a moustache came and helped me to my feet.

"You're tough," he said.

"Yeah," I said.

"You're broke," he said.

"Yeah," I said.

"I'll give you a job," he said.

"O.K.," I said.

The job was overseer at this guy's etherium mines on Luna, and as soon as I was sober I began wondering what I'd let myself in for.

It was only a couple of days' ride from Mars. I went in the guy's private ferry—his name was Allen—with a couple of the weirdest weirdies I had, up to then, met. They were both dwarves, and one of them had a hunched back. They were going to work in the mines too, but they were going to be doing the digging. Their hands were really rough and horny. One of them was called Pete and the other, the one with the hunched back, Ernie.

"You've let yourselves in for something, you guys," I said to them once on the voyage over.

"Ah, don't you threaten me," said Pete; and Ernie said, "I know why I'm going. I've got a very good reason for going. I'm going to kill somebody."

Hell, I thought, this is going to be fun if I'm supposed to oversee a crowd of crazy dwarves.

"You kill anybody," I said, "and you'll stand a very good chance of being killed yourself." I knew that much about etherium mines.

"Who cares?" said Ernie. His voice was deep and guttural. "I'll get the scummy slob if it's the last thing I do."

"Who?" I said, thinking at least I might be able to forestall something by keeping Ernie and his enemy apart.

"Never mind," Ernie said, and shut up. Maybe he thought he'd said too much, because he didn't say another word to me for the rest of the trip.

"Don't you try and stop him, mister," said Pete; his voice was squeaky, almost creaky. "You just let Ernie fight his own battles. He's got to learn some day."

Ernie sniffed, and rubbed his nose on the back of his hand. "You're right, Pete," he said. "You're always right."

My quarters were better than I expected, having heard so many tales about etherium mines. There were twenty-three of us, each bunked in a separate room with our own water and air supplies; we could regulate the air as we chose. I turned my oxy content down a bit, and the carbon dioxide slightly up. I'd got used to carbon dioxide on Theta. Maybe it was bad for me, like a drug perhaps; but hell, I liked the tang. I still do.

My thick perspex window looked out on a wide, lonely crater. The moon's not much of a place, really; I hoped I wasn't going to be there for long. All that rock . . .

The workings were on the outside of the crater, burrowing in. There were too many entrances to that place for me to count. Inside, it was like an airlocked rabbit warren.

It must have been making a fortune for Allen.

Once every twelve Earth-hours, a gang of us would lope down to the mine-mouths, pick up our teams from the men's block, and move in. I'll admit I was protected by the standard Allen Company spacesuit, with lead-weighted boots and emergency oxy supply just in case; but I never liked those holes in the rock.

You know why it had to be those dwarves to do the digging? Because they weren't normal dwarves. I mean, not just short people. They were mutants. Allen owned a rehabilitation camp. These were descendants of soldiers who had been exposed to too much cosmic radiation.

They were almost like real people, except they had regressed to a kind of childlike state: and I don't mean innocent, believe me. They were a constant source of wonder to me. One of the other overseers, Lanigan, said they were bloody nearly chimpanzees; and the doctor, who had to be present in accordance with the law, but who never did much except play cards, drink tiffin and go and see women (I think women) in Moon City said to me once that they were only one or two degrees removed from apes. They'd been prevented from using certain parts of their brains, he said. Their bodies, apart from the stunted growth and occasional deformities, which their work in the mines did not help to cure, were O.K.

They could get into cracks and crevices where you or I would hesitate to send a dachshund after a rabbit. And they had tough hides. They could stand up to scrapings against those rough, sharp rocks that would give you or me septic cuts. They just got scratched. Eventually, of course, they got a lot of scratches and some of them did go septic. Then the doctor certified them as incurable, and the welfare officer killed them humanely in the gas chamber just outside the camp. There was even a priest who used to come in from Moon City and hear their last confessions, if he was wanted. Allen had that place really well equipped.

It was their eyes that usually went first, though; that accounted for a lot of the casualties we had. It accounted for Ernie's accident.

He had weak eyes to start with. I thought he was a fool to let himself get roped into this game; but maybe he came from Allen's people farm and couldn't help it.

