COMPACT SF

NEW WORLDS

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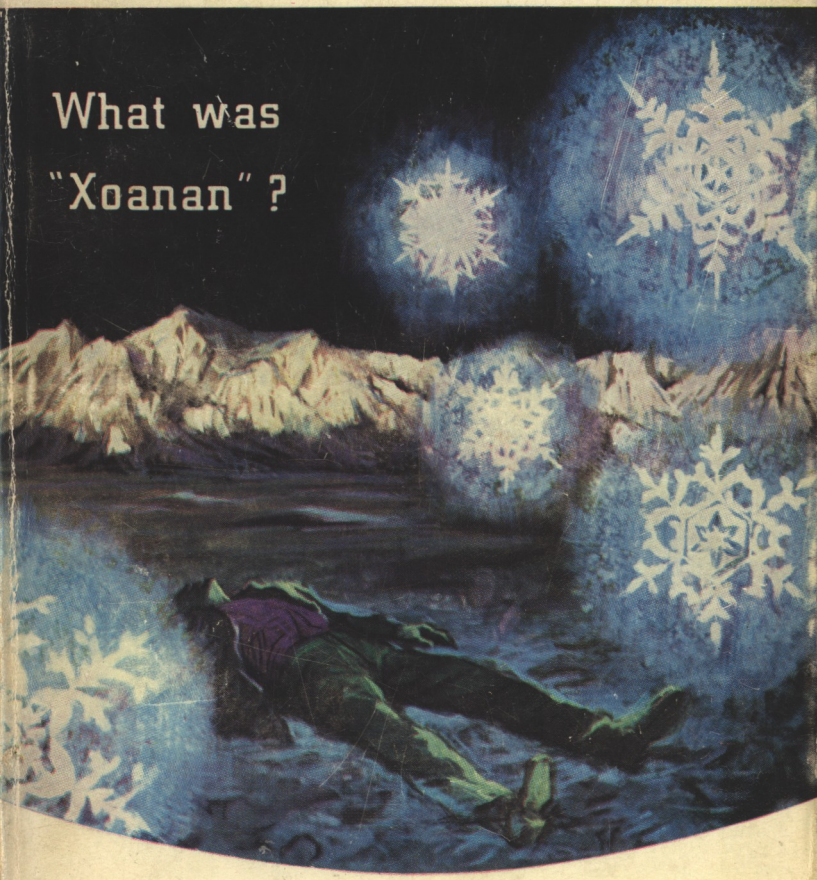

PILOT PLANT

by BOB SHAW

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Contents

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

MAN AND HIS MIND

IN THEIR EXCELLENT new book *The Supernatural* (Aldus, 63s) Douglas Hill and Pat Williams (both of whom have elsewhere written about science fiction) have produced a rational approach to the subject not normally found in this kind of work. Authors who usually produce investigations of the supernatural are as often as not morbidly interested in the subject and incapable of rational investigation. Thus it is refreshing to find a book almost totally devoid of the usual preconceptions.

At the beginning of *The Supernatural* the authors quote W. S. Jevons, writing in the 19th century:

"True science will not deny the existence of things because they cannot be weighed and measured. It will rather lead us to believe that the wonders and subtleties of possible existence surpass all that our mental powers allow us clearly to perceive . . . We must ignore no existence whatever; we may variously interpret or explain its meaning and origin, but, if a phenomenon does exist, it demands some kind of explanation." (*The Principles of Science.*)

The authors discuss many kinds of superstition and religious belief throughout the world, concentrating primarily, of course, on apparent supernatural events—possession, hauntings, visions, etc. The book concludes that while most of these occurrences can be explained in the light of modern knowledge, not all of them can be as yet. Their summing up is a far cry from the usual kind of

rationalising that as often as not takes the place of rational argument in authors who have such a strong neurotic reliance on religious and occult beliefs that they use statements like Jevons' to justify their conclusions—perverting, in fact, the whole essence of what Jevons says.

This is how Douglas Hill and Pat Williams wind up their book:

"So drugs, like the drumming, the entrancement, and the speaking in tongues to be found in the rituals of many mystical and ecstatic groups, may be part of a process that can propel us toward a new understanding. Perhaps all cults—from the most ridiculous to the most reputable—are attempting to achieve the same thing: an escape from the conventional manner of knowing things into another way of knowing. Like alchemists, magicians, witchdoctors, voodoo worshippers, spiritualists, and other practitioners of the supernatural, they are seeking an understanding of the powers within man and outside him—powers that they believe to exist but that remain unexplained and often unrecognised in terms of the accepted laws of the physical universe. This is a territory that has already been eroded by scientific discovery—as astrology was by the discoveries of the astronomers. Perhaps more territory still will, in the future, be mapped and annexed to the 'normal'. Meanwhile many questions, many mysteries remain. And possibly the most important and most fundamental of them all is whether the inner adventures of the occultists are always merely fantasy, or whether, sometimes at least, they are experiences that do relate to an external reality. Perhaps as psychology, parapsychology, and the physical sciences move closer together, they may together provide some new —and perhaps startling—answers to these questions."

We are inclined to be satisfied that the origin of the 'supernatural' can eventually be traced to the 'natural'; to man and his mind, in fact, but this doesn't make it any less satisfying a subject; one which sf writers are often interested in. The work of Philip K. Dick, for instance, is

constantly questioning and investigating the nature of 'reality' and so, in a very different way, is that of J. G. Ballard.

Perhaps in future we shall be able to see many more sf stories that make the attempt in original and interesting ways. Current experiments with drugs are revealing all kinds of fresh discoveries about the human mind and it is time that more sf writers concerned themselves with these discoveries for it is in these areas, more than anywhere else, that science and the traditional obsessions of literature come closest together.

Michael Moorcock

one

AFTERWARDS, GARNETT FOUND it difficult to decide which gave him the greater shock—the aircraft or the voice.

It had been a diamond-sharp morning in early Spring, with the green expanses of the airfield curving into the distance like the sunny cricket pitches of boyhood. From the comfort of his car Garnett watched the plane which had monopolised his life for five years go through an advanced phase of its flight development programme. The two-seat interceptor shimmered across the sky high up in the south then banked into a long, shallow dive aimed at the runway. As the machine approached, with the menacing silence of transonic speed, several hares which had been sitting on the turf shifted uneasily, displaying a kind of prescience, and began to run.

"Will pull out at approximately eight gravities." The

voice of chief test pilot Bill Makin, picked up by Garnett's special car radio, sounded remote and somehow irrelevant.

The aircraft bit down into the denser air close to the ground and the invisible force fields that were its wings suddenly attained a ghostly visibility as air-borne moisture condensed into flickering grey streamers in the shock wave. At the far end of the runway the aircraft levelled out for a second then reared up into an impossible-looking climb.

If the wing generators were to fail about now, Garnett thought, indulging himself in a moment of melodrama, twenty tons of stainless steel and ceramic fuselage would land on top of my car. I would be killed.

"Something wrong here!" Makin's voice had gone hard. "I'm losing my wings!"

The tattered rags of grey mist which had been flapping on the invisible wings, like a Valkyrie's cloak, abruptly vanished. Garnett watched incredulously as the massive fuselage began to sink below its anticipated flight path then, suddenly very heavy, enter a definite and irrevocable dive. Ejector charges burst the centre section open and the precious cockpit hurled itself upwards, frantically breaking the suicide pact in which the rest of the plummetting airframe was now involved.

Garnett slammed the car's starter button with the heel of his hand but the warm engine perversely missed its cue. He glanced over his shoulder. The fuselage was somersaulting down on him, so close that he saw the seriate rivets of its belly plates. The car's engine whirred uselessly—and then he heard the voice.

It said, "Get me out of this, Xoanon."

Garnett had time for one instant of wonderment before he swept away from the sunny Spring morning in a bomburst of sound, pain and darkness.

two

THE ROOM was small but airy, and its chairs had the flawless convexities of furniture never used. Garnett's bed was positioned where he could see, beyond the banked foliage of elm trees, the distant slopes of the Pennines.

Only very reluctantly, and over a period of weeks, had

the drugs begun to release their grip on his brain. He was aware of his mind clearing from the bottom like a glass of aerated water, during which process there was a slow escalation of thought. At first he could little more than observe the rhythm of hospital routine, then he began to cope with his personal affairs and, a little later, to pick up the threads of his working life. For a while the realization that he was owner and chief engineer of the Pryce-Garnett Aircraft Company was less important than the fact that weeks of lying in bed had given him a permanent ache in, of all the unlikely places, his heels. But gradually the knowledge ceased to be a kind of distant landmark with which to orientate himself and there came a vague feeling that it might be pleasant to get back to work. It might be pleasant, and yet there was a disturbing element somewhere. . . .

"If you won't drink milk I'll simply have to put you on a course of calcium tablets." Janice Villiers shrugged as she spoke and let her eyes wander disinterestedly around the mushroom-coloured walls of his room. She was the dietician at the discreetly expensive clinic in which he had found himself, and Garnett had the impression she had got the job by mistake. She had lush black hair, a slight cast in one eye and a kind of forthright sexiness which struck a faintly jarring note amid the pervading professional blandness.

"I don't need milk," he said. "My bones are as good as you'll get."

"It isn't bones I'm thinking about, it's your nerves. You must be a pretty tough little fellow to have recovered as well as you did, but your system has taken a beating. Do you want a cigarette?"

She had been quick to notice his size, or lack of it, even though he was in bed. Garnett turned his head away angrily, ignoring the offered pack. Who the hell did she think she was, making personal comments to important patients? He saw his fine-featured jockey's face frowning at him from a mirror and sought an unrevealing way to express his anger.

"Tell me," he said tersely, "do you smoke in the other patients' rooms?"

Janice smiled and returned his stare. Her eyes were a strong, clear grey, but the slight in-turning of one of them gave her a ruefully conspiratorial look. She shook her head.

"Well, what makes you think you can get away with it in my room?" Garnett spoke coldly, but was astonished to discover that part of him was pleased with her answer.

Janice shrugged again and lit up her cigarette. "Were you afraid when you saw that plane dropping down on to your car?"

"Isn't that an . . . unprofessional sort of a question?" He was working hard to elicit the normal respectful responses, but she seemed not to notice.

"Did you think you were going to die?" Her small oval face was intent.

Garnett shook his head uncertainly, remembering. *Get me out of this, Xoanon.* It had been a quiet, clear, perfectly normal voice—except for the fact that it had no apparent owner. He had read stories with the well-worn literary gimmick in which a man in a panic had heard screams, then realized they were coming from his own mouth, but this was rather different. He was not even the praying type, and had he been he knew of no deity by the name of Xoanon.

"Supposing you did die," Janice persisted. "Did you ever think what you would most like to find on the other side?"

Garnett laughed incredulously. "For God's sake! Have you been reading pamphlets on how to be an interesting conversationalist?" As on her previous visits, he finally gave up trying to establish anything other than the timeless man-woman relationship. "All right then, what would you like to find?"

"I would like," she said, inhaling deeply and talking through the smoke with a kind of hard expertise which he found strangely annoying, "to waken up in a great hall with one of those vaulted green ceilings, but so big and high up that it was misty looking. And I would like to find myself in a chair facing a wise old man who was removing a kind of earphone set from my head. And I would like him to be saying, 'Well, that was a sample of

life on Sol III. If you would really like to study that planet there are a hundred thousand million of those lives to go through—or would you prefer to look at some of the other inhabited worlds of the universe?'"

Garnett blinked. "That's quite a concept—are you a writer?"

"No. I just worry about dying. I'm not cut out for it, I guess." She smiled and brushed a speck of ash from the white linen of her uniform.

Garnett felt a pang of concern. He was fairly sure the girl was being flippant, but there was something in her face. Perhaps she really had a problem of some kind and had been speaking to him on a level of honesty which most people rarely reach. He failed to see how anyone with her stake in life could be obsessed with death, but somehow the subject kept cropping up in her conversation, and he had no idea of how to react. In the silence he became aware of barriers clanging into place between them and was amazed to discover how strongly he wanted to break through.

"Janice," he said uneasily, using her name for the first time. "I'm getting out of this place in a few days, and . . . I wonder if you would have dinner with me some evening?"

She glanced up at him, apparantly pleased but hesitating.

"I'll still be on sticks," he said quickly, feeling gauche, "but my hair's growing back again where they put the plate in my skull. I won't always have this tonsure, you know."

Janice smiled whitely, stood up and stubbed out her cigarette. "Thank you," she said. "It sounds nice. Let's discuss it later." She went out, closing the door gently.

Garnett slumped back feeling both elated and aghast. He also had a suspicion she had left at that moment simply because her illicit cigarette was finished and if it had burned out sooner she would have gone that much earlier. What, he wondered, had made him do it? And what did he think he would be able to do for her? The latest pile of blue-covered, spiral-bound reports from the works occupied his attention for some time, and then Nurse McFee came to re-make his bed. She was a motherly

woman, with bright red forearms and a faintly Scots accent.

"I was speaking to the dietician," he said casually, "and I . . ."

"Oh, she's begun visiting you, has she?" Nurse McFee grunted fiercely as she pulled back the bed-clothes. "I wondered when she would get round to you."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you must be getting better." Nurse McFee pounded his pillows into submissive fluffiness and refused to speak again. When she had gone Garnett settled down for his afternoon doze, acknowledging sleepily that he would probably be better off if he stopped the Janice Villiers thing right then and there. He slid peacefully into unconsciousness, and sometime during the drowsy afternoon his brain, which had hesitated so long, took the final decisive step out from under the canopy of the drugs.

He awoke in a panic.

A glance at the clock showed him it was several minutes before four. He pulled the televu off the bedside table on to his lap and punched out the works number. There was a delay, during which the little screen remained blank, then the face of the operator appeared, glowing in the grey depths like a submerged pearl.

"Mr. Garnett!" The tiny face assumed perfect miniature lineaments of surprise.

"Hello, Connie," Garnett said brusquely. "Put me through to Mr. Dermott." He waited impatiently while the connection was being made. Ian Dermott was his general manager and had been with the organization since its early days back in the Sixties, handling the administrative and commercial side. He was directly and solely responsible to Garnett because the Pryce-Garnett Aircraft Company was a rarity in its field in that it was privately owned. When Clifford Pryce, inventor of the generated wing, had died in 1978 he had willed the company to Garnett, along with a complicated system of legal safeguards designed to prevent him from bringing in public money by the issue of even a single debenture. Not that there had been any likelihood of fresh capital being required—the Pryce-Garnett T.6 orbital interceptor had

been on the boards of the Coventry design offices then and it was an obvious winner right from the start.

The T.6's main engine was a hydrogen-burning jet with an advanced type of ion-augmented thrust, but the aircraft's big selling point was the Pryce generated wing—the invisible, steel-hard force field which could fan out ten metres for low-speed flight and progressively reduce in size as speed increased. At Mach 8 the wing generators were switched off altogether, allowing the hurtling, white-hot fuselage to sustain itself by body lift alone without the impending drag of even a vestigial wing. During the research and development stages there had been delays due to the fantastic precision called for by Pryce's design for the wing electronics. In the end the bugs had been ironed out and, as a private venture financed by profits from military orders, the company was now developing a larger generated wing system capable of supporting a civil airliner.

Which was why Garnett was in a panic.

"Hello, Tony." Dermott's face appeared in the screen. "What's all this then? Why aren't you catching up on your sleep? You'll need it when you get back you know."

"Hello, Ian. Sorry to interrupt you, but this is important and I want you to issue the initial paperwork right away."

Dermott adjusted his glasses, looking puzzled. "Of course, Tony. What is it?"

"I'm cancelling the twenty-metre wing project."

Dermott lowered his head for a few seconds, apparently staring at his hands, then he looked up coldly. "I'm sorry, Tony. You can't do that."

The words shocked Garnett. He had expected the other man perhaps to show surprise or resentment, but not step so completely out of line, and out of character. "I'm doing it," he said. "In fact, I've done it. From the moment I informed you I was cancelling, the project was dead."

"Tony, are you sure you're feeling all right? You just can't do this, you know."

Garnett took a deep breath. "Issue an immediate stop-work order to the design, production, test, purchasing and planning staff concerned."

"For God's sake, Tony! *Why?* Just tell me why."

"Because it will lose money. We won't be able to sell it. Do you want a better reason? So far we've sunk the best part of a million pounds into that wing—money that I'll have to write off against research and development costs of the T.6 wing."

"But we were in full agreement that the big wing is just what civil aviation is waiting for."

"It is," Garnett agreed grimly, "but not with our reliability figures. Our own Air Registration Board and the American F.A.A. have always regarded a fatal accident rate of one in every hundred million flights as being a reasonable objective, although in practice they treat one in ten million flights as an acceptable figure. In more convenient terms, this is an accident rate of 1×10^{-7}. It has taken us four years to achieve $.92 \times 10^{-6}$ with the smaller T.6 wing, which is just inside military necessity standards and a whole order below civil standards. But now we are proposing to produce the twenty-metre wing, which will have a reliability about half that of the T.6 wing, not for the military but for the civil market! It doesn't make any kind of sense."

Dermott looked impatient. "But this is nothing new, Tony. All those figures have been thoroughly discussed. Gedge and the rest of the reliability team are confident that . . ."

"If they are very lucky," Garnett interrupted, "they might make military standard in five years, civil standard in ten. By that time the R&D costs would be astronomical and we would still have to sell the first unit. The public won't take to an invisible wing that vanishes if there's a power failure."

Dermott's face suddenly smoothed into a look of relief. "So that's it," he said softly. "You haven't recovered from the accident! You had me really worried. Tony, the prototype that dropped on to your car was proving a special power system—you remember the new lightweight alternator from Schuylers—and, needless to say, that is one bought-out component which we won't . . ."

"What is this?" Garnett shouted incredulously, feeling his temper break. "Are you telling me that the accident has

affected my mind? This decision has nothing to do with my personal experience."