They drilled the etherium out of the rock in chunks first of all, tunnelling deeper and farther into and under the crater, exploding oxy grenades to give themselves some kind of atmosphere as they opened up new sections—those dwarves could stand the thinnest of atmospheres, as long as there was a bit of oxy around somewhere. They drilled the stuff out with big electric power drills that took two dwarves to operate them. Then the chunks of rock came back via chain gangs and conveyor belts to central grottoes, at the junction of several tunnels. In the grottoes, where we overseers spent most of our time, because the tunnels were really only fit for dwarves, the dwarf-women would sort out the rock, process it in stovelike gadgets and send the strained etherium to the top for grading. Other gangs used the "dead" rock to fill up worked-out tunnels. Tunnels were worked out quickly: we were always getting deeper.

Ernie was assigned to one of my digging parties. He worked doggedly and well until his eyes began to go, which was about two Earth-months after he and I both arrived. Then one day I was in one of the grottoes when a red light on the cave-wall flashed and Pete and another dwarf carried him in, bleeding from a head wound.

"Get a doctor!" Pete kept saying. "Get a doctor!"

"You know as well as I do we don't send for the doctor while there's a chance he'll recover," I said.

"And you know as well as I do he'll die as sure as God made little atoms if you don't send for a doctor!" Peter said. What could I do? I couldn't go against Company policy.

"What the shit do you think I am?" I bawled at him. "I'm not a goddamned fairy godmother! And I won't have my workers cheeking their overseer! Get back to work or I'll flog you under Section 42 of the Company Rules!"

He spat at me but he went.

I didn't know how Ernie hurt his head. I presumed he had had a fall in one of the tunnels. It wasn't holding up production; the rest of the men on his gang were working normally—I checked with the radar scanner—so I just got Ernie cleared out of the grotto, where his groans were distracting the women, and put some new life into the women with my whip. Yes, I had a whip. So did the other overseers. That's another story about the mines that's true.

Next development was a call I got on my visiphone during a rest period. It was from Tollemacher, the mine manager.

"Get down to the men's block straight away," he said.

"What is it?" I said.

"One of your workers is making trouble," he said. "He may have to be put down."

It was difficult to sort out one kind of trouble from another in the men's block, which was a stinking chaos not by any means confined to men. There were five storeys, none of the floors divided into rooms, a lot of straw and foam rubber matting lying around for bedding, defecation shafts leading down to the incinerator. On the third floor I found Ernie and Pete. Amazing how those two stuck together. Ernie was shambling around in a little clearing among the bodies, with the crowd around him shouting and laughing. He made poking movements with his fists, waved his arms around, turned and turned, trying to hit an opponent who was not there. He looked like he was playing blind man's buff without a blindfold. He was sobbing.

Pete was yelling at the crowd: "Ya pack of stinking slobs! Call yaselves people? People are better people than you are! How do ya think our soldier daddies'd like the way ya behavin'!"

to my buddy? He's my buddy and damn me to hell if I don't stick by him, ya rotten slob!"

"O.K., O.K.," I said, "Break it up, guys. Break it up. Pete. PETE SHUT UP."

"You lousy slob," he yelled at me, and spat at my face. The spittle travelled only as far as my space-suited chest. I smacked his head with my open hand, which dazed him for a minute or two. While he lay on the floor shaking his head, I grabbed hold of Ernie. Different tactics were required here.

"Ernie," I said, "this is your overseer. Your enemy's gone. No good hitting at him, because he isn't there."

Ernie calmed down. He didn't move. He just stood there, sobbing. I could see he was practically blind. My duty was plain.

Section 10 of Company Rules: Overseers are not philanthropists. Their duties are purely functional, viz.: to get as much work as possible out of every worker in their charge. As soon as a worker becomes unfit for work, he will be discharged if his contract is up, or destroyed if it is not.

Ernie's contract was not up, and he could not work without his eyes. He would be a danger to the rest of his gang.

I carried out a few tests, like passing my hands in front of his eyes. It was no good.

The other dwarves knew what I was doing, and they knew why I was doing it. They were quiet. I think some of them held their breath. Pete was still shaking his head, rubbing his temples; he wasn't quite aware of what was going on. It was odd, the way that part of the third floor had grown quiet in a few minutes like that. There was still shouting and laughing and fighting and loving going on at the other end of the floor; and every few seconds there was a bump and a swish as someone used a defecation shaft.

I called the doctor's quarters on my wrist-radio: he was out.

"He went to Moon City three days ago," said his secretary.

I told her to let me know when he came back. Then I called the welfare officer.

A couple of days later, the doctor came back. He spent a whole rest period in his room, sobering up with the aid of his secretary. He was just about sober by the time I and my digging party came out of the tunnels after our shift, and

his secretary called me on my wrist-radio. I told her he was needed to certify one of my men as incurably unfit.

Then I called the roll. Pete was missing. He must have slipped away while I was on the radio.

"O.K. men," I said. "Where'd he go?"

They wouldn't tell me, so I marched them over to the men's block and worked them over with my whip, one at a time. Would you believe it, not one of them would say a word? I almost began to admire the creatures. But it was stupid. He hadn't got a chance. There were scanners mounted on towers all around the crater.

"He's not going to get away," I said. "This keeping quiet isn't going to do either him or you any good. In fact, it's going to make life bad for you, because you're going straight back to work without a rest period. I'm going to have a rest period, but you're not. I'm then going to come and take charge of you for twelve more Earth-hours, so you'll have been working an Earth-day and a half without any rest, just because of this stupid misplaced loyalty. The Company's the one you ought to be loyal to, and don't you forget it."

Lanigan was just beginning his shift; he took my dwarves back with his party.

Then I got a call from the doctor.

"Your hunchback's gone," he said.

"Gone?" I said, shouting at my wrist. "What the hell do you mean, gone? He's in the sanitarium block, room next to the gas chamber. There's guards there."

"One of the other dwarves said he had to take him to me for examination, and they let him out," the doctor said.

I started loping across the rocks toward the san. block outside the camp, and then my radio picked up the howl of a burglar siren. A minitank rolled over the ground toward the explosive store, flashing its red warning light. I turned and loped after it. I called the driver.

"What's up?" I said.

"Somebody just stole some dynamite," he said.

"Got a line on 'em?" I said.

"There's two of 'em," he said. "Making toward the management block."

Then he accelerated and left me behind. I joined a squad of camp police who were going after the two thieves.

We picked them up outside Tollemacher's office. Pete and another dwarf. Not Ernie.

"Where's Ernie?" I said.

Pete told me to go and do something obscene to myself.

"That won't get you anywhere," I said.

"I should worry," said Pete.

I asked him: "Was it you that got Ernie out the san. block?"

"No," he said. "How would I have got from there to the bang-bang store in this time? Use your head." He spat.

Then I got a call from Lanigan.

"I just spotted your hunchback in the tunnels," he said.

I went down to the mine-mouths with some of the police. We crawled through the tunnels to the grotto where Lanigan was working.

What a sight.

The gangs were simply refusing to work. More than that, half a dozen of the men had turned on Lanigan, kicking and punching at his legs and stomach. As I crawled out into the grotto, I saw two of them grab his flailing whip-arm; then they pulled him down on the ground and sat on him.

A shriek drew my attention to the mouth of one of the tunnels. There was a crowd of dwarf-women there, some of them screaming, some of them giggling at something that was happening inside the tunnel. I went over and pulled them away, while a couple of policemen pulled the dwarves off Lanigan. I knelt down and crawled just inside the tunnel.

A couple of phosphor lamps threw a green light on the two bodies that threshed about, interlocked in a savage frenzy, at the tunnel's end. I saw them roll over and over, and I saw a knife catch the green light. One of the bodies was Ernie: his face was hidden, but I saw the hump clearly. The other was one of Lanigan's dwarves—a big fellow as dwarves go, full of muscle, with a shock of black hair that looked emerald in the phosphor glow and that fell this way and that as he tussled with Ernie. They were crying and grunting as each tried to get an advantage over the other. Suddenly they rolled sideways and disappeared.

I crawled down the tunnel and saw that they had slipped into a narrow passage—too narrow for me to squeeze down. I squinted after them into the darkness, shining my suit's flashlight down the passage.