"Look at it this way, Tony. Before the accident you were one of the prime movers in the twenty-metre wing project. You over-ruled every objection. You let some of our best engineers resign because they argued against it. Now, after the accident, you want to drop the whole thing like a hot rivet. What other conclusion . . . ?"

"Ian!" With an effort Garnett held his voice level. "I am speaking to you now as owner of the Pryce-Garnett Aircraft Company. Right now, right this minute, you must issue those stop-work orders or give me your resignation. Which is it to be?"

"I'm damned if I'll take this from . . ." Dermott stopped talking and his face seemed to ripple in the depths of the tiny television screen. He paused for a long moment and when he resumed speaking his voice was dulled. "I'm sorry, Tony. I shouldn't have spoken to you like that. I've been under somewhat of a strain. You're quite right—these decisions are yours to make and it was unforgivable of me to. . . . I'll issue the stop-work orders immediately."

Garnett's anger had gathered too much emotional momentum for him to match the other man's abrupt change of manner. "See that you do!" He broke the televu connection, dropped the instrument on to the bedside table, then realized he was trembling and covered with perspiration. He lay back and stared at the shifting, green-toned light reflected on the ceiling from the trees outside his open window. The faint sound of children laughing was carried in on the warm air across what seemed to him like interplanetary distance. There's a gulf, he thought irrelevantly, between those who go to work and those who go to school.

Another gulf had opened up between things as they were before the accident and things as they were now. The conversation with Ian Dermott had been little short of fantastic, but the man had made one good point. Garnett knew he was absolutely right in dropping the twenty-metre generated wing but there was no disputing the fact that once, and not so long ago, he had believed in the project whole-heartedly.

Perhaps a long serious illness always made things seem strange, but there was much to explain. The violent reaction of the normally phlegmatic Dermott, the fact that Garnett seemed to be developing a Don Quixote complex over an unhappy girl when he knew perfectly well he could not spare the time, and there was always—he realized he was falling asleep—that voice. He had never heard of anyone called Xoanon. There was a *thing* called a xoanon. The odd, back-of-the-dictionary word meant a primitive statue, supposed to have fallen from heaven.

As exhaustion claimed him, and the room tilted ponderously away, Garnett managed to smile. Aircraft might occasionally fall from the sky, but that was all.

three

IT WAS SIMPLY a question of scale.

The photograph gleaming on his desk was a routine publicity shot. It had been taken by a staff cameraman and showed a newly elected works beauty queen posed against a background of the production line, in which were ranged the great incomplete machines, brooding sullenly over their inability to fly. Garnett stared down at the picture, aware that his heart had begun the swift, striding beats of excitement. This was the answer if only he could believe it.

It had taken him over a month to begin suspecting there was anything wrong with the Pryce-Garnett organization. Another month had passed while he tried unsuccessfully to put his finger on the source of his unease, but there was almost nothing to go on.

The feeling was so faint Garnett could compare it only with the subliminal impulse of recognition he felt when being introduced to a person from his home town of Portsmouth. He had always explained the phenomenon by assuming that in living for many years in one area one was bound to glimpse practically all its inhabitants, and that their faces were filed away in the deeper reaches of memory. His suspicions about the organization were equally vague, based on similar instinctive reactions.

He sat back in his chair, lit his pipe and stared at the

opposite wall of his office through a screen of aromatic smoke. Large but infrequent drops of warm August rain struck across the windows. It was four months since the morning of the accident in which he so nearly lost his life. Afterwards he had learned that the fuselage itself had cleared the top of his car but the starboard tailplane had raked through the roof, spinning the heavy vehicle out of its way like a matchbox. Although he had lost a piece of his skull and broken both arms and one leg, everyone assured Garnett he was lucky to have come out of it alive. He agreed with them, but during the weeks of convalescence which followed his abrupt cancellation of the twenty-metre wing project he had been impatient to get back to work. As soon as it had been possible to wrest reluctant agreement from the doctors he had returned, walking at first with the aid of a stick although, when he had realized that using it made him appear a good inch shorter, he quickly managed to get around unaided.

He had returned too soon, Garnett acknowledged to himself as he drew on the sweet smoke, but in a way the past two months had been invaluable. Had he been fit enough to plunge back into the demanding complexities of his job, the subtle, the very subtle, impressions of wrongness would have been swamped. As it was, he had been forced to spend his days in comparative inactivity during which, for the first time, he had been able to take a long impartial look at his own business.

He had begun by arranging with McIntyre, the head of the printing department, that a copy of everything which went through the machines would be sent to his office. The consequent flow of commercial and technical brochures, handbooks, reports and minutes had provided him with several hours of solid reading every day. Although he owned the company in its entirety Garnett had always considered himself an airframe specialist, which he had been when Pryce took him on, and had never had time to read more than a fraction of the organization's internal publications. The sheer quantity was astounding—reports from the medical officer, the safety officer, the sales teams, the various project designers, the publicity officer, the production planning departments, the purchasing officer,

the production centres, the personnel department. Experimental flight test, security, wind tunnel, canteen, fire service. Wages, drawing offices, photographic, spares, transport, maintenance. Stress office, stores, analytical, reliability, tool room. . . .

Garnett began to realize that a large number of his department heads actually enjoyed writing reports and broadcasting them, while others tended to be terse and uninformative. Also, some departments tended to function more crisply and efficiently than others. Strangely, these characteristics of individuals and groups did not remain constant—over-articulate heads might suddenly fall quiet, efficient teams appear to become sloppy, or vice versa. From the welter of paper a picture had begun to emerge, but it was like a television picture in which the lines had been shuffled into a random sequence. Much information was given or implied but he lacked the key which would enable him to systemize it. All he had to go on was a vague feeling, so formless that he dare not mention it to anyone. The only near-concrete fact was that overall company efficiency seemed to have deteriorated, but this could have been explained as a temporary fluctuation, or simply the effect of his own absence—until he had seen the photograph.

A frozen instant of time was trapped under the glossy surface of the picture, and in that unique instant half a dozen aircraft fitters had passed behind the smiling girl at whom the camera had been aimed. They were all perfectly normal men, but one was carrying a wing unit mounting plate which was too big for him. He was a small man but that was not the reason the plate appeared too large. It would have been outsize even on a tall person —it was, in fact, a plate which could only have been used on the cancelled twenty-metre wing!

The implications were so vast that Garnett refused even to consider them before making one or two elementary checks.

"I'll be in the Number Three drawing office," he said as he burst through the outer office. Miss Fleet, his secretary, and her two assistants glanced up in surprise as he passed. He took the lift to the third floor of the Technical Block

and went in to the co-ordinating section which occupied the rear of Number Three. The grey-coated clerks who ran the section were flustered at seeing him and stood back respectfully and yet challengingly as he hauled out master assembly drawings and register books. But Garnett knew the complex system and it took him only several minutes to establish the part number of the mounting plate and to trace its history. The plate had been schemed, stress approved and detailed early in the year, but the stop-work order had been issued before the drawings reached the shops. As far as Pryce-Garnett was concerned the mounting plate existed on paper only.

Garnett left the drawing office and walked down the stairs thoughtfully. One approach would have been to find the foreman in charge of the production centre where the component had been made and ask him what the hell he thought he was doing. This was Garnett's first impulse, then he began to *think* about what was involved. There was the baffling question of motive—the company as a whole had only a distant and very faint possibility of profit from the twenty-metre wing project, so there was no point at all in individuals tinkering with it under cover. Security angle? There might have been at one time, but shortly before he died Clifford Pryce had insisted on publishing full details of his system. Pryce-Garnett had a comfortable head-start, of course, but every country in the world which had sufficiently advanced aircraft and electronics industries was travelling at full speed along the same technological highway. In any case, spies did not work in this way.

The rain had stopped by the time Garnett left the Technical Block and the air was heavy with the smell of moistened dust. He began to walk towards the main shops. There was also the question of how many individuals were involved and who they were. It was not comparable with a case of two or three shop floor personnel getting together to make and smuggle out, say, a component for a broken washing machine. The fitter who had been carrying the mounting plate would only be one link in what must be a very long chain. There would be his immediate foreman and the shop supervisor above him; someone in Supplies

must have ordered in the expensive, ultra high tensile steel; someone in Stores must have received and issued it; at least two men in the jig and tool drawing office must have been involved in preparing the tooling drawings and instructions, which in turn brought in the Tool Room superintendent; someone in Accounts must have covered up as much as possible from that end, but it would be impossible to conceal it from the management for very long. . . .

Ian Dermott!

Garnett recalled Dermott's unexpected and completely uncharacteristic reaction on the day he had called him from the clinic to cancel the twenty-metre wing. His discovery provided an explanation for that, but it was of a sort that only necessitated further explanations. He realized he had stopped walking as his vaulting brain had robbed his body of blood, and he picked up his step again, feeling his heels stick to the warm tarmac. Beyond the saw-tooth roof of the main shop a T.6 screamed across the airfield on full boost, the red glow of re-combining calcium ions trailing from its jet pipes.

Passing into the comparative darkness of the shop Garnett moved through the banks of tape-controlled sculpture milling machines which gnawed patiently into billets of gleaming alloy. Although there were eight thousand people in the company he had been able to half-identify the fitter carrying the plate in the photograph simply because he was one of the few men in the place who was not taller than Garnett. No amount of self-discipline had ever been able to prevent him being specially aware of others his own size, feeling that much in common with them and hating them for it.

He headed for the area indicated in his memory as the region in which he had previously seen the fitter, then realized he was going towards the experimental machine shop. Garnett nodded his approval of the conspirators' choice—the experimental shop was a small and completely self-contained unit with a full range of modern tools. It was a place where unusual jobs were the order of the day and where it would be easy to conceal unauthorized work. As he neared the doors it occurred to Garnett that he

ought to be more circumspect than to rush in and collar his man, but his initial astonishment was giving way to a reckless fury.

An electric truck burst its way through the heavy sheet rubber doors and Garnett walked in behind it, avoiding the noisy slap of the doors as they closed. He looked around, ignoring the curious glances of the machine operators, and recognized the small figure of the fitter seated at a wall bench with his back to the door. Garnett walked across to him and, hearing his footsteps, the fitter turned. His eyes widened as he saw Garnett and he froze on the stool, cigarette drooping from his lips.

A definite reaction, Garnett thought with satisfaction. "I want to have a word with you," he said.

The other man's oil-streaked face remained immobile, staring.

Garnett became impatient. "Let's go into the office."

Saliva gleamed at the corners of the fitter's mouth. He rolled gently forward on to the tool-cluttered bench, mashing the burning cigarette against his face, then slipped sideways to the floor. Several of his workmates came running as Garnett caught the falling body and lowered it.

"Ring the medical department," he ordered, "and carry him into the supervisor's office." The stocky, white-coated figure of Raine, the experimental shop super, appeared and directed the strangely difficult operation. Garnett was puzzled for a moment at the awkwardness of the grunting men doing the carrying, then he noticed the fitter's body was still in the sitting attitude, with rigid arms and legs. He stood by until a young doctor and two male nurses arrived with a stretcher. The doctor looked surprised at Garnett's presence in the workshop but he cleared the office efficiently and began to examine the inert fitter.

Garnett felt a touch on his sleeve and looked round to see a worried-looking boy in the green overalls of a graduate apprentice. "Excuse me, sir. I'm Jack Elkin. That's my uncle in there. Victor Elkin. Is he all right? I came round from Centre 83 when I heard he had collapsed."

"I don't know," Garnett replied. "You'd better wait and

speak to the doctor. He may want to question you about your uncle's medical history."

The boy hesitated. "Well, he isn't an epileptic or anything like that, but he's been working very long hours in the last couple of months—ever since the firm sent him down to Harlech on that special training course. He might be suffering from nervous exhaustion."

Garnett frowned. "The firm sent him *where*?"

"Harlech, sir."

"You mean in Wales?" Garnett felt slightly silly.

"Yes, sir. He never talked about it and I don't even know the names of the others who went. I assumed it was on some kind of classified work, what with Harlech being so close to the missile ranges at Aberporth and Ty Croes."

"Quite right," Garnett said with a knowing briskness he did not feel. He went back into the glass box of the office, noting that Elkin's limbs had been straightened.

The doctor stood up. "I'll have to get him to hospital. His pulse, respiration, temperature and blood pressure are near enough normal, but he's far down in coma. It's as though his brain had been switched off. Did you . . . ?"

"Come to my office later," Garnett interrupted. "I must go."

He walked quickly back to the Technical Block, feeling the now-familiar exhaustion begin to grow in him like a leaden core. Back in his office he rang for Miss Fleet and she came in with notebook and pen, exuding normalcy.

"Since I've been in hospital," he said, "has the company established an office or booked any kind of accommodation for special courses in or near Harlech?"

"Of course not, Mr. Garnett." She dismissed the subject as being ridiculous and got down to the business of the day. "I've left a list of people who rang while you were out, and Mr. Moller called in from Photographic for a second."

"Very well," he said tiredly, reaching for his pipe. "That's all." As he loaded the bowl with moist yellow strands Garnett tentatively identified the emotion causing the fluttering hollowness in his chest—it was the beginnings of fear. His momentary glimpse of the other organization

hidden inside his own works had shown it to be disturbingly large, and he had a conviction Elkin's sudden paralysis had merely been the first flexing of its r scles. Tackling Elkin direct had been not exactly a mistake—he searched for a suitable word—it had been a non-cybernetic move. The specific application of cybernetics to aircraft production control was a subject on which Garnett had written a book years before the T.6 had claimed his life, and now one of the opening paragraphs was assuming a new and nightmarish appearance of relevance to the present situation.

'An aircraft factory is a machine for producing aeroplanes and it may be disastrous to attempt to improve production by piecemeal tinkering with individual departments—one must seek out in all its ramifications, and destroy, the machine for *stopping* the production of aeroplanes, which lurks like a parasite within the organization.'

Approaching Elkin had been the equivalent of tinkering with an individual department, but a good cyberneticist never grabbed a tiger by the tail, not without simultaneously taking a powerful grip of its other extremities. Garnett took a clean sheet of graph paper and began to draw a block diagram of the other organization as he saw it. In the top square he put Ian Dermott's name; in the bottom one Victor Elkin's; in between he put question marks in departments he believed must be involved. It occurred to him that, except for the photograph, he had nothing to show but a very personal kind of evidence, which made the photograph an object of some value. He picked it up and scanned it closely.

An impossibly long time dragged by before his heart resumed beating.

The beauty queen still smiled beneath the picture's glazed surface, but none of the men behind her were carrying anything!

The obvious conclusion, the one every sane person in the world would agree on, was that Garnett had made a stupid mistake. After all, he had returned to work too soon and had been under a considerable strain. Garnett smiled wryly, almost grateful that all traces of doubt were

eliminated. He took his pen, drew a new off-shoot to his diagram, and in it printed, 'C. R. Moller, Chief Photographer.' Re-lighting his pipe he pulled the comforting smoke deep into his body. Chris Moller, the cadaverous ex-R.A.F. cameraman, must have realized his mistake and substituted a picture taken a few seconds earlier or later than the vital one. Again, it was hardly first-class evidence but it was good enough for Garnett. There were quite a few question marks on his diagram which had to be replaced with names, but when he finally had those identities the parasite—the machine for secretly producing aircraft parts nobody would ever buy—was going to find itself in trouble. I may be small, Garnett thought in an illogical surge of confidence, but I've never met anybody big enough to step on me. Impelled by the freshly released adrenalin in his blood he stood up, limped ferociously around the office, then calmed down enough to decide what he ought to do. It seemed fairly obvious.

"Next on the menu," he muttered, "is a trip to Harlech."

He picked up the televu on his private line and punched the number of the Carvill Clinic. As he waited for them to find Janice Villiers he felt the bright bubble of confidence begin to tremble. Since leaving the clinic he had had two rather unsatisfactory dinner dates with her, and a third which had been a downright fiasco. Right from the start she had talked freely about her affairs ("Not *love* affairs, Tony—the qualification always sounds so excusatory!"), and the effect had been to throw him into a rage which cumulatively became uncontrollable. And yet, because he had deliberately entered her world and not she his, he had been unable to express his anger honestly and in the end had resorted to a vicious attack on her odd, epigrammatic mode of conversation.

"Talking to you," he had said coldly, in the middle of a discourse on the incongruity of an infinitely small present sandwiched between an infinitely large past and a similar future, "is like standing by while somebody tears off every day on one of those ghastly calendars." She had given him a level stare, displaying the deviation in her eye, and had smiled knowingly but sadly. After that there had been nothing—Garnett felt he had slammed a door.

"Hello, Jan." He tried to sound casual as Janice's face suddenly glowed in the depths of the little screen.

"Hello, Tony. How are you?"

"Quite well. I've been drinking my milk regularly. It . . . it does seem to help the nerves." He wondered if she would find that acceptable.

"Apologies hurt me too," she said with one of her white, perfect smiles. "What is it, Tony?"

"I've got to drive down to Wales tomorrow. I'll be coming back over the week-end sometime. I wondered if you would go with me." He waited, realizing his attempt to sound like a different person had flopped, but she was kind and answered quickly, agreeing to go. When the arrangements were made and the connection broken, Garnett sat staring across his expanse of gooseberry-coloured carpet which was silvered in places by footprints. He was elated but his pleasure was tempered by the discovery of how deeply he was involved with Janice Villiers, the black-haired stranger who was two dismaying inches taller than he. On the surface he was planning a casual 'affair' but there was one disturbing fact the significance of which, even with his sketchy acquaintance with Freud, was obvious.

Ten minutes before, he had decided, with all the trappings of cold logic, that the next step ought to be the trip to Harlech—*but this was not the case*! There were half a dozen avenues of investigation open to him right here in the Pryce-Garnett works, any one of which could yield valuable information. It was not too late to call off the journey, and yet he knew he was going to go.