They had separated. I saw the black-haired dwarf standing upright, holding the knife; he blinked and glared round as the flashlight caught his eyes. I shone it on his feet, and saw that he was standing on a precipice. The tunnel ended in a pit.

I picked out Ernie then, creeping down toward the pit, hugging the wall, bare-handed, groping his blind way along the tunnel.

"Here, Ernie, here," grunted the black-haired dwarf; and he kept on grunting out: "Here. Here. Here," while Ernie changed course toward his voice. The big dwarf braced himself firmly against the rock wall.

I saw Ernie's hunched shape lurch toward him—I saw the knife flash out—I saw the big dwarf push Ernie sideways—I saw the two silhouettes interlocked for a second at the edge of the pit—then I saw the hunched little shape drop out of sight.

There was practically no atmosphere left in that shaft: if he screamed, the sound didn't carry.

When the other dwarf squeezed out of the side-tunnel, I confiscated the knife. He spent a few days in the guard block, then he was put to work again. Able-bodied dwarves were at a premium in the Crater.

I never did find out what the grudge-fight was all about. Some woman in it somewhere, I guess.

I left Allen's outfit when my contract ran out. I'm bucking starfreight again now. There's no bloody dwarves in that game.

LOOKING BACK

Langdon Jones



DANDELION WINE by Ray Bradbury has at last appeared in a British paperback version, and is published by Corgi at 3s. 6d. Bradbury has received a lot of unfavourable criticism, even from such balanced sources as my colleague, James Colvin, a great deal of which I think is completely unfounded. In general, Bradbury's critics attack the escapist element in his writing. A glance at a few American sf and fantasy books should be enough to demonstrate that the easiest way of cashing in is to write about the Good Old Days. In the present neurotic state of American society, the drive to ignore the present has been responsible for the popularity of literature that spreads outward, in space or time, away from present day American urban civilisation. The drive to remember the days or places where things were slow, calm ordered and safe, when ethics were a way of choosing between two alternatives, when laws of conduct could be followed simply and correctly, has led to many different things, among them the Western, Steinbeck, The Beverley Hillbillies, Hemingway, and particularly in sf, an obsessive delving into childhood or times even earlier. This tendency is, granted, unhealthy, but at the same time, quite understandable. The trouble is, from the writing point of view, that this tendency is likely to produce badly written stuff, which gets by purely on the overwhelmingly sickly sentimentality and nostalgia it contains. However, the critics of this backward-looking genre are likely—like Mr. Colvin—to be misled into criticising every single work that contains these elements.

Dandelion Wine is sentimental, at times. It is heavily nostalgic, almost all the way through. But at the same time

it is a moving and incredibly evocative piece of work that just cannot be compared with some of the other stuff that uses similar ideas. I agree wholeheartedly that *Dandelion Wine* is escapist, but at the same time, fail to regard this as a fault. As Edgar Pangborn says in *The Trial of Callista Blake*, "‘Escape’ is just another one of those two-for-a-nickel derogatory noises that people use in place of thinking. Why not escape from ugliness toward something better? Escaping doesn’t mean you’ve forgotten the ugliness is there." And the world of Green Town, Illinois, is not a world of smug sweetness. There is horror here too, the horror of the first realisation of the omnipotence of death; the horror of the Lonely One, the maniac who kills young women; the horror of losing touch with close friends; the horror of being old and of suddenly losing the whole of one’s youth. From all accounts, Bradbury’s own childhood was not a thing of long and peaceful summer days, and neither is that of Douglas Spaulding (Bradbury’s middle name is Douglas), the main character of the book.

The book consists of episodes, linked by one or more short passages in much the same way as in *The Silver Locusts* or *The Illustrated Man*. However, in this case, the individual episodes are much more closely linked, the short interludes are more than just explanatory wedges, and the whole is in the complete sense, a novel.

There are, as I have discovered, some very, very literal people in this world. Those who would rather spend their time crabbily counting up the halfpennies of logic whilst ignoring the fluttering riches of meaning, I advise to keep well away from this book and this author. Those who would prefer the transparent but sweaty engineer working frantically on his logical machinery while blue-scaled Venusian lizards batter down the papier-maché door will not feel at home in Green Town with its solid, but distorted perspectives. In parenthesis I would point out how strange it is that this kind of reader will often condemn an author’s work on the grounds of non-realism over some trifling technical ‘error’ that isn’t really an error at all, while the stuff that they are fond of reading is as unreal (in an imaginative sense) as it possibly could be. I would also, in parenthesis, express my astonishment that in the field of imaginative literature, there can be

so many writers completely lacking in any kind of imaginative thought.