Hormones, he decided comfortably, are lousy cybernetics.

four

DRIVING FAST IN Garnett's superb, though oversized, car was a little like flying in an under-the radar jet, and in normal circumstances he would have annihilated the distance from Coventry to Harlech in a very short time. But with the black-clad girl coiled like a whip on the seat beside him the journey was too pleasant not to prolong.

He drove north to Rhyl then followed the coast road south against a sea whose clean blue horizon caused him a near-physical pain by its demands for emotional responses the adult Garnett had almost lost. He breathed deeply, trying to fill himself with the bright pastel colours of the morning air.

"Have you been to Harlech before?"

Garnett shook his head. "No. I'm looking forward to seeing it."

"I am, too. Places that have figured in songs are different somehow. There's a kind of imminence." Janice lit a cigarette. "You know, this trip may not help you much. It would have been better to hire a private detective."

"Never thought of it," Garnett said in genuine astonishment. "I suppose they really do exist."

Janice laughed. "Of course they do! One of my best friends runs a small agency."

Garnett tried to kill a pang of annoyance. "Interesting work, I suppose."

"I'm sure it would only take him a matter of hours to find out which of your employees have been to Harlech. That's the sort of things he does all the time. Shall I give him a call?"

"Let's see how I get on first," Garnett said ungraciously. He had told Janice only enough to give her the impression he was on a commercial security investigation of some kind, and was beginning to wonder whether he had said too little or too much. Debating the point, he drove in silence for a while and it was then, just as he was beginning to relax, that the first cool tendrils of alarm began to reach up from the depths of his nervous system.

Filled with a kind of astonishment, Garnett instinctively slowed the car and the white road markers began arrowing beneath at a more leisurely rate. He was disturbed—his quickened pulse and breathing made that clear—but there was no discernible reason. If I were a Philip Marlowe, he thought, this feeling would be caused by the fact that I had subconsciously noted the too-frequent appearance of a certain car in the rear-view mirror, but I haven't seen any vehicles at all for some time. Could that in itself be a

wrong note? No, roads like this one would be relatively empty in late morning.

Garnett depressed his right foot again and the seat urged against his back as the car responded. Janice gave him a speculative stare through a grey voodoo mask of cigarette smoke. The machine continued its effortless, whispering progress between mountains and sea, but now Garnett could feel his alarm increase with every minute. It grew with each fresh glimpse of soaring rock faces and each new involution of the road until the psychic pressure became almost intolerable . . . then came a partial answer.

"Janice," he said thoughtfully. "Do you know much about this *déjà vu* thing?"

"Nothing. I've heard it defined as the opposite of uncanniness."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, uncanniness is a feeling a strangeness in familiar circumstances, *déjà vu* is a feeling of familiarity in strange circumstances. Have you got that feeling now? Is that what's the matter with you?"

Garnett nodded uncertainly. "I get the feeling I've been here before and yet . . . Good God!"

"What is it?" Janice stubbed out her cigarette.

"I *have* been here before! With Clifford Pryce!"

"Problem solved," Janice said cheerfully. "Gone the way of all para-normal phenomena."

Garnett felt no better. The problem had been solved on one level—*but how could he have forgotten*? During one of his meetings in Liverpool with Pryce, while they were still discussing the terms of Garnett's engagement, the old millionaire had decided the day was too hot for sitting indoors and insisted on going for a long drive. Garnett, drunk on visions of the new future opening before him, had not paid much attention to anything outside the car, but he should have remembered the exhilarating high-speed run down the Welsh coast. Why, at the turning point they had even lunched in Harlech! Garnett had travelled considerably and at the age of thirty-eight was beginning to realize he could not clearly remember every day of his life. He could, however, remember the high spots and they did not come any higher than the time he had been

given the chance to create the T.6—so how could he have forgotten?

They reached Harlech at mid-day. Garnett stopped the car in the main street and sat for a moment deciding what he ought to do next. The village was a linear scatter of blocks of sunshine, shadow and stone which appeared not to have changed in the last hundred years. Where was he to start? And what was he to say? 'Pardon me, is there a local establishment where men are trained to secretly manufacture aircraft components nobody would buy?'

It dawned on Garnett he had been nursing an illogical hope that the mere fact of his being in Harlech would trigger off new events which would lay all the answers out in front of him, but of course it was not going to be like that. This was a fact he had subconsciously understood all along and the sudden conscious realization led him to his first direct thoughts about the forthcoming evening and night. It seemed too good to be true. He had never before met a girl who might have tempted him to try fitting marriage into his high-paced career, yet with Janice the question of legal entanglements did not arise. She preferred her 'natural relationships' and that being the case Garnett was more than happy to go along with her.

Janice patted her black hair into place. "Where are we staying, Tony? I ought to freshen up."

"Not here. There's a new motel at Llanbedr, about twenty minutes further down the coast. Shall I drop you there and come back?"

"No, I'll be all right." They got out and Garnett noticed she had not changed into flat-heeled shoes to help equalize their heights. He told himself it was because conventions about height, like all other conventions, were unimportant to her, all part of the wonderful grab-bag of goodies he was getting for nothing. After touring the village together they went into the dim coolness of an inn and ate incredibly good sandwiches of home-cured ham, washed down with heavy tankards of ale. She ate and drank with a kind of mannish gusto which he would have found disconcerting had it not fitted in so perfectly with his vision of her as his wayward child of nature, purveyor of guiltless enjoyments.

"You aren't happy about all this, are you, Tony?"

Garnett looked up from filling his pipe. "I'm happy about us, but I've got . . . problems at the works and I probably ought to be back there doing something about them. You were quite right about the detective agency. I feel slightly lost."

"Why do you worry so much about your work? From what you've told me you've spent your whole life flying aeroplanes, or building them, or having them drop on your head."

Garnett ruefully stroked the still-bristly hairs under which the stainless steel plate completed his skull. "Perhaps it's egotism. Some people sell shoes for a living, or write in ledgers—I put those big birds up in the sky. And now they have my name on them, so I want them to be good."

"So that your name will live on, etcetera."

"Something like that, yes." Garnett found himself on the defensive.

"You aren't an egotist, Tony. You're a solipsist." Janice laughed without removing her cigarette, which gave her lips an unexpectedly cruel twist. "Your name won't live on, you know. Look, you're going to live for seventy or eighty years if you're lucky. Supposing you were an all-round genius and you spent that time developing a longevity drug which increased your life span to a thousand years. You aren't going to do that, but let's suppose it anyway. Imagine then that you devoted your thousand years to studying science and became absolute master of the physical universe—which you aren't going to do either. Suppose next that you used your fantastic powers to gather up every star in the galaxy and arrange them to spell out your name in letters a thousand light years high. . . ."

"I sense," Garnett put in, "you're trying to get some message over to me."

"The message is that, even after you had done all those things, still there would come a day when an intelligent being could survey the universe and find no trace of your existence."

"It wouldn't alter the fact that I had existed. It doesn't matter how short a time I live—if I make something good,

the fact that I did so will be just as real after a billion years as after ten minutes."

"Horsefeathers!" Janice looked mildly surprised. "I think that's the first time I ever said that word. The proper occasion must never have arisen before, but it did just then."

"Same to you. Let's get out before we have a stand-up fight." Garnett drained his glass and they went out into the bright, impersonal infinities of the summer afternoon. He was relieved there was no need to talk as they walked, for this time he was determined nothing should go wrong between them yet he had felt himself being drawn into another row by her determined futility. At least, he thought, it provided a working explanation for the aimlessness of her personal life. Garnett found himself wishing Janice was not so blindingly attractive—born into a more homely body she might have been forced to explore the possibilities of a permanent relationship. As it was she had no shortage of philosophical fellow-travellers. Men, he admitted, like Tony Garnett.

They spent the afternoon walking in the village and its environs. Garnett's pockets filled with pipe cleaners and boxes of matches as he worked round the local shops trying to talk to people without being conspicuous. Finally he had to give up. Almost by instinct he could put his finger on the subtlest flaw hidden behind the massed symbolism of an engineering drawing, but this village, as far as Garnett was concerned, remained simply an ordinary village.

He rolled the big car gently down the coast to Llanbedr and found the motel, which turned out to be a scattering of pink chalets on a hillside overlooking a sea-lapped airfield. Numb with excitement Garnett rented two chalets from the sports-coated proprietor, noting with satisfaction how the man gaped at Janice. The motel, he learned, had no restaurant facilities but a reasonable dinner could be had at the hotel in Llanbedr.

"My feet hurt," Janice said as they walked up the winding path to the little single-roomed buildings. "Give me a couple of hours to get them back into shape, then I'll be ready to eat." As he set the bags down inside her doorway

she stepped out of her shoes and turned to him. Their first kiss was good, just as he had always known it would be; he kept his eyes open to print the few racing seconds on his memory.

"Easy, Tony, easy," she murmured. "We've got lots of time."

Garnett stepped back reluctantly and lifted his case. "We solipsists are all the same, you know. See you about eight." His throat was dry.

In the silence of his own chalet he shaved, changed his clothes and lay tensely on the unfamiliar bed watching a pale, three-quarters moon slide across the window. Since the establishment of the permanent Lunar bases in the mid-seventies, ten years earlier, Garnett had come to regard the moon as just another geographical location, a place he might visit someday. But tonight it was just the same old moon the poets knew, and nobody could ever walk on that.

He called on Janice at eight and found her standing at her door, smoking as usual, and wearing a white dress fastened with gold clasps giving it a faintly classical look which suited the Delian atmosphere of the lush summer evening. They walked to the hotel in Llanbedr, had several drinks, a simple dinner, and returned to the motel in the twilight. Garnett thought vaguely that they should go to her chalet but Janice stopped determinedly at his so he led her in and closed the door.

Their second kiss was much longer, even more perfect than the first and Garnett felt her lithe body drive forward against his own with a force he could barely match. It was everything he could have asked for, except for one tiny thing—the words. The words were unimportant but suddenly Garnett found himself greedy for them, needing them, and they forced themselves up from his throat.

"I love you, Janice." He waited, and felt her arms untwine slightly. You fool, he screamed inwardly, what are you doing?

"I like you, Tony," she said. "I like you a lot."

It isn't too late, he thought, she has said she likes me and maybe that's better than love—why ruin it all now? But aloud he found himself demanding the age-old re-

sponse and in a few thunderous seconds they were standing apart, arguing. The words, all the wrong ones, came too fast for him to comprehend, and Janice stuck to everything she had ever said about human relationships with a ruthless, uncompromising honesty which filled him with rage. The realization that he would have been content for her to lie about loving him made Garnett even more furious. Finally she turned away from him, shrugged, and took a cigarette from her purse.

"If you light that thing," he said coldly, "I'm leaving."

Janice flicked her lighter on. "What is the saying about ultimatums? You should never issue an ultimatum because . . ."

Garnett snatched the cigarette from her mouth, crumpled it and shouldered his way outside, slamming the door behind him. He had taken a dozen steps in the darkness towards where he imagined his chalet to be when he remembered they had been *in* his chalet. Swearing incoherently he began to turn back then realized the ludicrousness would be too much for him. Once into Janice's chalet, he ripped off his jacket and lay down on her bed, sick with dismay. He had no expectations of sleep, but the exhaustion inherited from the accident closed black arms around him within a matter of minutes and he dropped into an uneasy sleep.

The explosion came hours later.

Garnett sat up gasping in pitch darkness, so disorientated that for one panicky moment he was unable to find even his own identity. The air was still filled with reverberations from the heart-stopping blast and not far away someone had begun to scream patiently and regularly, like breathing. A shifting orange light was beginning to move across the window when Garnett got to his feet and opened the door. The light was coming from flames that were fanning up through the crazily twisted roof of the chalet where he. . . .

Janice!

Garnett ran quickly, risking a broken ankle on the strange ground, and threw himself through the chalet's gaping doorway, beyond which the air was almost solid with billowing mortar dust. Please Janice, he pleaded, please be all right. He found her, still in the white dress,

lying face downwards beneath curling streamers of flowered wallpaper which the explosion had stripped from the walls. Sliding his hands under her he lifted then hesitated, sickened, knowing he had no business moving a human body which felt like *that*. The flames increased their grip on the wreckage. Garnett clenched his teeth, stood up with the limp body in his arms and carried it out on to the grass where people in night clothes had begun to gather. He knew as he folded Janice down on the ground she was at that moment launching out across the eternity of which she had always been so afraid. Incredibly, her lips moved for a moment, so slightly that at first he thought it might be shadow movements from the fire. He put his ear to her mouth.

". . . difficult, very difficult. Late. I have it. I have it now, Xoanon. I . . ." The words stopped with unmistakable finality and Garnett rolled away from her, burying his face in the grass. When he stood up again somebody had covered Janice with a yellow raincoat and the world was rocking around him, reduced to a meaningless montage of luridly-lit faces, black tree-shapes and distant black reaches of impassive sea. The floating faces spoke to him excitedly, questioning, but he ignored them, standing beside the body until an ambulance arrived and the attendants loaded the strangely small bundle into it. The boyish-looking doctor's eyes narrowed professionally as he looked at Garnett and suggested that he lie down, but Garnett brushed him away—for the second time that night nothing could satisfy him but ancient, formal words, this time with the police. *J'accuse!*

Janice's death had not been an accident.

She died because she was sleeping in the wrong chalet, and the invisible others had made a mistake. Garnett felt he shared the responsibility—something his conscience would settle with him later—but it carried the tiniest seed of consolation in that the mistake had been bigger than the unknown organization suspected. Until now all his evidence had been entirely negative or personal, the type of witness that would cause people's eyes to drift away in embarrassment. But an attempt had been made on his life,

the name Xoanon had been spoken again, and Janice was dead. . . .

The police inspector who took charge was a big man with a malarial complexion and baffled brown eyes. Garnett limped up the wooden steps into the motel office behind him, aware that his legs were weakening, and sat down on a magazine-littered couch. The inspector cleared a little space in the scurf of paperwork covering the desk then set his key-ring in the middle of it, somehow conveying his anxiety to get away.

"You look pretty tired, sir. We'll get this over as soon as we can. You can make an official statement tomorrow."

"I'm all right," Garnett said. "I want to make a statement now. I'm Garnett of the Pryce-Garnett Aircraft Company and I have reason to believe that tonight's explosion was intended to kill me because . . ."

The inspector's hands made little swimming movements in the cone of light from the office's single overhead fitting and he smiled uneasily. "Forgive me, Mr. Garnett. I think you should lie down. The shock . . ."

"I've already told you I'm all right, inspector. Will you let me speak? The men who set the bomb, or whatever it was, are . . ."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Garnett. I'm going to ask one of my men to have the doctor see you." The inspector stood up and moved towards the dark rectangle of the open door.

Garnett leaped to his feet and had to grab the desk for support. He tried hard to make his voice cool and reasonable. "Inspector, I'm trying to give you the facts about the bomb explosion that took place here a little while ago."

"That's just the point, Mr. Garnett. We have all the facts. There was no bomb—it was a meteorite."

"A *meteorite*?"

"That's right. Quite a small one apparently, but it was seen for miles. We've had reports of it from half a dozen places up and down the coast. A rare but entirely natural occurrence, sir—so there wasn't any bomb. Now will you see the doctor? I think you should." The inspector went out and Garnett heard him whispering to a waiting constable.

Garnett lurched to the door and sat on the polished wooden steps, staring upwards as he waited for the doctor. The sky contained no answers. It remained impersonal, anonymous, and beyond the mountains dawn was already beginning to overpaint the fainter stars.

five

THE PRYCE-GARNETT organization was a 'second generation' aircraft firm, as distinct from the long-established giants all of which had been founded by World War I aviators. It employed a total of only eight thousand men based in factories at Liverpool and Coventry, and had been given its toe-hold in the fiercely competitive industry solely by the introduction of the Pryce generated wing. The bulk of the electronics equipment associated with the wing was still produced at Pryce's original plant in Liverpool, but the airframe fabrication and assembly unit in Coventry had become the company's headquarters. Most of its senior management lived close to Coventry and it was there that Garnett headed on Sunday afternoon as soon as he was freed of his obligations to the authorities at Llanbedr.

He took the shorter route across the Welsh mountains, driving as fast as he dared in view of his condition. The events surrounding Janice's death had punished him both mentally and physically, and he was reminded how the surgeon who had patched him up after the accident had commented that he might never fully get over it. Garnett had written that off at the time as pessimism but he was beginning to understand what the man had meant.

The big car hissed occasionally as it flashed through scattered rain showers. Once or twice on the journey he glimpsed newspaper billboards on which were scrawled, MOTEL GIRL KILLED BY FIREBALL. Part of him was forced to admire how merely describing Janice as a 'motel girl'—whatever that might be—had added just the right connotation of shady sexuality to the story. The rest of him was filled with a brooding anger which at times caused his forehead to prickle painfully with sweat and turned his heart into a pulsating pillow, threatening to explode his ribs. In a way he was almost glad of the anger because an

adversary who could guide meteorites down on to pin-point targets was someone of whom he would normally have been very afraid. As it was, Garnett was going to come to grips with his enemy in the only way he knew, and was looking forward to it.

It was late afternoon when he reached Coventry and swung round the outskirts to Baginton where Ian Dermott, his general manager, lived. Observation and deduction both indicated Dermott as top man in the mysterious 'other' production unit, but looking at his home Garnett was impressed by its sheer normality. The big redbrick house radiated friendliness through its helmet of rain-soaked ivy and the bright lawns vapoured introspectively in the sun. He parked outside the iron gates and walked up the drive, half expecting to be challenged at every step, but the place was silent until he rang the doorbell. As he waited Garnett began to feel foolish, but Janice was dead and there were questions which had to be answered, or at least asked. What was going on at the factory? Why had Janice mentioned someone known as Xoanon in her last breath? Was she one of *them*? How did one set about steering a meteorite? And why . . . ?

The door opened. Dermott stood there in a maroon silk dressing gown and a pair of television glasses in his hand.

"We've got to have a talk," Garnett said flatly.

"Of course, Tony. It's good to see you. Come in. How was your trip to Wales?" Dermott stood back and cheerfully ushered Garnett into the hall, smiling down at him. "I've been watching television alone—becoming addicted to it, I'm afraid. I was able to take it or leave it while big screens were popular but these little gadgets have hooked me." He held up the glasses. The little eye-sized screens glowed with movement like distant bonfires and a thin wisp of music escaped from the earpiece.

Garnett stared at the familiar, amiable face. "All right, Ian. You've done your sane, sensible, crumpets-for-tea bit—now let's have our talk. What the hell have you been up to?"

"Up to! What do you mean, Tony?" Dermott turned and led the way into the spacious sitting room he used as a kind of office.

"I'm going to blast this thing out into the open," Garnett said to the other man's back. "I'm going to kick up the biggest row this country has ever seen, whether you talk or not. This is your only chance to talk about it in private —and you know me well enough to know I mean that."

Dermott's shoulders sagged slightly and he turned round. His face was suddenly very pale, almost luminescent. After a long, clock-ticking pause he said, "I suppose we must make the effort."

"Never mind making efforts. Start making sense."

Dermott swayed slightly and when he spoke his voice was harsh. "We are, as you suspected, completing a twenty-metre wing unit."

Garnett had known, yet hearing it shocked him. "But *why*? For God's sake why? Who wants it?"

"The customer's name is Xoanon. I've never seen him. He's an . . . I suppose you'd call it an extraterrestrial."

Garnett remained silent—this was what he had dreaded since the first slithering premonitions the night he had sat on the motel steps and stared into a hostile sky.

"Neither Xoanon nor any of his race," Dermott continued, "have ever set foot on Earth. They are human, but from a world with lower gravity. Their craft is in a three-hundred kilometre orbit."

"That's impossible. They couldn't get away with it. Our radar would lamp them the first time round, unless . . ."

Dermott nodded. "Electron absorption screens—we'll have something like that ourselves soon."

Futile as it was, Garnett was unable to prevent himself from arguing. "But why do they want an aircraft wing?"

"There is a very important reason, but it can't be disclosed."

A pressure was building up within Garnett's temples. "It still doesn't make sense. If they can't land—how do they expect to get hold of the wing unit?"

Dermott seemed slightly surprised by the question. "We will deliver, of course. Using a T.6." Something about the way he spoke caused a convulsive upheaval in Garnett's subconscious but he had no time to guess what it might

mean. The anger, dulled by shock, was growing in him again.

"What sort of a person are you, Dermott? What did they buy you with?"

"I wasn't bought, Tony—any more than you were."

"Than *I* was!" The room slanted momentarily, then righted itself.

"Yes, Tony. You still don't understand, do you? They got you before any of us. The instrument they use has been hidden in the sea close to the Welsh coast for years. It seems to be a device for recording the patterns of electrical activity in a person's brain and then transmitting it to the spacecraft. Up there they construct an analogue—don't ask me how—and by adjusting it force the weaker electrical activity of the brain into new patterns.

"What it boils down to is, if you get close enough to the device for an initial reading to be made they can influence you from that moment on. If necessary absolute control can be exerted but usually it is enough just to nudge a person's thinking in the desired direction—that was how the twenty-metre wing project got under way in the first place. There were only half a dozen key men involved, you and I being two of them, but you had to lose part of your skull. The metal plate riveted into it acted like a screen and broke your link with Xoanon. When you cancelled the project we had to go underground, which meant that a total of forty personnel had to be put under almost complete control so that they would finish the wing unit and do it in secrecy.

"It would have been much easier to kill you, of course, but Xoanon doesn't work that way. I'm explaining all this in the hope that you can eventually be persuaded to join us again."

Garnett shook his head, unable to speak as he struggled to assimilate all he had just heard.

"Think it over," Dermott said. "I'll get you a drink. You look as though you could use one." He moved to a sideboard which glittered with cut glass and silver.

"I am thinking it over. I'm thinking about Janice Villiers. I take it Xoanon is dismissing that as an unfortunate error."

"Errors," Dermott said, still busy at the sideboard, "can be compensated for." When he turned round again only one of his hands held a glass. The other trembled slightly under the weight of an obsolescent, but nonetheless effective, automatic pistol. "We are sorry about this, Tony, but the project is too important. . . ."

"You wouldn't dare fire that thing. Somebody would hear it."

Dermott shook his head. "I've sent Jean and the two boys away for a week, so let me assure you I will use it, but. . . ."

Garnett had been shifting his balance while the other man spoke. He leaped sideways and dived for the cover of the massive desk which occupied a corner of the room. Dermott's arm jerked up, the big pistol went off like a ton of high explosive and Garnett felt himself stopped as though he had run into a wall, his chest muscles paralysed with agony. He caught the desk for support then realized the bullet had almost missed him, scribing a bloody tangent across his ribs. The discovery brought with it a surge of elation. Honour's satisfied, he thought illogically, Ian had made his point. He'll call it quits now and I'll go away and stay out of his life for ever.

But Dermott lurched forward, arm outstretched stiffly and face contorted with the loathing a man always feels for an animal he has failed to dispatch at the first blow. Garnett tried desperately to move, but there was no time. Dermott pointed the automatic at his head at a range of only a few feet and fired again. As he tried to jerk his head out of the way Garnett felt himself flicked off the edge of the desk like a fly. He landed heavily on the floor behind the desk and lay motionless, wondering why he was still alive. One side of his face, including the eye, was raw with a burning pain he recognized as being caused by muzzle blast and his ear was ringing like an anvil, but where had the bullet gone? Something hard was lodged in the back of his mouth. For an instant he recalled stories of soldiers who had bullets pierce their skulls and travel all round their heads on the inside, then he realized the hard object was a tooth. The bullet had hit him high on the cheek and had passed straight out the other side,

smashing his back teeth on the way. He had been lucky.

Several cautious footsteps sounded as Dermott approached.

Garnett held his breath and hoped there was enough blood distributed over his head and chest to convince Dermott a *coup de grâce* was unnecessary. After a few seconds he heard him pick up his televu from the desk and punch out a number.

"Hello, Bill."

"Hello, Ian. Has it happened?" Garnett recognized the voice of his chief test pilot, Bill Makin.

"Yes—he came here, as we expected. I had to take certain steps. You know what I mean."

"I know."

"There'll be trouble, of course. This is as far as we can go. You'd better deliver the unit right away."

"I thought there still were difficulties with dimensiónal stability."

"Only a centimetre or so at maximum chord. It's acceptable. Anyway, we've run out of time."

"What will you do with the . . . ah . . . waste products?"

"Don't worry about that. Just deliver the goods."

"I'm already plotting the flight profile. See you."

Dermott set the televu down, stood for a moment then came round the desk and grabbed a fistful of Garnett's jacket. He screamed in terror as Garnett brought up his legs and kicked, then he went down clutching his belly. Garnett propelled himself upwards, grunting with the effort. The televu set almost flew out of his fingers as he lifted and swung, but it connected with Dermott's head. The screaming stopped. Garnett lifted the pistol purposively, hesitated, then worked it into his belt—Dermott had just tried to murder him but he had not been responsible for his own actions. Nor was he the one responsible for what had happened to Janice.

He dragged the unconscious man all the way into the kitchen, tied his wrists with the silk dressing gown cord and locked him in a cupboard. By the time he had finished he was drenched with perspiration and was leaving bloody footprints on the floor. He cleaned himself up in the bathroom as best he could, taped a clean towel across his

ribs and put patches of skin-coloured medical plastic on his cheeks. Blood from the ruptured gums kept trickling into his throat so he made two plugs of cotton and bit down on them. The whole operation took only a matter of minutes, at the end of which his image in the full-length mirror appeared almost normal. There was a certain spiky look, like that of a sick bird, but that was pretty good considering the way he felt.

Garnett carefully locked the door behind him and limped out to his car which greeted him like an old friend as he settled into the seat. He slid it meticulously through the Sunday evening traffic, not risking an encounter with the police, and reached the works in reddish evening sunlight. A patrol officer saluted as he drove through the main gates and threaded among the silent workshops on his way to the field. The square-finned shape of a T.6 crouched outside the flight shed, impassively drinking in the contents of a mustard-coloured fuel bowser. Garnett was too far from the men who moved around it to decide if they were the regular ground crew or Xoanon-controlled draftees. Scanning the line of parked vehicles he found what he wanted—the white sports car belonging to Bill Makin.

Garnett slipped into the test pilots' building by the rear entrance, went along the corridor and stopped outside Makin's office. There was the question of how much feedback was built into Xoanon's control system—if the space craft acted as a sort of clearing house for sense impressions then every man under control might know what was happening to all the others, in which case Makin could be expecting him. He extricated the heavy weapon from his belt, thankful there had been no necessity for a quick draw, and gently opened the door. Makin was already in his silver pressure skin and was bent over his personal computer, waiting tensely. Beyond the venetian blinds the evening sky was turning peacock green.

Garnett levelled the automatic.

"Don't move, Bill. Don't make a sound. You've got a passenger on this trip."

Makin remained hunched over the machine, but he shook his head without turning round. "I have—but not

you, Tony. The wing unit is strapped into the second seat. Even you couldn't get in there with it."

"I don't think you understand—I'm not permitting delivery of the unit. You're taking me in its place."

"What makes you think so?"

The task of thinking up a direct verbal reply which did not sound like something out of an old film was too much for Garnett's patience and imagination. He stepped forward and gently laid the gun muzzle against Makin's neck, but the time for words or any other sort of reply had already passed. Makin slid down on to the floor and lay, like a doll, with both arms reaching blindly into the air. As Garnett stared down at him, remembering Elkin, the fitter who had also been 'switched off', the computer chimed softly and rolled out a curling tongue of grey paper. Garnett snatched it and ran his eye down the printed figures—they were a complete set of parameters defining the flight profile for a maximum altitude T.6 sortie.

A few minutes later Garnett limped out of the test pilots' building, doing his best to imitate Makin's careful walk. The pressure skin was several sizes too large for him but none of the ground crew seemed to notice anything wrong. Garnett discovered that the loneliness of the astronaut, the age's solitary hero figure, began from the moment he donned his egg-shell and silver limbs. The T.6 waited for him, its belly replete with fuel, and the late sunlight splayed across the sky, masking everything that lay beyond.

six

GARNETT HAD NEVER actually flown a T.6 before and the fact that he was able to consider doing so, even with his experience in the aircraft's simulator, was a tribute to the way in which the aircraft industry had tackled one of its oldest problems. Even before the end of the era of the reciprocating engine the demands upon the pilot of the large, fast transport were nearing the theoretical maximum capacity of the human nervous system. A limiting factor had been the sheer quantity of eye movements the pilot was called upon to make as he gathered discreet informa-

tion from his instrument array and processed it into control movements. The answer had lain in a new philosophy of cockpit design which ushered in the age of the black box, starting with the first autoland systems. Its culmination was the fully automated cockpit which was the most valuable part of the machine and which could be lifted bodily out of any aircraft and installed in any other type, allowing the pilot to concentrate on where he was going and not on the mechanics of getting there.

The ground crew stood around disinterestedly as Garnett walked to the aircraft and worked his way up the spring-loaded hand and toe holds to reach the open cockpit. Actually, due to the fact that the T.6 was a true self-starter, there was nothing for them to do once the fuelling operation was completed. Now that he was about to take its controls into his own hands Garnett was impressed as never before by the machine's sheer power. The huge cylinder was literally nothing but an engine and fuel system, with a contrived niche on top for two men and an assortment of mountings below for weapons. It was not armed, being still in final development, but it was one of the most fantastically extravagant products of a society with the arm-bearing mentality.

As he slid into the front seat Garnett realized, with a keen sense of shock, that he disliked the T.6 and all it stood for. Thoughts like that had never crossed his mind until now but then, as Dermott had explained, an outsider had been 'nudging' his ideas towards a certain end. It was difficult to comprehend that the whole twenty-metre wing project had been brought into being at the instigation of an alien figure known as Xoanon. Men's lives had been twisted to meet that end and a girl called Janice had died. Garnett felt the gnawing bitterness of regret for everything that might have been. Up there, up in the lofty three-hundred kilometre orbit, Janice's death probably seemed an infinitesimal event, but it had been an important one in his life. Soon he would be up there himself, though, and then he was going to make Janice important to Xoanon as well. The automatic in his belt was a pretty insignificant payload for the T.6 but, properly used, it should be sufficient.

Garnett wanted to unload the crated twenty-metre wing unit but doing it might have attracted too much suspicion, so he sealed the cockpit and checked over the flight plan. It called for a take-off at seventeen-fifty hours, gradual climb to twenty thousand metres to clear the denser air strata, and then a fully boosted ballistic-style climb to engine shut-down at 250 kilometres. This would give enough momentum for the ship to coast the remaining fifty kilometres to what presumably was rendezvous altitude. He was more than ten minutes too early and was tempted to blast off anyway then adjust the flight path to suit, but there was the danger of alerting the whole of Regional Command. The flight was bound to be illegal—Makin had not had time even to file a flight plan—but as long as he did not loiter around at medium altitudes there was little anybody could do to stop him. They were unlikely to loose one of their robotic nimrods on an unidentified aircraft flying *out* of the country. There was also the danger of alerting the spacecraft but he had a feeling Xoanon already knew what was going on—the precious wing unit would be his guarantee of safe conduct.

At zero minus five he flicked over a series of toggles and the great engine, which extended from the ship's nose, under his seat and all the way back to the tail, cleared its throat and gave voice, an indefinitely prolonged explosion even at minimum power. Keeping the radio switched off to eliminate distracting queries from the tower he released the brakes and steered the T.6 out to the end of the main runway. The configuration scope showed that the machine's invisible wings were spread to their full extent.

Poised at the end of the runway, staring into the flame-coloured feathers of the sunset, Garnett was suddenly afraid to make the flight. The feeling was something like the one which had followed Dermott's first grazing shot across his chest. He wanted to get away, escape into normal life, not project himself into the inhuman, *anti*-human coldness of the three-hundred kilometre orbit. But when his chronometer said it was time to go he kicked off the brakes and let the machine do all his thinking and worrying. The sound of the engine faded out a few seconds later as the T.6 went supersonic. He barely had time to

get it on to the south-easterly bearing specified in the flight plan, and check his course, when the altimeter registered twenty thousand metres. At that point he surrendered all authority to the black boxes.

The T.6's nose lifted higher as the built-in computers, unhampered by fears or regrets, drove it up beyond the atmosphere in a clean, pure curve. Garnett grunted with pain as the ion-boost came on and the high gravities tore at his wounds. The boost worked by seeding the jet stream with calcium particles which were ionised and accelerated by an engine-driven oscillator. To prevent the aircraft building up a huge electrical potential negative and positive ions were blasted out alternately, re-combining in a long reddish flare behind the jet pipe. When the atmosphere became too tenuous for turbine efficiency the fuel flow was terminated and the T.6 continued upwards on ion propulsion alone. Finally that too was shut down and the machine coasted on to find its orbit.

Inside the cockpit Garnett felt small, lonely and cold. With the T.6 in free fall and everything switched off, except for life-sustaining equipment, there was nothing for him to do but wait. In good health and different circumstances he might have been able to enjoy his first look at the unshielded stars, great cities wheeling in the blackness, but he could think only of hot coffee, a yellow-lit book-lined room, a good chair . . . and rest. . . .

The spacecraft took him swiftly and easily, before he realized what was happening.

It came from behind and Garnett only became aware of its arrival when the stars progressively vanished until only a handful shone in a circle ahead of him. The circle was filled in abruptly and he knew the T.6, large as it was, had been engulfed the way a swooping bird takes a gnat. Lights suddenly shone from above to reveal a grey metal cavern, the walls and ceiling of which were criss-crossed with frames and braces of surprisingly Earth-like design. The silence which surrounded him was gradually replaced by faint sounds and he guessed air was being pumped into the compartment. His guess was confirmed as the T.6, which had been hanging contentedly a few metres above the floor, began to wallow gently and

drift to one side in the currents. At the same time the cockpit canopy turned white as a coating of frost materialized on the aircraft. Flexible metal hoses tipped with suction cups snaked out from half a dozen wall panels and the T.6 became steady, held fast.

Garnett took a deep breath. He had known from the start there would be no chance of escape after he shot Xoanon—this simply confirmed it. He opened the cockpit, stood up and launched himself upwards with his legs. The roof was higher than he had estimated in the dim light and for several long seconds he felt vulnerable and helpless, drifting up into the interlaced structure of beams, cables and pipes. Finally he connected with a truss and worked himself through it into a reasonably secure position, feeling like a bird in the roof of a barn.

While he waited for someone to appear down below Garnett partially unzipped the pressure skin and withdrew the automatic. It was almost a certainty that the aliens knew who had delivered the wing unit so there was little point in trying anything but the most direct tactics. Besides, with the weapon in his hands he might be in a position to find the answer to his big question—why did the builders of this tremendous ship want the wing of a relatively primitive aircraft? Why did they want it so badly they were prepared to hang in orbit for several years while their puppets carried out the construction? Why. . . .

A large section of the wall slid away and Garnett found himself looking down at a group of five aliens silhouetted against powerful blue-white light which streamed into his metal cave.

They appeared to be human, as Dermott had predicted, but humans who floated assuredly in the air like fish, controlling their attitudes with little arm and leg movements which caused disproportionately large shadow plays in the mingling light rays. He had time for a few fleeting impressions—almost childishly small bodies, silt-coloured skin, wispy hair, darkly lambent eyes—then the aliens were swimming towards his empty craft. As he took aim it occurred to Garnett that he had completely forgotten to allow for zero gravity conditions when he brought the automatic pistol. Under these circumstances its fierce

recoil would make it less effective than a bow and arrow, but it was too late to worry about it—the aliens must not be allowed to get their hands on the wing unit. Pain arced across his chest from the recoil as he fired. The aliens tumbled in panic and dived back through the doorway while thunderous multiple reverberations battered against the metal walls. Knowing he had deliberately aimed to miss, Garnett for the first time understood that a pistol's sound is one of the most important factors in its potency as a weapon.