So, in *Green Town*, 1928, you will not find the things you expected to find. Leo Auffmann, with his attempt at building a Happiness Machine, does not belong in any town outside of Bradbury's mind. Nor the children, Douglas Spaulding and his brother, Tom, strangely articulate for their ages, and yet, as in the rescue of the Tarot Witch, capable of reasoning in the same way as a young child. You will not find normal actions, normal conversations, for here people are dissected by the mind of Bradbury, and their spilled essence is distilled and bottled, in the same way as the dandelions are crushed and bottled, trapping a single day of that 1928 summer in their amber crystal.

The book starts on the first day of summer, with Douglas standing before his window like a conductor, controlling the movements and the wakening of the town. Then there is the trip to the woods when Douglas realises for the first time, *I'm alive!* Then the first pair of tennis shoes, and then the time when the summer night turns cold for Tom, and he realises that there are no absolute answers to problems and fear. And then on, the Happiness Machine; the old lady who discovered that she would always be old and that she had always been old; the Green Machine, the old ladies' electric runabout that proves a treacherous friend; Elmira Brown with her potions, cobwebs, herbs and superstitions, finally coming to terms with the world by an involuntary physical and psychological honesty; Douglas's burning day of illness; and on, to the end of summer.

Here are all the elements of Bradbury's style; the nostalgic, the beautiful, the grotesque, the horrible; it is as if the essence of Bradbury is bottled here along with the wine.

This is not descriptive writing backed by a powerful intelligence, as one may find in Nabakov; the whole thing is purely on an emotional level, although this is not by any means a fault. Water is very much more thirst-quenching than wine, but although there is water everywhere, people still make dandelion wine.

This, then, is *Dandelion Wine*, one of the best of Bradbury's works to date. If you think that a story isn't worthy of the name unless it's set in space; if you delight in reading of

the snide action and the cynical remark; if you prefer Stravinsky to Brahms; then you'll probably not like this book. Otherwise I urge you to buy it, and take a sip of this curiously heady brew.

Langdon Jones

Also received:

Reefs of Space, Pohl/Williamson (Dobson 15s.)

The Dragon Masters, Vance (Dobson 13s. 6d.)

NO CHARACTERS

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL has long since been Britain's leading contributor to American sf magazines and *Somewhere A Voice* (Dobson 16s.) contains seven stories which represent a fair cross section of Mr. Russell's versatility. The title story, which concerns the survivors of a wrecked space vessel wandering through the alien jungles of a distant planet, is recommended by the author in his introduction as "a tale of disaster that gained no medals." But in fact the story is worthy of more than this simple banner. Although the characters, from First Officer Symes down to the lowly Little Koo, are mere representations of types, little more than cardboard caricatures, the logical carrying through of consequences dependent upon the plot setting make the story one which is well worth reading. This is a novelet which can rank with the best in alien world stories.

The impetus given the collection by this story carries over into the second story, *U-Turn*, which concerns itself with a man's longing for death in a near perfect society, but unfortunately the standard of writing falls considerably in the following stories and it is only at the end of the collection that Mr. Russell really excels.

In the main these are stories of idea, conventional science fiction stories in which the long-term reader will find little to stimulate him, stories in which the characters are completely subservient to the plot. The control of personality, space loneliness, post nuclear devastation and inter-galactic war are all present, as is a cute little conversation piece, *Displaced Person*, which is wholly dependent upon its punch

ending. Undoubtedly the best story of the seven is the last, *I Am Nothing*, which is a brilliant portrayal in compensation, though the change of heart and of character in the dictator, Korman, stretches credulity a little.

Apart from the very worthwhile title story and the excellent *I Am Nothing* one is left with the feeling that while the stories in this collection are decidedly above average, something even better is expected from this author.