He opened the face-plate of his helmet, hardly noticing the smell of the alien air. "Where is Xoanon?" he shouted. "I want Xoanon."

The aliens remained out of sight but their shadows moved anxiously across the glittering, frosty whiteness of the trapped T.6. Garnett waited with his eyes fixed on the brilliant trapezoid of the doorway, wondering if Xoanon would dare to appear. He watched tensely, aware of his own heart beats, yet when the movement finally came it took him completely by surprise—*for it was inside his helmet*!

Something cold brushed against his eyebrow and, from close up, a flash of brightness stabbed into his eye.

Sobbing with fear, Garnett scrabbled frantically at the helmet with his free hand, then abruptly he held still. It had only been the tiny flip-down television screen which formed part of the suit's communications system. The fact that it had dropped into place in front of his left eye meant someone on the alien ship had begun to broadcast on his personal frequency.

Garnett moved his eye forward to the little screen and found himself peering into a large room with pale green lighting and what appeared to be clusters of silver threads running vertically between its floor and ceiling. The room was circular and its walls were banked with what was obviously a tremendously complex instrument array. Several aliens in black cover-alls appeared to be entangled in the silver strands at different heights, but as each was positioned close to groups of controls Garnett realized the threads took the place of conventional furniture.

In the centre of the room a single, almost normal, chair

held a white-haired man who had one arm missing from just below the shoulder. The slight figure of an alien woman floated behind the chair but Garnett's attention was fixed on its occupant. There was an authoritative look about the time-scarred face and intent, unflinching eyes which told him. . . .

"You are Xoanon?"

"Yes. And you are Mr. Garnett."

A violent shuddering fit seized Garnett and pain radiated from different centres in his body. Anything I do, he thought, had better be done soon.

"I'm going to kill you, Xoanon." At his words several aliens high up in the silver skeins twisted away from their control panels but Xoanon dismissed them with a rapid wave of his single arm. He leaned forward in his chair, dark eyes like gun muzzles.

"Mr. Garnett," he said quietly, "I have no desire to use violence against you."

"I can understand that," Garnett said. "Facing an armed man is rather more difficult than aiming meteorites at him from the safety of your ship."

"That isn't my point. If it were necessary I could kill you without leaving this chair. I could, for example, withdraw the air from your sector of the ship."

"You could," Garnett conceded, "but I have enough oxygen here for several hours. At the end of that time there would be very little left of your wing unit."

The old man's face became bleak. "You must not touch the unit, Mr. Garnett. We have waited too long to permit anything to happen to it now. I must advise you that several members of my crew have armed themselves and are returning to the vicinity of your aircraft. I repeat, we have no desire to use violence, but we will not allow you to damage the unit. Now let us talk more reasonably —I know you well enough to be convinced we can be friends."

Garnett was astounded at the idea. "No, Xoanon, you don't know me." He suddenly became aware of the woman behind Xoanon—could she be the old man's daughter? He had not thought of the aliens as having daughters, sons, wives.

"I know you," the old man insisted, "and now we must talk before it is too late. Some of my crew are running out of patience. This ship, although large by your standards, is regarded by my people as an ordinary commercial vessel, the equivalent of one of your tramp steamers. I could lie to you about its purpose. I could say it is a mercy ship filled with enough serum to save the lives of a billion people, or that it had some other equally important role, but I give you the simple truth. It is a rather old, rather shabby freighter which a long time ago, during a routine journey, suffered a major breakdown—an explosion which destroyed essential equipment and at the same time deprived us of much of our workshop facilities.

"At that time the ship had a crew of almost two hundred, all of whom had a very natural desire to return to their home planet, so we took a number of risks," Xoanon glanced momentarily at the stump of his arm, "and got our vessel as far as this planet. However, our troubles were only beginning. We were unable to land and even if we had been able to put down your high gravity would have made us almost helpless. The component we required was not available on Earth, naturally enough, nor was the means to manufacture and deliver it. No solution at all would have been possible but for the fact that our ship normally travelled to a number of 'backwoods' planetary systems and therefore was fitted with a standard brain-to-brain communications device. Our engineers were able to effect a number of illegal modifications to it and . . ."

"I don't understand," Garnett interrupted. "What use would an aircraft wing be to a ship this size?"

Xoanon smiled faintly. "To you it is an aircraft wing—to my engineers it is one of a system of drive thrust deflectors without which the ship cannot be manoeuvred. It is necessary to employ a force field, as you call it, because no physical deflector can exist for more than a few seconds in the drive stream."

"I see," Garnett said grimly. "So you took over a man called Garnett and had him order his firm to build a unit the size you needed."

The old man shook his head. "It wasn't that simple. The first person we took over was called Clifford Pryce. . . ."

"*Pryce!* But that means . . ."

"Yes, Mr. Garnett. When we reached your world it had an electronics industry of sorts, but our requirements were far beyond its capabilities, so far. . . ."

Garnett stopped listening. There had been a movement of shadows near the doorway. Two aliens carrying what looked like weapons sped through the opening and vanished into the dimness beyond the T.6. Garnett decided to get closer to the wing unit so as to be certain of destroying it with his first shots and began working his way downwards, trying to remain in cover. At the same time his mind swung dizzily over chasms of thought opened by Xoanon's words.

"Exactly when," he said, "did you take over Pryce?"

"I have already given you that information. It was in your year 1940."

"But that was . . ."

"Several years before you were born, Mr. Garnett. At that time Clifford Pryce was young radio engineer. It was necessary for us to guide his development so that he could 'invent' the force field generator. We had to steer him into aviation in order that he would not find some more obvious application than constructing aerofoil surfaces, and at the same time make him a multi-millionaire so that we could retain control of the new invention. The aircraft you refer to as the T.6 had a triple function—it gave your technicians the experience they needed to develop successfully the larger force field unit, it financed the larger unit and, most important, it . . ."

"It provided the means to get the unit into your hands," Garnett finished, listening to the strangely distant sound of his own voice. He spoke automatically, all his attention centred on the task of moving downwards without swinging out into view of the two aliens. "You said you know me, Xoanon—but you don't. You have learned nothing at all about the primitives down there if you think you have just presented a case *against* my killing you. Not one inhabitant of my world would hesitate in this situation. By your own admission you have twisted people's lives,

you have tampered with Earth's very history, you have provided a new dimension in weapon building for a race which specializes in weapon building. . . .

"And you took a human life. A very human life." Garnett reached the metal floor and began to work his way towards the T.6, talking feverishly. "You can have the unit, Xoanon, but you must come here and collect it in person, and pay for it in person. I am close enough to the T.6 to guarantee to put a bullet into the unit unless you come through that doorway within the next five minutes." Without warning from his stomach, Garnett found himself retching violently, each convulsion tearing the wound in his chest until his eyes blurred with tears. When he had recovered, he again noticed the wispy-haired woman behind Xoanon. She had the typical silt-coloured alien complexion, but her eyes were large and somehow disturbing.

Xoanon remained seated. "Before you act, Mr. Garnett, let me remind you of a few basic facts. I told you it was necessary to steer Clifford Pryce into the aircraft industry so that he would not concentrate on more obvious applications of the force field generator. Has it occurred to you that the field could make an excellent instrument of defence in, for instance, the form of a city-sized dome?"

Garnett was no longer listening. He had become the matrix for a ferocious concentration of pain, nausea, exhaustion and, above all, the sheer psychological shock of being translated from his own physical and mental universe into another in which different players played a different game to strange rules. Worlds tilted crazily beneath his feet and spun away, stars became black orbs in a continuum of blinding light. Garnett was foundering, falling, but he hung desperately to the one unalterable fact which remained to him.

"The girl," he whispered hoarsely. "You can change all the rest, but not that—now get down here or I start blasting the unit apart."

Xoanon rose from his chair. "You haven't yet learned . . ."

"Enough!" Garnett shouted desperately. "No more talk. If you want the unit—come for it!" He dragged his

suit microphone free of its socket and pushed it away from him. It twinkled briefly in the shaft of light then floated up into the dimness, and when he looked back into the screen Xoanon's chair was empty. As he lay waiting for the old man to appear in the doorway several dark, trembling globules escaped from his helmet and drifted away on his breath. Blood, he thought. The old bastard has to get here soon. . . .

Shadow movements disturbed the light again, then Xoanon silently appeared, holding himself upright in the shifting air by gripping the edge of the doorway. Garnett stared at him over the sights of the automatic. He looked frail and helpless—but not as helpless as Janice had been.

"I haven't finished talking, Mr. Garnett, you . . ."

"I've finished listening," Garnett shouted. He tightened his finger on the trigger, but there was a new flurry of activity as the alien woman ducked under Xoanon's arm. She straightened up with a strangely clumsy movement and launched herself towards Garnett.

"Get out of the way," he warned frantically. "You'll get yourself killed."

The woman caught a vertical frame and pulled herself down in front of him, disregarding the pistol.

"Take it easy, Tony," she said gently. "You've been neglecting your milk again, haven't you?"

Garnett stared up at her face. It was the colourless face of an alien woman, but those eyes. . . .

After a long time he said, "Janice."

She nodded and Garnett felt himself slide over the edge of reality into darkness.

The woman cradled his head in thin brown arms with a kind of reverence. "You did love me," she whispered. "You *did*!"

seven

THOUGH LARGE BY Earth standards, the spaceship was in fact a rather old and rather shabby commercial vessel, the equivalent of a tramp steamer. Nor did the fact that its main drive had not been activated for forty-five Earth

years make the task of getting under way any easier. There were many unforeseen difficulties in preparing for the journey and after three days it was still far from ready.

Garnett opened his eyes and found himself wrapped in a soft, warm cocoon which was anchored to the wall of a green and silver room. There was the smell of hot soup and he realized he had not eaten for a long time. He raised his head and looked around.

She was there beside him—the woman who had looked at him with Janice's eyes. He remembered vaguely that she had been there on earlier occasions when he had wakened and fallen back into the sleep on which his body was gorging itself. Then he had been able to accept the impossible, but now—*how could it be?*

"Awake at last," she said quickly, nervously. "It must have been the smell of food. The way to a man's heart. . . . What disgusting anatomical details some of these sayings conjure up—or is it just my mind?"

Garnett closed his eyes and smiled peacefully. He knew Janice Villiers when he heard her.

"Are you going to sleep again, Tony? Or am I too horrible to look at?"

He took her hand. "I'm not going to sleep, so stop asking questions and provide a few answers."

"All right, all right—don't let the fact that you're bigger than I am now go to your head. I can only remember part of what Xoanon told me. He said the only way they could control somebody down there was for one of them to have his own identity temporarily erased so that the new patterns could be impressed on his brain. Xoanon called it becoming a living analogue, whatever that means. He said a person they were controlling existed in two bodies at once, one up here and one down there. If anything happened to the body on Earth the identity was preserved up here—it's a bit like astral bodies, isn't it?"

"That means you too were under control?"

Janice shook her head. "I wasn't—not until they discovered their mistake when they tried to kill you, then they had to act quickly. One of their women voluntarily died for me, Tony. Or, at least, her identity is in indefinitely

prolonged storage—but she still had to go through it. Her name was Temnare. I've learned something from her."

Garnett thought in silence. "I wasn't under control though. If the meteorite had killed me, that would have been the end."

"I know. Xoanon wasn't happy about it, but the population of the ship has grown to over three hundred and all of them will die eventually unless they get it back to their own world. The vitamin shortages caused by synthetic foods are already chronic—look at my new hair! What would you do in a case where the life of one stranger was weighed against the lives of three hundred friends?"

"Well, if you put it like that. . . . Whose side are you on anyway?"

"I'm on their side. I'm one of them now. I can't go back to Earth with you, Tony."

He had known it was coming, and the decision was strangely easy. "I'm not going back to Earth either. I'm finished building aeroplanes and, from what the doctors told me, a low-gravity world is just what I need. Besides, all this hasn't really changed anything so far as I'm concerned. You might as well get ready to laugh—but I. . . ." He hesitated.

Janice smiled. "Go ahead and say it, Tony—some things *have* changed."

RICHARD A. GORDON

THE ULTIMATE ARTIST

HE HAD FOLLOWED the artist Zacharias the galaxy over. From world to world, from inspired recitals before spell-bound crowds to others equally successful whole light years away. He had made it his life work, if it could be likened to common toil, to follow the artist across the entire galaxy, to study his brilliant compositions and worship from afar.

He didn't even know whether he intended to use his by now immense knowledge of his subject to produce a biography that would be eagerly lapped up by the teeming billions on the civilized planets. To him such things seemed vaguely obscene, that one should try to commit to the printed page or to the book-reel screen the essence, the power, the very being of the artist.

Whether artist was the right word was something over which he'd never really made up his obsessed brain. Artist, composer, writer, empathist—he was all of these and something more besides.

He remembered when he'd first seen Zacharias, to fall under his spell for ever. He had been little more than twenty, a young man earning a good living, when the wonderful posters had first gone up all over the city—posters in glowing translucent colours, that somehow seemed to beg to be noticed, and that promised things far greater than the mere words in their bright three-dimensional colours suggested.

They had been irresistible to him, and to thousands of others. And his coming created a furore, for this was something that could not be broadcast over the tv, this was something that had to be experienced in the flesh.

And there was only room for some hundred thousand people to see the performance, for the artist had a crowded schedule, and could not stay long on such an out-of-the-way planet.

He remembered how he had queued for three nights to make sure of his ticket, and how, in spite of his precautions, he had had to spend almost a month's pay on a blackmarket ticket, a precious rectangle of glowing plastic that was almost a symphony, a work of art, in itself. For the posters which shone hypnotically over all the city had affected him greatly, as they were intended to do. Also the artist, although he was only in his twenties at the time himself, already had a galaxy-wide reputation which was entirely deserved.

And then he remembered the performance itself. The first of many he had witnessed, yet still the most memorable, in fact perhaps the only performance of the maestro he was able to distinguish from the great mass of all the others he had seen over the long years.

The crowded and enormous amphitheatre, and the hushed and expectant atmosphere before the beginning of the programme. The audience growing restless as the minutes ticked by, beginning to suspect that they had been tricked, until at last, with superb showmanship, the artist Zacharias had appeared, alone, on the stage. A young man, only in his twenties.

And then the first delicate chord of hidden emotion wafting its gentle way from the slim figure on the stage up towards the hushed audience before him; that delicate chord, reinforced by a slim line of throbbing colour which seemed to belong simultaneously to every colour of the spectrum and others as yet unknown, pulsating colour and line hanging in the still air apparently in the immediate area before each entranced spectator. And then, after that, came the music, slender lone chords of gentle tunes which seemed lost in the vast hall as soon as they were released to mingle with the colour and emotion; delicate notes which touched a hidden poignancy in everyone listening, notes which evoked memories and beliefs and wonders long forgotten through the hardy cynicism of adulthood.

The artist had the whole crowd, as always, perfectly

controlled, and he knew this. He smiled benignly amidst the strange scales and tones and feelings emanating from his wonderful mind, and the entranced audience smiled back to him. The tones and colours shifted suddenly, suggested things which were unpleasant, and the audience groaned and shuddered. But he was too consummate an artist to keep that up for long, for although an audience does not mind being frightened in the cause of entertainment for a short while, it cannot stand it for long. So after a while the muddy spectrum hanging in the air was restored to its former brightness and evocativeness, while the musical notes became cheerful, brisk, and the feelings and emotions harmonious and pleasing.

This performance had lasted a mere half hour, he remembered, yet such was the skill of the artist that it seemed to have been many times that length, for he could control what men sensed and felt deep within themselves, and this power included the passage of time, which is, after all, entirely a subjective experience, different to each different person.

And now after thirty-five years of travel and painstaking following of his idol through the bright star-clusters to the very shores of space and time itself at the galaxy's edge, now he knew at last that the artist was fading, that his powers were on the wane and that he could not last very much longer himself. For it had been such a very great strain to keep up with the constantly travelling artist, such a very great strain evading the immigration officers of a hundred and a thousand worlds and persuading friendly space captains to take him aboard and such a very great strain to find the temporary jobs that paid him enough to see each different performance.

He had only once met Zacharias himself, and that had been in the early years of his travels, when a contingent of the audience had been invited backstage to meet the great man. He remembered the compelling eyes, which looked as though twin fires burned deep inside the man, and he remembered little else. For the outward appearance of the man was unimportant, it was the spirit he possessed that was so captivating to many millions.

And now, it seemed, he had come to the end of the

road. Here, on the very outskirts of the explored galaxy, on the edge of the gulf between island universe and island universe, on a lone planet with a tiny population which seemed little concerned with culture and art. He wondered why Zacharias had bothered to come to this part of the galaxy; his last performance had been in the very centre of civilization, before the crowned heads of the entire galaxy; a swan-song, the final curtain on a glorious career. Why had he not retired after that last concert, why had he travelled out the distant light-years to this miserable lump of rubble where the fires always burned low and weak?

He was only fifty-five, yet he felt much older. This last voyage, which had taken him so long, had all but killed him, with the yet-savage thrusts and pressures of space travel, and he could not really see why he had bothered to come. Custom, he muttered to himself as he approached the tiny amphitheatre which was soon going to see what was surely the last performance of the greatest artist the universe of man had ever known; nothing but custom, that's all it can be.

He glanced at the battered old chronometer he wore; as he was swept forward by the yet bustling crowds. There were still two standard hours before the opening of the performance, yet he supposed he might as well take his place in the theatre and await this last performance.

Above him the tiny red sun which tried to light this planet was slowly sinking behind an orange-tinged bank of cloud close to the horizon, and the symbolism seemed to be perfect to the now old man as he shambled, head bent, towards the theatre entrance at the limits of the city. The sun was going out at the edge of eternity, and shortly too his sun would go out, to leave him with nothing to do but die. His life had not been long, but the intense emotion in which he had lived it more than accounted for the years that he would surely never experience. For he felt old, and when a man feels old, so he is.

He shambled into the theatre entrance, clutching his precious plastic ticket tight between his gnarled old hands, fresh with the blisters that represented the work he had done for this final privilege.

The theatre boasted an automatic ticket scanner, which was vaguely surprising to him; he thrust it into the interior of the gleaming machine, which chuckled quietly to itself before lifting the gate to allow him access. He passed inside gratefully, with a sigh of relief. It would have been too bad had he possessed a counterfeit ticket on this most special of all occasions, as had happened on other, earlier occasions.

He wandered into the theatre with its archaic plush seating arrangements, found his seat, and wearily sank down, heaving another sigh. A tiny trickle of people was coming in steadily, and he thought that he perhaps recognized some of them, although he wasn't very sure. For the most part they seemed as old and tired as he did himself.

Eventually one of the seats adjacent to his was occupied, by an old man with red-rimmed eyes and tattered clothing. He didn't bother to survey this new arrival, and consequentially he was surprised to hear a wheezy voice address him:

"I've seen you before . . . on Vega, perhaps?"

He turned round to scan the man next to him, and shrugged. He struck no chord in his tired old memory, for he had seen so many faces and forgotten so many names . . .

He said, politely. "I don't seem to remember, you said Vega?"

The other replied. "I was on Vega, I sat next to you at His performance there. It was only two years ago. I haven't seen you since."

Still no definite chord was struck, although there did seem to be the faintest glimmerings of returning memory.

"Perhaps. What's your name? I'm Daninose, from . . . from one of the Ophiuchus planets." He made a feeble hand gesture. "It's been so long since . . . I've been following Him ever since I first saw Him perform, over thirty-five years ago . . ."

The other man regarded him gravely.

"My name's Oblensky . . . I don't think I can remember where I first saw Him. It was nearly forty years ago, I think."

Pathetic efforts to communicate, between two human beings who had hardly spoken rational words because of their very special need for many years. Two, representative of many more, who had followed a dream throughout their lifetimes, without ever being aware that there were others exactly like themselves. Thousands of them, who had first heard Him at an early age and had arisen and followed, to the exclusion of all else.

The hours to the performance passed, the thousands of people waiting were still talking, which was unusual. For they had discovered their common link, their common ground; discovered that the white-haired old man sitting next to themselves had also been to Rigel, to Procyon, even to old Earth itself, at the other end of the galaxy.

And some even guessed the purpose of this last foregathering, for all were agreed that it was surely the last.

And there were no natives of the planet present at all, for such a happening held no interest for them whatsoever. Besides, the visit had not been advertised on the planet itself. The hall had been leased, nothing more. It had been announced at the termination of the last performance that this one would take place; announced there and nowhere else. Despite this, the hall was almost full . . .

The time for the artist to appear eventually came round. The audience grew hushed as spotlights played around the bare stage.

Then Zacharias entered.

He was now an old man himself, and his step was no longer springy and his face was lined and wrinkled with years of mental effort. But there was still an aura of—something indefinable—which surrounded him, and the waiting audience drew in their breaths, ready for the beginning of his act, his performance, his concert, whatever one wanted to call it.

But this time he broke with tradition.

He stood alone in the middle of the stage, holding his arms aloft like some ancient prophet, and the audience was as silent as the grave.

Then he spoke, after having cast a long and serious glance round the darkened rows of seats.

"My friends," he said quietly, and even those words held magic in them—a magic which had of late been waning, but now seemed returned to its fullest powers.

"My friends. This will be the last time I will meet you, and you I. For this is my final performance."

A sigh ran softly round the theatre, and then all was quiet again.

"My friends," he said again. "I wish to thank you all for the many years you have faithfully attended me and my performances. You may never have met me in the flesh, yet you may rest assured that I know you all and that I appreciate all that you have done for me during my years of entertainment. For many have pretended to care for me and my works, yet few have had the true appreciation and love for me to persuade them to travel the entire galaxy to see and listen and experience my performances. Those few are you, I appreciate it. And I know you all, rest assured."

To Daninose, the entire dedication of his life, at all times hard, often cursed by doubts and fears, was made completely worthwhile at that instant. For a tiny warm voice whispered within him: "You, my friend Daninose, you I have known for a very long time, since a certain concert in the Ophiuchus region, was it not? Thank you, my friend, thank you."

And the voice was cool and very, very important, and he was sure that it was something that no one else had ever experienced, for he felt complete and whole in a way he had never before experienced, even in the heights of ecstasy at one of His concerts. And even at this moment of triumph and togetherness with the person—the God—he worshipped, he knew that the others in the hall were experiencing the same thing, and he felt very close and brotherly towards them too, in a way he felt sure that very few men had ever experienced before. It was unique, of that he was sure.

The old man, the radiant man on the stage smiled gently, incredibly softly, it seemed, and spoke into the still darkness.

"This then, is my last performance, and I promise you it shall be my greatest. For all things there is an end;

I decided long ago that I should end when I felt my powers to be on the wane, and that they are. But I have enough skill and perception in me for one final performance, and you shall have the fruits of that. And I can say that after it no one here will ever have to worry again; the word worry will be eternally irrelevant. For you, my friends, deserve the fruits of a paradise which I alone can give you."

He ceased speaking and began his performance.

And this time, realized Daninose and a thousand and more others, with bemused amazement and wonderment, it was different.

For a gentle glow arose from the lone figure on the stage, and music and chords and shapes so beautiful that they almost hurt to behold. And the glow pervaded the entire place, until it seemed that each member of the audience was crowned with this gentle nimbus, and they felt peace and calm steal over them, and gradually everything but the peace and calm lost all its meaning, everything but the golden glow, and the softly ascending music, and the wonderful timelessness of it all, until they no longer seemed to be in their seats or on a planet or anything so mundane at all, but rather they seemed to be suspended in a delightful sphere of eternal joy and beauty and peace. A corner of their minds told them vainly that it was really nothing but an illusion; that their entire mentalities were gratefully succumbing to the mental spells the Artist was weaving for them, but soon that corner was itself extinguished in the now all pervading glow and emotion which allowed nothing else to enter, no other emotion than joy; no other colour than the most beautiful, although it strangely seemed to be nothing they had ever before seen; no other shape than the most pleasing; no tone other than the most mellow, the most clear . . .

And there was no time. Only the eternal sense of well-being, lifting and stretching through the first units of eternity itself, forever, never-ending.

Golden peace and calm, rippling to the impossible shores of infinity itself . . .

The end of the great artist Zacharias and his final audience created a great shock throughout the galaxy.

It also created great speculation.

Attendants, growing worried after the performance had supposedly lasted for six hours, had entered the auditorium, in spite of orders to the contrary, had taken one look, and then called the police, the news, and the medical profession.

Between ten and twenty thousand men, mainly middle-aged and older, lying completely quiescent in their seats, with composed and entirely relaxed faces which suggested that they had undergone some great experience more-or-less beyond the ken of man. They lay there, and they were neither dead nor alive, for there was neither pulse nor any other sign of life, yet the bodies were still warm, maintaining customary temperature in some incredible fashion. And on every single face was the bliss brought only by communion with Happiness Incarnate.

Zacharias was lying on the stage in front of the footlights, in similar fashion, similarly neither dead nor alive.

It was soon decided that the problem was impossible to solve; indeed, men felt that they were committing some kind of sacrilege merely by their presence.

In due time the investigators left the theatre and the first tourists came from the richer sections of the galaxy.

In time the theatre began to crumble, and had to be rebuilt round the recumbent figures, still miraculously in a half-world between life and death.

After longer still, myths began to circulate about the powers of the Artist and those who Followed him to the end, for people are always basically simple at heart.

DAPHNE CASTELL

RUMPELSTILTSKIN

CURIOSITY TOOK ME the first time—that curiosity that our people have always for the creatures of the full round world. It was not only the summons for help. If that worked every time that the creatures think they have used the singing or the signs or whatever ritual mumbo-jumbo they have invented for themselves, no cry would run unanswered. But we come or not, as we happen to hear, and as our curiosity happens to tug us. It tugged me that first time, and I began the hard ascent. There are always pangs at passing through that division. When one reaches the place where the thing always sleeps, huge hollow blue eyes still open, old ivory teeth clenched in both past and future, and the echoes begin to drift and scurry, shuddering to movement as well as to sound, there is a kind of wrenching. Then the mirror-screens gather thickly round and begin to melt, and the whole being seems to dissolve. After that, one is through, and there is no pain in returning.

The first time I heard her call, it was in despair, and there was no answer that she really expected. It was later that she began to gather that hard insolent self-confidence that is their most objectionable characteristic.

The first time, she shrieked and would not at first believe that I stood there. The room was hot and bright—the lights in that world are always too fierce. Their sun licked along the white wood of a square sill. Beyond it, stiff trees and flaming green fields; and further still a sea rustled incandescent purple along ancient shores.

I turned away, for it hurt to see that landscape. There was no kindness in it. She had found a return of courage, and was now standing straighter, though shivering.

She said, "No-one told me devils could look so like men." I did not reply, explain that I was no devil. She would not have understood if I had told her what I was. But I knew now what kind of petty little black play she had used to send her summons echoing so clearly through our world. She must have had—she must have still—some kind of scattered tattered knowledge, a trailing rag of fragments picked up from someone who had been between the worlds and returned. She was tall, taller than I was. She had brown hot eyes, still with the remnants of fear glazing them, a full hard boasting mouth, and a wealth of gold hair tumbling down her back. In her own world she must have had men crawling to her for her beauty; even to my eyes she had a certain glory. And she had, of course, the warmth of being human. For us, that is a like, a fire that we may warm our hands at. In our world it is always cold—there is no connection between any of us, nor is one drawn to another.

She told me what she wanted. The spinning was nothing, but there are laws for us, and payment there must be. Whether she knew the laws or not, I do not know. I am inclined to think not. I think she offered the payment without knowledge that it would be demanded of her; partly out of curiosity, too, which afflicts them as much as it does us.

Certainly it was she who said, "I suppose I must give you something for this?—do you want it now, or will you wait till *he* pays me?" We are gifted at moments with a little knowledge of what is to come—small glimpses, like the parts of a picture reflected in a broken mirror. It is of very little use to us. I said nothing, and she continued almost mischievously, with the astonishing quality of adaptation to the unbelievable that their women so often show: "I could offer you my girdle—or a hempen ring. What would you like?" By this time she had come close to me, and if it had been possible for me to do so, I might have felt the soft down or hairs on her lower cheek and smelt the washed linen smell of her old dress. I understood by intuition what a creature of her own race would have known by the senses, and something stirred dimly in me—I think they would have called it 'regret'.

She whispered, "You're small—but you're handsome enough—and you look as if you might have both fire and ice in you."

I suppose that if I had felt nothing, had been entirely indifferent, I might have returned then by the way I came. But it is not possible to mix with the full world without acquiring some of its ways, its desires, its responses, its acquiescences. And since there is always that hunger to be warm which we may satisfy a little at the human fire —they called us sometimes incubi and succubi—I took the body offered to me in that hot white room with the bare wood and cornered shadows, before I returned to my own place, and left her half-asleep.

The thing slept still, in its usual place, but it began to yawn and dream as I passed, until the structure even of our insubstantial world trembled in terror, and slid away beneath our feet. Only while it sleeps, we live, precariously. The second time, I came reluctantly. The third time, with small knockings of panic—we can feel fear—for she had now managed to summon me three times, and each time the call had been to me, after the first time, and to no-one else. There is nothing among us that they would recognize as direction, though their guesses and their instincts sometimes find a path where there is none. One comfort remained to me, as I swam through the drownings and groping of birth into their world. I had not been forced to come—it had simply seemed better to me to do so. There is no way they can compel us, except one. Any rumours of other compulsions have been deceits, and those who relied on them lost from the beginning.

She wore green silk, now. My efforts for her had been all to please him, and the rewards of them rippled round her like water as she walked.

She said, "This is the last time." I knew that, and one other thing. I took up the singing, rocking wheel, and strained the rough down over it into the fine, until the heaps covered the splintery floor.

Her face was half-greedy, half-contemptuous, as she slid her arms round me. I asked for the child.

She stepped back, wary. "What child?" she said. She knew nothing of her own body, but I knew. I felt the

child within her clear enough to draw the pattern of its curled limbs in the dust on the wooden sill. I asked for the child to take into my own world. It was half mine, and there it could grow, as the human babies we steal cannot. They live and thrive and are happy, but they sit, smiling, and only stare at us.

This child would be half of our people, and could hear and talk and move and learn. It would warm me, and I would teach it.

She said, "No! If what you say is true, it's mine, and I must keep it. He will marry me now, and he will need an heir. I've offered you what you've always wanted before —isn't that enough for you?" Her face was ugly with pleading and desire, and she would not have listened if I had told her that the enjoyment of her was nothing to me—it merely fulfilled the law of reward. I told her that if I chose, I could take whatever I asked. I said that once the child was born and given to me, she was free of all debts, and would be fortunate all her life—that she would never see me again.

She looked at me with fear and calculation and peevishness. Until then I had not realized that she wanted to keep everything that passed by her—me she wanted, partly for lust, partly for pride, and partly because of the desire for a miraculous servant. "But I haven't said that I don't want to see you again—you're a charming little man in your own way. Why must you be so unreasonable? I don't want to let you have the child—he'll think it's his. And suppose it's born dead or something? I'll have to think —will you come again if I call you?"

I said that I had come for the last time, except to fetch the child. She tore her hair angrily, and her large face grew squalid with fretful tears. "There must be some way I can make you come! I'll find it!" I laughed and told her. But how was I to know?

I could not see, for all my glimpses of the future, that she would ever find a way to put it to use.

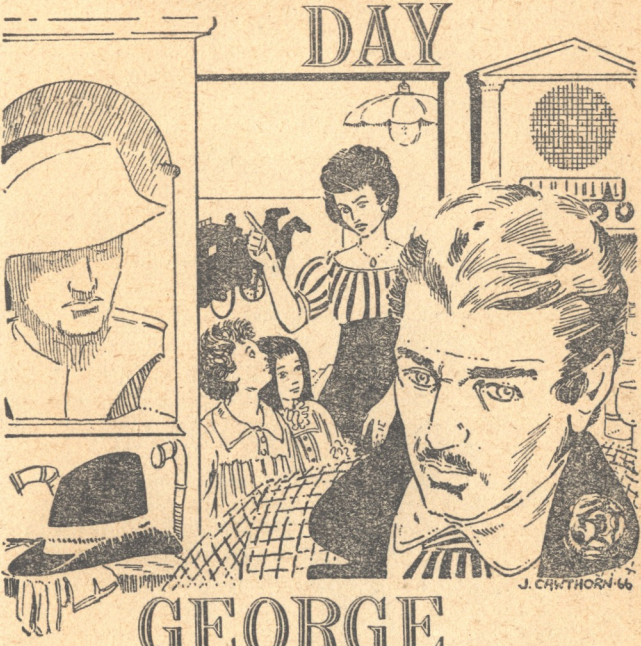
She must have had more power than I realized, or discovered it, or had it torn from some wise old woman. For she found a Sending, and dispatched it through the division of our worlds. It had not far to go. It had no need to seek

me out, only to find the thing in whose sleep we exist, whose fangs knit time in a circle, the blue-eyed thing that has all knowledge.

Now she has my name, and the name is the power and spirit of every being. She can call and compel me at will, and I was sitting in the coolness of my shadows and making a song, when I was stretched and racked into the transition to her world, without a warning. She can keep me, or send me away; repel me or satisfy her desires, as she wishes, and the child is as far away from me as before its conception.

If there is a way to free me, I do not see it. But it may be there. I must look for it. And if I do not find it, perhaps the child could. I must teach the child the ways of looking for it.

UNIFICATION DAY



GEORGE COLLYN

Sunday, July 11th, 1965. AN APPEAL BY GUILLAUME

I USED TO hate those visits to my sister and her husband. They were too much like the petitionary pilgrimages of poor relations. Which, in a way, I suppose they were since Guillaume MacDonald was much better off than I. They, Guillaume and Hélène, lived in a luxurious villa overlooking the wooded slopes of the Val d'Everton. Marie and I on the other hand—a poor broadcaster and his wife—

we struggled on in the dusty cobbled street at the heart of Porte de Livre, not a stone's throw away from the harbour frontage. Yet it was not their wealth which oppressed me so much as their self-righteous acceptance of everything *Haute French* and their contempt for their provincial English inferiors—including Marie and I. I had never forgiven Hélène her habit of snubbing the children when they were still too young to understand the petty snobberies and Francophile nuances which governed the lives of the Anglo-French upper classes. We would arrive at the Villa MacDonald and the children would babble on in their happy way, excited by the excursion and at greeting their aunt and uncle. And, instead of smiling tolerantly on their enthusiasm, Hélène would draw herself upright and say in her prim and precise French, "We do not speak English in this house, children."

I blame Guillaume of course. As a Scot he was more French than the French. Seeing it as a victory for what they called the Auld Alliance, the whole of Scotland had welcomed the Unification with open arms and had traded on that compliance ever since. As a result the Emperor had his summer palace at Holyrood and anyone from the Province d'Ecosse was assured of promotion in the Imperial Service. It was part of Guillaume's upbringing that he should look down on the obstinate English who clung to their outdated and parochial ways after a century and a half of French rule. Hélène, it is true, came from a middle-class family who spoke English in the home and daily life. But, by her marriage, she was a convert to Guillaume's point of view and, like most converts, was probably even more dedicated to the pursuit of French culture than her husband.

Nevertheless, and despite the gap which had grown between us, Hélène was my sister and family ties had always been strong with us. So it had become a family tradition that on festive occasions, such as Christmas or family birthdays, Marie, the children and I should go to the Villa for the afternoon and evening. And on this Sunday before the Fête de L'Unification we laced Annette into her best white dress, slipped a clean blue tunic over Baudouin's head which, just for this once, bore less resemblance to

a bird's nest than usual. Then we settled down in the front room to wait for the carriage my brother-in-law would send for us.