R. M. Bennett

Editorial

(Concluded from page 3)

takes three writers, Lan Wright, Donald Malcolm and J. G. Ballard and uses their work to show what is right and what is wrong with the British scene. His criticism is positive and thoughtful and his tendency to make fun of the afflicted quite often has you laughing in spite of yourself. We might point out that we only approve of making fun of the afflicted when the afflicted appear to wish their own afflictions on everyone else. This issue is much more even in standard than the first issue. Anyone who takes a positive attitude towards science fiction should send their four shillings to SFH, Pelham, Priory Road, Sunningdale, Berks, and get their copy while they can. It might also be worth enquiring about back issues of the first number if you have not seen it.

SF HORIZONS is at this stage still concentrating on analysing what is wrong with sf. Brian Aldiss's article indicates that what we shall see in later issues will be some well-detailed suggestions about what can be done to improve the field. Currently it is still the most stimulating magazine of its kind ever to appear in the sf world.

Michael Moorcock

Dr. Peristyle's Column

We meet again, readers, across this battle-scarred page. Only a few of you have been rash enough to send me their tender notes of interrogation; they shall have their reward, here if not Hereafter.

E. Gudgeon, Shirley, Croydon

Do you believe a science fiction convention advances the cause of science fiction?

If there is a cause, then a good convention advances it. The Birmingham convention probably set it back a bit, but the London World Con served several useful purposes. Notably, it aired the name of science fiction in several media, and it developed the feeling for a common interest that has always been strong in sf circles. A cynic leaving the convention with a hangover claimed that the purpose of a convention is to make fans loathe professionals and professionals despise fans, but this is not the whole story. You probably get out of such a meeting what you put into it, whether this is understanding, intellect, friendship, or just beer; so that a convention is a sort of microcosm of the world, with a similar line up of malcontents and cheery types. And although most people grumble about some aspects of the convention ethos (my dislike is the childish idea that staying up late is fun in itself), writers have been known to admit at the end of a session that they are stimulated by contacts made with audience and rivals—stimulated enough to keep churning out their quota for another year.

Betty Pierce, Diss, Norfolk.

All I ask of a story is that it tells a story. Why do writers insist on trying to give me more?

A prize question, and your scribe is floored by it. I suppose the answer is that there are writers who write for the likes of you, madam, but the good ones hope to avoid you. In your

ideal world, publishers would presumably publish only synopses of the stories they received. A true writer's answer to you would be, possibly, that the interest never lies entirely in a story but in the details of how it happened and who it happened to, and also whether what happened had different effects on all concerned. Many writers, too, are as interested in how to tell what happened as in what happened; and they may be the individuals who are more interested in their subject matter than their readers.

E. Lee, Durham.

Do you recognise Anthony Burgess as a science fiction writer?

Certainly, when he is writing science fiction.

Mrs. A. E. Roberts, Twickenham, Middlesex.

I would like to begin my son, aged fourteen, on SF, which I have read on and off for a number of years. Can you recommend a dozen good books?

Readers might like to help Mrs. Roberts. My idea would be to start him on an Edgar Rice Burroughs and a Conan Doyle, together with beginners' sf collections like Doherty's excellent *Aspects of Science Fiction* (same editor has another anthology coming from Nelson) or Aldiss's *Introducing Sf*. He could then graduate to the more boyish sf adventures, either those designed for teenagers, such as Heinlein's or Andre Norton's, or Clarke's early ones like *Sands of Mars* and Clement's *Mission of Gravity*. By then, he might graduate to a subscription to NEW WORLDS.

Send your questions to Dr. Peristyle's column, c/o NWWSF, 87a Ladbroke Grove, W.11.

All correspondence to
The Editor,
NEW WORLDS SF,
87a, Ladbroke Grove,
London, W.11.



Earthworks

Dear Sir,

In his recent review of *Earthworks* by Brian Aldiss, Charles Platt over-states his case by a long way and I think the book is a lot better than he will admit. Nevertheless when he says that the writing 'varies from allegory to hack political-intrigue stuff' I think he has laid his finger squarely on the trouble with Aldiss. I have said before I think that there are often two completely separate writers struggling to get out of Brian Aldiss. In one mood he is capable of a depth of vision quite as strong as that of Ballard. In the other he is liable to lapse into what I call the British Satire Syndrome. As a sufferer from this he is liable to fall into this terribly arch style so much adopted by British writers which pokes harmless fun at current political attitudes. To the former mood belong his best works—*The Airs of Earth*, *Hothouse* and what is good in *Greybeard* and *Earthworks*. To the latter belong *The Dark Light Years* and *The Male Response*.

Colin Pilkington, 16 Bridge Street, Ormskirk, Lancs.

Greater range of interest

Dear Sir,

When I look back at the magazines which have passed out of existence, it seems that one thing most of them had in common (the old *UNKNOWN* was an exception, but as we know there were specific reasons why this ceased publication) was a failure to provide a reasonable percentage of good stories in each issue, very often coupled with over-emphasis on one aspect of the field. Possibly the very fact that there are more or less organised groups of 'fans' has

proved a source of confusion to many an editor, because these groups or clubs tend to become very dogmatic, and their members very active in making their views known. Yet they may not be at all representative of the general body of readers.

I believe that the ordinary reader is a person who likes a fantasy or sf yarn but expects these yarns to be of approximately the same standard of competency, judged simply as stories, as he or she is used to in his non-fantasy and non-sf reading matter. I think the ordinary reader's range of interest is greater than that of some of the 'fans', who seem to build up a specialised interest in part of the field, and likewise form definite antipathies towards other parts. And I point to the continued success of F & SF as evidence of all this. The variety of stories offered by F & SF is wide indeed, and the standard of writing never disappoints.

There is no room for a second F & SF, and of course you are not aiming at that. What you seem to have set out to achieve is a similarly enlightened and well-balanced editorial policy, and in that I wish you (and also the editor of SCIENCE FANTASY) every success.

J. E. Henry, Box 490, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

Effective Use of Space

Dear Sir,

Congratulations on publishing Harry Harrison's *Bill, the Galactic Hero*. Here you have managed to find a space story that is light in treatment and serious in theme, that entertains on two definite and worthwhile levels. It shows that what you have spoken of in previous issues can be achieved and that the space story can break out of its hitherto over-restricting limitations. I hope that *Bill, the Galactic Hero* is just a start. Here's rich territory for the comic novelist. Sf has been over-earnest about itself for too long. Harrison has given it a much-deserved kick in the pants that at the same time makes un-put-downable reading. More please!

K. L. Morrison, Vauxhall Bridge Road, S.W.1.

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ZENITH SPECULATION, Britain's magazine of sf criticism. Send 2/- for latest issue to P. R. Weston, 9 Porlock Crescent, Northfield, Birmingham 31.

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Harry Harrison, C. S. Lewis and reports on "The International Field". Send 4/- to Tom Boardman, SF HORIZONS, Pelham, Priory Road, Sunningdale, Berks., England.

MEETINGS, etc.

Any experiences of the supernatural? If so write Box 130. (1)

THE BRITISH SF ASSOCIATION is organising the 1966 SF Convention at Yarmouth at Easter. Members of the BSFA get cheaper attendance fee, etc. BSFA offers its regular journal VECTOR, the fiction magazine TANGENT (top professional writers and bright newcomers in every issue), postal library, bibliographies, etc. Hon. Sec. BSFA, 77 College Road North, Blundellsands, Liverpool 23.

AT THE GLOBE, Hatton Garden (behind Gages, London) an informal gathering of sf fans and writers takes place on first Thursday of every month. All are welcome. Carry a copy of this magazine for recognition and you'll be greeted warmly.

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IN THIS ISSUE

NEW WORLDS



Langdon Jones's **TRANSIENT**

describes the pain of a creature brought to full consciousness by human science. It is a moving story by an author who has already made a name for himself with only a few published stories.

Michael Moorcock's **FURTHER INFORMATION**

continues to build up the jig-saw picture that is the world of the enigmatic Jerry Cornelius.

E. C. Tubb's **J IS FOR JEANNE**

Joseph Green's **DANCE OF THE CATS**

David Newton's **TO POSSESS IN REALITY**

Robert Cheetham's **A MIND OF MY OWN**

Colin Fry's **ERNIE**

plus

James Colvin's second part of his colourful and mystifying serial

THE WRECKS OF TIME

And our usual departments and features.