The day was dull with a penetrating drizzle coming in from the sea. The interior of the carriage was damp and pervaded by the distinctive and cloying odour of moist leather. Between that and our jolting progress over the cobbles I found myself wishing that Guillaume was not just comfortably off but so rich as to be able to afford a motor-car. That or that Porte de Livre would either extend its tramway routes or follow the lead of Paris and Londres in introducing the omnibus. These recent innovations, marvellous conveyances which I had seen on my rare visits to the capital, were at that time, like the aeroplane, quite common in America but very rarely seen in the Empire. But that was wishful thinking and, returning to the present, I tolerated the slow progress of the two horses with a growing irritation while the children, forbidden to spoil their best clothes by climbing on the seats, became steadily more and more fractious. Our final turn under the dripping elms which hid the Villa MacDonald from the inquisitive, came not a moment too soon.

With the memory of past troubles in mind I waited in dread for the children's ill-temper to overcome good manners. But, when the door swung open to reveal my sister with Guillaume hovering at her shoulder, nothing could have been more innocently angelic than Annette's curtsey, Baudouin's bow and their harmonized, *"Bonjour Tante Hélène, Bonjour mon Oncle."* My relief was such that I followed Marie's lead in embracing the MacDonalds with something approaching equanimity.

Delicious coffee, together with Hélène's fine pastries, made the dismal journey little more than a distant memory. Later, with the jalousies closed against the lowering sky and the unseasonable fire twinkling in miniature from the dinner service, we four adults ate a meal which was as friendly and companionable as any we had ever eaten together. Then, as the meal drew to a close with iced fresh fruit and a ripe Camembert, the comfort disappeared. With an excuse blatantly transparent, Hélène inveigled Marie from the room and Guillaume began to play with

the stem of his wine-glass in the embarrassed silence of a man who has something disagreeable to say.

"Georges," he began, but he was unable to remain still. He walked round the room, twitching at curtains, rearranging ornaments, opening and shutting his snuff-box without taking so much as a pinch. "I know that this has been a bone of contention between us for some time but I want you to believe that what I am about to ask you, I ask in your own best interests. . . . Tell me. How closely are you connected with the Rose of England Society?"

Debates about my continued Englishness had recurred over the years with fluctuating animosity. Usually his criticism made my ever-ready temper boil over. This time there was such an undercurrent of genuine-seeming worry in his tone that I choked back the rapidly rising angry words and simply said, "I'm not a member if that's what you mean. But I'm on very friendly terms with a number of people who are and, in general, I'm sympathetic towards their aims."

"And how sympathetic would that be?"

"Well, I'm proud of being English—as you know—and I don't think we should allow our English language, history and traditions to be lost by slavish imitation of their French counterparts which, however good they may be, are not native to us. Nor do I think we should allow Britain as a separate entity to disappear—as Italy and Spain have disappeared to all intents and purposes." I was tempted to add Scotland to the list but I wanted to see where this was all leading too much to needlessly provoke him. "Don't get me wrong. As a loyal subject of the Emperor I think we are better off inside the Empire than we would be outside it. But I think that as Englishmen we have something to contribute to the welfare of the Empire. As pseudo-Frenchmen we would have nothing."

"You don't want an independent Britain on the German model? Or long for the return of the 'Queen-Over-The-Sea'—as I believe they say?"

"Good Heavens no! I always find the picture of the New Britons playing at royal families on the far side of America somewhat pitiful, if not laughable. What is more, I don't believe the Rose of England Society believes in

or wants either. They are concerned with the rôle of the English as part of the Empire; not as potential rebels."

"Hmmm," he said, "Funnily enough I believe you. But I'm afraid the Emperor doesn't share your faith. A number of people who are in a position to know what they're talking about have told me that, when he speaks to the Empire on Unification Day, the Emperor will announce special measures to be taken against members of the Society."

"You can't be serious. What about the Act of Tolerance?"

"When Napoleon I granted the Act he believed that over the years there would be a gradual integration of the British Provinces into the main body of the Empire—an integration that would be smoother if it was not forced. Ultimately, he thought, the British would gradually absorb French culture and there would be a racial and linguistic as well as a political unity. But it hasn't happened. For the past twenty-five years—ever since Germany forced her independence—court circles have been growing increasingly worried about what they consider is incipient British (especially English) nationalism. Now you and I know that this parochial attitude is merely a facet of the English character which has little to do with their political beliefs. But the government can't see it like that. With the increasing tension between the Empire and America they feel they cannot allow a possible source of disaffection to develop in their midst. After all, the German rebellion was small enough to be put down with ease as we did with the outbreaks of eighteen seventy and nineteen fourteen. Then the Americans used it as an excuse to declare war on us. In other words the government is scared of what the English might do and it is going to use this anniversary as an excuse for the introduction of measures to bring the British provinces into line."

I had no answer since I couldn't bring myself to believe him. Yet I knew that, through his work, Guillaume knew much of what went on in government circles. Also I remembered the pin-pricks of the last five years which seemed to bear out what he said—the harsh restrictions on the use of English in schools and the reduction of hours in English-language broadcasts.

"What I am trying to say and why I say that I am telling you this in your own interest, is that it would be best if you tread warily and don't parade your Englishness so ostentatiously. Steer clear of your friends in the Society, try not to use English so much outside the privacy of your home and—though I don't like to criticise a man's religion—don't you think you could show your face at Mass from time to time?"

I might have lost my temper then. I wanted to tell him that what I did and what I believed was my own business. But the girls came back at that moment and Guillaume and I reverted to light gossip. So for the rest of the evening the topic was allowed to drop. In time we woke the children from their nap and got into the carriage for the drive home.

In the cab I turned over Guillaume's words and although, in the end, I dismissed them as the wishful thinking of an arrant Francophile, they still left their germ of uneasiness. I was, as I have said, a loyal citizen. I detested nationalism and despised the followers of exiled monarchy. At the same time I was still very English. Now I had felt the curb of a French bit in my mouth and I didn't like it. If the restriction grew any stronger, I allowed myself to wonder, where would my loyalty lie?

Monday, July 12th, 1965. THE SENATOR SPEAKS

TO THE RELIEF of my wife, who had not heard a word from me all night, the mood disappeared in the sunshine of the following day. Monsieur Meyer, the station director, telephoned me early to transfer me for the day from my duties on the local English Service of the R.T.F., in order to act as interpreter on the networked Service Impérial. Robert Michaud, a top-line commentator from Paris was in Port de Livre to interview Senator Shore, the representative of the American President, who was passing through on his way for talks with the Emperor in Edimbourg. I was to stand by to interpret in case the Senator could not speak French.

I think anyone would lose their depression if they

could stand with me on the harbour wall and watch the panorama of the Meusé as a great transatlantic liner docks. These interviews with celebrities from the United States and the Province de Québec were an everyday occurrence as far as I was concerned, but I never tired of watching the wallowing mother-figure of the liner with the darting gnat-like tugs fussing and shepherding around her. I always felt some regret when I had to leave the busy scene and enter the claustrophobic studio.

This time it seemed I was redundant and could well have stayed outside for all the use I was. The Senator spoke excellent French albeit a little pedantically, and I was left to stand on one side and admire the technique of two experts—one at asking questions and one at evading them—in full pursuit of their vocations. Both participants knew that relations between the Empire and the United States were deteriorating hourly. Therefore they expressed themselves in the most cordial of terms. The Senator's opening remarks were masterly and typical, "As representative of the President at the celebrations marking the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Unification; might I say how happy I am to visit the Empire at this time. I think it worth remembering that we in the United States were allies of your first Emperor and that, at the same time that he was defeating the Duke of Wellington to achieve the Unification of the Empire, we, for our part, defeated Lord Pakenham to guarantee the territorial integrity of the United States."

Which being translated means, "You owe us a favour; now leave us be."

Michaud responded by attacking the Senator on all points in dispute—America's support of their ally Russia against our ally Turkey in Montenegro; American recognition of the Republic of Germany; worst of all, their recognition of Queen Elizabeth and New Britain.

To all questions the Senator replied with unruffled calm, a calm which implied that these were minor differences which he and the Emperor would clear up with a few well chosen words. Michaud hung on with a terrier-like persistence but he never once had got under the Senator's skin by the time the red light came on to terminate the

interview. With unruffled affability the Senator rose to move slowly from the studio, bidding everyone a cordial "au revoir" including myself.

Unthinkingly I replied with an English "goodbye".

He stopped dead with a simulated look of astonishment on his face. "Merciful Heavens," he said, "an Englishman! I thought they were extinct."

Then he left. It was a chance phrase of a man apparently being witty. But the remark had been meant to hurt. And strangely enough, for it was a childish enough remark, it did hurt me. The doubts of the previous evening came crawling back into my mind which for a time had forgotten the disturbance of conflicting loyalties.

But Michaud led me off to the nearest bar and by our mutual choice of English beer with cognac chasers he succeeded in reconciling the split between my loyalty and my apprehension. As the day wore on we were joined by other R.T.F. employees from both the English and French-speaking sides of the organization and a casual drinking session turned into a party. It was late evening before I returned to my ever-tolerant wife to whom I muttered endearments mingled with stirring remarks about the essential compatibility of the French and English subjects of His Imperial Majesty Napoleon V.

Tuesday, July 13th, 1965. THE UNLUCKY THIRTEENTH

THE RESULTANT HANGOVER clouded my early hours at work and I read scripts through a veil of red corpuscles which an endless stream of black coffee did little to dispel. Then, mid-morning, I got a note from Monsieur Meyer asking me to come to his office. I tried, for a moment, to work out what he might want me for. But the hammer beating on my brain behind the left temple would not allow me time for thought and I gave up the attempt.

He was very gentle with me. He sat me down and offered me a glass of wine and a cigarette, both of which I refused. Such gentleness was so out of character for Meyer that I could not help but feel that it was merely a prelude to some sort of nastiness.

"Monsieur Collyn," he began after the courtesies were

over, "there is some dissatisfaction in high places with the intransigence of the English."

"So I have heard M'sieur le Directeur."

"In the English-language broadcasts which we originate, and for which you are responsible, we cater for the lower orders of society since the middle classes without exception are bilingual—as you are yourself. Do you agree?"

Despite my bilinguality I was having difficulty in following his clipped, lawyer-precise French. But I nodded.

"Let us face the fact that by broadcasting in English we are actively encouraging these people in their laziness. They learn French at school and hear it spoken around them every day. It is mere infantile defiance which causes them to refuse to use the official language of their country.

"Therefore it has been decided that, in his speech tomorrow—I tell you this in strict confidence of course—the Emperor will announce the Revocation of the Act of Toleration. Such an action will have other serious repercussions of course but as far as you are concerned the Revocation will mean that, as soon as it is ratified by the National Assembly, English will cease to be an official language of the Empire. And of course English-language broadcasts by the R.T.F. will cease immediately."

It was true! Everything Guillaume had hinted at was true. The thought kept pounding through my befuddled brain. Meyer was waiting for my reaction. He got none—not, that is, in words.

"I have always thought your work excellent," he continued, "and I am sure that your services will be of great value to the augmented French services in the future. However I have to ask for your signature on this declaration before I am able to renew your contract. It is a mere formality of course."

Everything connected with Meyer was "of course". Of course I would sign he told himself. I ran my eyes over a blurred mass of type ". . . for the benefits of French culture . . . setting of a suitable example . . . eschewing the frequent use of the English language . . . to our glorious Emperor . . . the established Church of Rome . . ." and so on.

I could so easily have signed; and if my mind had been a little less confused I probably would have done so. I believed in most of it already. And as for what I didn't believe in . . . outward observance was all they required of me. Yet something stuck in my throat and I shook my head. Some people would call it a question of principles. Others would call it being pig-headed. All I know is that I could not bring myself to put pen to paper.

Meyer was incredulous, contemptuous, resentful. Outwardly he made the polite noises of regret and assurances of adequate compensation, etcetera. All passed me by as the realization of my impending unemployment hit me. As it was, the full implications of what I had done did not strike home until I had left Meyer's office. Then, although I had a month's notice to work out, I left and went out to get drunk. Not the most sensible of answers but a quick release from my dilemma.

Wednesday, July 14th, 1965.

REJOICINGS AND REVOLUTION

A CRACKLE OF fireworks announced the start of the one hundred and fiftieth Fête de l'Unification since Britain's entry into the Empire. It was the first Fourteenth of my life that I spent in bed. I was hung-over, depressed, apathetic and I had a cold which was maybe psychosomatic. At any rate I felt utterly divorced from the rejoicings.

I felt an acute sense of loss and a feeling of betrayal such as a child feels for his parents when they tell him that Father Christmas does not exist. I wanted desperately to belong—mainly because I was too much a moral coward to confess to myself that for years I had loyally followed a government which subconsciously I detested. But now the Empire was telling me that I could only belong to it on their terms and they would enforce these terms by the oldest deterrent known to man—the threat of poverty, starvation and ostracism.

I did not have to go back to the R.T.F. for a job if I didn't want to swallow my pride and throw away my dramatic gesture. I could go to Guillaume MacDonald cap in hand and he would use his influence to find me a post in the civil service. But wherever I went I would have to sign that declaration of submission. My stubborn Anglo-Saxon pride refused to budge from the idiotic stand it had taken the day before.

I didn't get up for breakfast or lunch but just lay there —a man of principle who kept telling himself not to be a fool. The bedroom was hot and, with the window wide open, extremely noisy. Every radio in blocks seemed to be at full volume and, although I had refused to have the portable set in my room, I still got the entire morning's programmes at second hand. In the early afternoon the festive music stopped and the Marche Imperiale boomed out. The quiet voice of the Emperor followed, speaking in his literate and literary French from which all anglicisms had been ruthlessly exorcised.

So, on that warm summer afternoon, lying in my bed, listening to words drifting through an open window, I heard the era of persuasion end and the era of compulsion begin. After a hundred and fifty years we were to be reminded that Britain was after all a conquered country.

At the end of the speech, every radio I could hear was switched off, almost in unison, and Port de Livre fell under a silence one could virtually smell and feel. In the midst of the silence Marie came into the room and without saying a word, crossed to the bed and pressed my hand as if to apologize for her angry words of the evening before. Now she understood what it was that had weighed on my mind.

"André Jackson is here," she said, "shall I tell him to go?"

"No," I suddenly wanted to know what the Rose of England Society thought of this. "Ask him to come up."

And he came, looking very uncomfortable at finding himself in my bedroom. Marie ushered him in and quietly slipped out. André coughed to hide his awkwardness.

"You'll have heard?" he said.

"Yes. In fact I knew yesterday. You might say that I've known since Sunday."

"You will be out of a job thanks to this then?"

"Yes. Unless I sign a bit of paper promising to be a good boy."

"How would you like to sign that bit of paper and go back? I assume your job would still be open?"

"It would still be open but . . ."

Marie came back at that moment carrying a tray with three glasses of wine. I could barely face the thought of alcohol but I took one as did the other two. André held his high and looked appraisingly at me over the rim. "To Queen Elizabeth," he said, "rightful queen of England."

To my astonishment I heard Marie murmur "To Queen Elizabeth" as well. I nearly flung my glass in their faces. Then I realized that if my actions were to have any logic I must follow them through to their inevitable conclusion. I gave the toast dutifully.

"You see," said André, "the Society has always had a political purpose even though we kept it secret from most of our sympathizers. For the past ten years we have been in constant touch with America and New Britain waiting for the moment when the government would finally antagonize those people like yourself who have tried to sit on the fence. I know you haven't been fully sympathetic with British nationalism in the past but I think you must realize now whose side you are on."

I sidestepped the implied question and simply said, "I don't see what this has got to do with my going back to R.T.F."

"Look, George," he said, "I can call on help in many different quarters when the time comes but we shall need to control the media of communication. Let us say that it could be very useful if on some day in the near future we had a friend within the broadcasting organization. Do you understand me?"

I understood him only too well. The internal conflict which had been brewing since Sunday came to its head then. I fobbed André off with a promise to think it over and he left without my agreement. But I knew full well I would do as he suggested. Unfortunately Man has

arranged his political affairs in such a fashion that there comes a time when to do what he believes is right a man must do something he hates. In my heart I wanted Britain to remain within the Empire but it could only be on my terms for the price the government demanded was too high.

Since my desire was denied me I knew I must fight for my rights.

E. C. TUBB

SECRET WEAPON

AT FIRST IT wasn't so bad. He stowed his few personal belongings, tested the mattress, checked every inch of the cubicle which was his new home and then, at the sound of a bell, went out to mingle with his new companions.

They were, as he expected, a motley crew. Their uniforms were identical but that ended any similarity between the students. Old, young, middling. Wizened, broad, tall and short. Plump, thin, shrewd and moronic. Every shape and size was to be found within the walls of the Institute. A cross-section of the male population of Earth which made Armitage unique. It was a distinction he could well have done without.

A small, monkey-faced man standing to one side nodded and came over.

"Hi there," he greeted. "New student?"

"Just arrived."

"I thought so, you get to tell after a while. I'm Mackinly. What brought you here?"

"I'm Armitage. What's it to you?"

Mackinly scowled then forced a smile as he spotted a tutor.

"No need for that," he said. "I was just trying to be friendly." His elbow dug into Armitage's side. "Better get rid of the frown," he whispered. "We're being watched."

Armitage twisted his mouth into a smile and then let it die. To hell with it, why should he pretend? He glowered at the tutor as the man came towards him.

"Something wrong?" He waited for Armitage to smile

and, when he didn't, came a little closer. "I asked a question."

"Nothing's wrong a pass-out wouldn't cure," snapped Armitage. "Satisfied?"

"You'll get out when you graduate," said the tutor. His eyes drifted over Armitage's forehead, deciphering the indelible lettering stencilled on the skin. "An Outsider, uh?"

"That's right."

"Home world?"

"Eldon."

"Welcome to Earth," said the tutor dryly. "We don't have enough bother of our own. Well," he decided, "you can settle down today. Tomorrow you get your introductionary interview and from then on you get treated like the rest. Better get along and eat now while you've got the chance."

He sauntered away, tall and neat in his tutor's uniform. Mackinly stared after him, muttered something uncomplimentary under his breath, looked up at Armitage.

"Better do as the man says," he suggested. "Unless, that is, you want to go hungry."

Armitage followed the little man into the dining hall.

The place was big, filled with tables and chairs, divided by barriers. His new friend found him a bowl and spoon from a pile standing beside the door and led the way to where a crowd waited before one of the barriers. He squinted at them, counting heads.

"Another two or three and we'll be ready to go," he said. "You a good runner?"

"Fair. Why?"

"See that trough at the end?" He pointed towards the end of the room where a long container rested on trestles which were bolted to the floor. Armitage nodded.

"That's where the chow is. First come gets the choice of what's going." He sucked in his breath as three more students crowded against the barrier. "Here we go!"

A barrier swung up and locked behind the crowd. The one they faced suddenly swung open. The mob of students raced for the container, elbows thrusting, legs pounding, teeth clenched as they hurled themselves towards the food.

Armitage, taken by surprise, was a bad starter. Half-way down the room he noticed that the trough was already the centre of a struggling mass of students. He speeded up, someone tripped him and, by the time he reached the end of the room only a thin, watery soup was left.

Mackinly grinned at him from where he sat, a leg of chicken held neatly in his hand.

"Tough luck," he said. "But you'll learn, friend, you'll learn."

"Learn what?" Armitage was irritable, hungry and impatient. "To eat like a hog?"

"Life," said Mackinly dreamily, "is a struggle. There is no place for the weak, the gentle, the hesitating. To exist at all you've got to get in and fight." He swallowed a mouthful of chicken. "The first lesson the Institute teaches."

"You seem to be a good learner." Armitage spooned up his soup, tasted it, scowled, then picked up the bowl and drank it down. He looked enviously at the cuts of chicken filling Mackinly's bowl. "How about passing me some of your chow?"

"Charity is a negative virtue," said Mackinly sternly. "To give without hope of reward is to weaken both the giver and receiver. The giver loses what he gives and the recipient has no respect for getting what he hasn't had to work for. Charity, in short, is the attribute of the Prime Sucker. That," he ended, "is the second lesson taught by the Institute."

"You could sneak me a leg."

"Uh, uh."

"Let's make a deal." Armitage was desperate with hunger. "You split with me now and I'll split with you later. Working together neither of us will go hungry."

"Conspiring together against the common welfare is anti-social behaviour," said Mackinly.

"The third lesson taught by the Institute?"

"That's right."

"But—"

"It's been tried," said the small man regretfully. "Worked nicely for a while too. Then the others got wise and ganged up too. I . . ." he coughed. ". . . they almost

starved before the tutors stepped in." He shook his head. "Never again."

Armitage sat and glowered during the rest of the meal. Finally the barriers were opened and the students trooped out to recreation before bed. Recreation was mostly the playing of games of chance, physical exercise and watching television. When Armitage went to bed he found that his few personal belongings had vanished. When he went to complain he found the door locked so he couldn't. The loss, together with his hunger, put him in an ugly frame of mind so that, at breakfast time, he was bubbling like a pot on the boil.

He wasn't the fastest runner but he didn't let that stop him. He reached the crowd around the trough, yanked a couple out of the way, slammed two more in the jaw and kicked a third in the stomach.

He was just about to fill his bowl with the choicest viands when the tutors arrived and knocked him out.

"Feeling better?" The Director of the Institute was a roly-poly character with beaming eyes and a built-in smile. He sat behind his desk, small hands folded over his paunch, chins folded over his collar. Armitage grunted as he rubbed the back of his neck. The stun-clubs didn't exactly hurt but they weren't to be recommended.

"I'll live," he said.

"And learn," beamed the Director. "Life without learning is a meaningless existence. Never forget that."

"I won't."

"Good. Mind you," pointed out the Director, "I'm not surprised at what happened. You Outsiders!" He lifted his eyes upwards. "Well, sometimes it takes a while for you to learn our ways."

"You can say that again," snapped Armitage. "Just what did I do wrong, anyway?"

"I'm afraid that you went a little too far. Meals are designed to ensure that everyone learns the need for a modicum of aggression but that aggression must be contained within clearly defined limits. It's all right to go out for what you want but you mustn't hurt anyone getting it. Not too much anyway."

"The first lesson of the Institute," sneered Armitage. The Director nodded.

"The first lesson of life when you come to think about it. Civilised life, at least. Surely you recognise the analogy between the food and money; the conditions in the dining hall and those of the commercial world?"

"Yours or mine?"

"Mine of course. Earth's." The Director spread his hands. "When in Rome, you know."

Armitage didn't get the connection. He scowled as he remembered a recent injury.

"I've been robbed," he said. "My things were missing when I got back to my room last night."

"So?" The Director shrugged. "What do you want me to do about it?"

"Another lesson?" Armitage glared at the plump man. "Is that it?"

"Naturally. If you had taken care of your things they wouldn't have been stolen. You should have used a lock." He silenced Armitage's protest. "Did you ask one of the tutors for one? No? I thought not. I'm sorry but the Institute cannot be held responsible for a student's blind stupidity."

Armitage told the Director what he thought of the Institute. He was unabashed.

"The only lessons worth learning are those learned the hard way," he pointed out. "You, obviously, have yet to learn that particular lesson."

"Back home a man's property is inviolate," snapped Armitage. "On Eldon . . ."

"Theft is unknown," completed the Director. "I know, I've heard it all before. Each time one of you colonials pays us a visit I've heard the same thing. But you aren't on Eldon now, you're on Earth and, if you hope to survive, you'll have to learn our ways. Reasonable?"

Armitage remained silent. The Director sighed and examined a file on his desk.

"Let me see now," he mused. "You were sent here because . . ."

"I was swindled!" stormed Armitage. "When I found

out about it I went after the swindler and broke his jaw. So they arrested me and sent me here. Why?"

"For education." The Director closed and pushed away the file. "You see, you Outsiders are rather green when it comes to living in a complex civilisation like ours. You have a black and white concept of justice but we know better. For example, it's no use simply blaming the criminal. It takes two to make a crime just as it takes two to make a quarrel. You were robbed, you say, very well. Whose fault was it? In order to be robbed you had to be careless. If you had learned the lessons of living with your fellow man you would never have permitted yourself to be robbed in the first place."

"But—"

"The fact that you allowed yourself to be robbed again last night shows how little you learned from the previous experience. You know, Armitage, I'm afraid that you've got a lot to learn."

"Perhaps, but answer me this. What was so wrong in my breaking that swindler's jaw? He'd asked for it, hadn't he?"

"The use of unnecessary force can never be tolerated," said the Director severely. "You had caught the swindler, there was no need for violence. True, you would have been sent here for self-preservation education just the same, but your case would have been less complicated and so you would have graduated all the sooner."

"Bunk!" snapped Armitage.

"No, simple, logical truth," corrected the Director. "Just what kind of a world would it be, do you think, if people were allowed to take the law into their own hands? Going around hitting people just because they took advantage of your stupidity?"

"All right," said Armitage. "I get the message. How long will it be before you let me out?"

"Before you graduate?" The Director pursed his lips. "That's rather up to yourself. When you have learned the lessons on living in a civilised world then we can consider your graduation. Until then you'll just have to settle down with the other students."

Settling down wasn't easy. Armitage found himself a

member of a peculiar fraternity, half of which were victims of criminals, the other half criminals. Both, in the eyes of the Enlightened Administration of Earth, required education to wean them from undesirable traits.

Oddly enough it made a weird kind of sense.

It had begun, so he learned, way back when mothers who neglected their children hadn't been sent to jail but to a home where they had been taught child-welfare. The idea had spread with the growth of crime. The police, in an effort to prevent crime, had emasculated the population to the point where it was an offence to carry, own or use anything for self-protection. By doing so they had merely armed the criminal. Finding that they could no longer guard the individual the police had managed to shed responsibility from themselves to the population in general. A man wasn't allowed to own a weapon to protect his home or himself but, if he were robbed or attacked it was his own fault for allowing himself to be robbed or attacked. The victim, then, was as much to blame as the criminal. Both needed education. Both, claimed the New Enlightenment, were out of step with the civilised way of life.

Both had to learn the hard way.

The tutors saw to it that they did.

Armitage grew to hate the tall, neatly dressed men in black. They had stun-clubs but they had more than that. They had a calm, even temper and a remarkable skill in judo. Armitage learned his first lesson in deportment very early.

"You aren't smiling," said a tutor. "Why not?"

"Go to hell," snapped Armitage. He didn't feel like smiling. He felt like tearing the place apart with his bare hands and was in the mood for a fight. He walked about with a scowl.

"Smile!" The tutor set an example. "People have to look pleasant," he explained. "If they don't they may arouse aggressive impulses in others and so lead them into the crime of violence. Now smile and keep on smiling."

Armitage deepened his scowl.

The next moment he was on his back. The tutor looked down at him.

"You see what I mean? It is both anti-social and anti-survival to be a sorehead."

Armitage sprang to his feet and did his best to kill the other man. Later, in the infirmary, the doctor shook his head as he dressed the injuries.

"I'll have to speak to Bulstrode," he said. "That man sometimes goes a little too far."

"I'll kill him," said Armitage. "You'll see."

He didn't kill him. The doctor sighed at their next meeting.

"You're tough," he admitted. "But hadn't you better learn a little sense?"

At their third meeting Armitage agreed that the medic was right.

After that he managed to look pleasant.

Looking pleasant wasn't the only thing he learned. He managed to recover all his property, Mackinly had had it all the time. The Outsider was tempted to help himself to more than he'd lost but he resisted the temptation. If he did take more then Mackinly would try to get it back. Then Armitage would have to turn thief again and so on. It was better to call a halt before they both got in too deep.

But that didn't stop him taking the little man to one side and giving him a swift punch in the stomach.

"What was that for?" Mackinly dragged himself from the floor. Armitage told him.

"What the hell—?" The little man was aggrieved. "Haven't you learned to play the game yet?"

"Sure I have." Armitage remembered to smile. "You steal from me and you get bopped. Prime lesson of the Institute," he said happily. "Never perform an action which could have a greater, and more unpleasant reaction."

"Why?"

"There's no profit in it." Armitage grabbed the little man by the scruff of the neck. "Let's go and say goodbye to Herman. He's graduating today."

Herman was a stolid truck-driver who had been the third husband of a marrying woman. He'd been learning the simple lesson that no one should buy a pig in a poke. Armitage wondered just what sort of tuition his bigamous

wife was having—something on the lines of "too much of a good thing" he supposed.

Enviously he watched the big man wave his diploma. It would be nice, he thought, to graduate and be released to the big, cutthroat, scheming world outside. But he still had one weakness.

The Director spoke of it, more in sorrow than anger, when later they were alone.

"I had high hopes of you, Armitage," he said. "You seemed to learn fast and showed promise of being one of our star pupils. A credit to the Institute. And now—" He shook his head. "What made you do it, Armitage? What made you do it?"

"He was cheating."

"So Linkman was cheating." The Director threw out his hands. "What else did you expect? People are always cheating in one way or another. At cards here in the Institute; on the stock market outside. Tell me, would you beat a stockbroker half to death if you caught him rigging the market?"

"Well, I . . ."

"Or a second-hand flitter dealer for not telling you a flitter had a life expectancy of maybe fifty miles?"

Armitage shifted restlessly on his seat. He wasn't too sure about the dealer.

"You Outsiders!" The Director puffed out his cheeks. "You have it so easy back home that . . ."

"Easy?" yelped Armitage. "Let me tell you that . . ."

"Easy!" insisted the Director. "Never mind the wildlife and the harsh environment—they are natural enemies. But you can rely on your fellow man. You don't have to watch him every second of the time. Do you know why that is?"

He leaned forward over the desk.

"You started with good stock," he said. "Manpower was at a premium and men had to trust each other or die. They had to be considerate and honest for survival and the habit stuck. Earth isn't like that."

"So I've gathered," said Armitage grimly. The Director ignored the interruption.

"On Earth people are never honest," he said. "They can't afford to be and, in order to survive, you mustn't be

wholly honest either. You'd think that was an easy enough thing to learn! Here we are, myself and the tutors, sacrificing our private lives in order to teach you and those like you how to live in our civilisation. Doing our best to eradicate all the bad habits of charity, honesty, trusting others. And now, just when you were on the verge of graduating, you have to get yourself into trouble."

"Linkman?"

"Who else? Didn't it ever occur to you to take advantage of his cheating? Or, better still, to cheat yourself? Did you have to hit him so hard and so often?"

"I guess I just lost my head," said Armitage. He felt genuinely ashamed. "I shouldn't have done what I did. I should have known better."

"Well, at least you admit it," beamed the Director. "That's something. Now, do you promise to try really hard?"

"I do," said Armitage.

"Good!" The Director rubbed his hands. "I don't think I was wrong about you, Armitage. Make a real effort and we'll have you graduated in no time."

It took another three months. They had been a hard twelve weeks but now it was over and the precious diploma safely in his pocket. Sitting in the rear of the official car he glanced back at the white and silver buildings of the Institute, the bars on the windows invisible in the distance. A pennant flapped weakly from the flagpole as if waving him farewell. The man sitting beside him cleared his throat.

"Was it very bad?"

"Bad enough." Armitage turned and looked ahead. He was smiling.

"We were getting worried," said his companion. "Much longer and we'd have taken action."

"And spoilt the whole thing?" Armitage shook his head. "The time to claim diplomatic immunity was at the beginning. Once started the plan had to go through. How's trade?"

"Need you ask? It's getting so that we're afraid to look a contract in the face. We've been cheated, deluded, plucked

and taken for suckers all along the line. But you know all this."

"I know it," said Armitage and smiled even wider. "That's why I allowed them to send me to their precious Institute for education. It was worth it."

"Did you learn their secret, sir?"

"I did. Earthmen manage to get along with each other because they bear one simple fact constantly in mind. They regard each and every person as a crook and treat them accordingly. We regard everyone as honest and they took full advantage of our 'weakness' but that's going to stop. I've been trained in their own unholy ethics but they don't know it yet. That gives me the advantage."

"For the proposed commercial treaty, sir?"

"Exactly." Armitage drew a deep breath and his smile almost touched his ears. "Brother! Am I going to take them to the cleaners!"

And the Secret Weapon of the Trade Commission of the planet of Eldon relaxed against the cushions of his car.

DAVID NEWTON

FOUNTAINEER

"Tradition has it that this fount is the 'fons juventis . . .' "
—Cirlot

AROUND THE SQUARE old white houses stood starchly. Dusty olive trees shrivelled their way around the pavements, and dusty sparrows frittered in their brittle branches. The café was as dull as old bone, and old bony men composed the clientele ; the golden coffee machine made the inside stuffy and dry. A steep face of limestone rose on the north side from behind the church. The little square baked in a natural heat trap. On the blinding face of the cliff tired goats cropped withered grass. On Sundays the bells of the church sounded in the arid air like saws cutting marble.

At the dead centre of the square was a defunct fountain ; a masterpiece of baroque. Traces of gilding clung to the sightless caryatids and cupids, and to the roses and pine-apples carved around the coronet which crowned it. Its beautifully full basin was full of litter ; and a few hopeful coins. A rotten green lightning conductor ran down the thighs of the nameless goddesses who supported the spout with gentle stone hands and breasts. The fountain crumbled under the vertical summer sunlights. In the winter it cracked in the frost. Around its base ran the names of all the past Emperors. On the granite slabs, between griffons and unicorns, were carved the names of the heroes of the country's history. The fountain had last run, with wine, at the coronation of the Third Emperor. Time out of mind it had mocked its form like an old, still beautiful, spinster. Its photograph was contained in innumerable art books. It was, after all, a masterpiece.

During the present century a new dam, high in the Appennines, provided fresh water for thousands of villages in Northern Italy. The Government charged the village in which the fountain stood with its renovation since there was now water in plenty; and since it was rumoured that the fountain was a gift of the First Emperor himself.

The stonework was freshened, and thousands of tubes and mouths and jets and orifices were cleaned and re-bored and polished and realigned. The old water pattern was rooted out of the organloft so that this could be done correctly. The trelliswork of liquid they followed from the ancient blueprint could possibly have been a rose. How it would glitter in the sunlight! The villagers laughed as they rubbed and scrubbed, and the watchmaker smiled as he adjusted the metal jets with his micrometer. How the golden rose would blossom for them!

At midday one Sunday the fountain exploded into liquid song. It sang in the little square and the villagers chattered and got happily damp in the fine spray. The trees softened and glowed. The girls blushed and the young men became gentle. The old men in the café reminisced fluently. The sparrows scattered jewels chirrupping. The air in the square freshened, moistened, misted, filled with rainbows and hazy light. The paint on the housefronts brightened. The village lived again.

In the libraries of the Vatican several years ago I came across the autobiography of the sculptor who had designed the fountain and fountains in many parts of the surrounding countryside. He was a man whose only other passion was alchemy, the most important part of which science he considered to be the inconsolable search for the elixir of life. He squandered most of his fees on the chemicals and retorts and furnaces which form the solid props of that delusion. He died a pauper. In the manuscript of the last volume there was a letter which he wrote to his Patroness, the Princess Vallombrosa, a lesbian philatelist; in it his two passions are related:

"In the days of my youth I practised all the arts of sculpture and of architecture. My talent was slight, and it was only by the hardest application to the best models and under the finest masters at Florence that I achieved a

standard which assured me a living. My commission eventually narrowed down to commissions for fountains. For these I had a peculiar flair; in the design of the water-flowers, the network woven by the jets, I achieved such exquisite results that some who contemplated my fountains wept with joy. The design imposed upon the liquid a semblance of timelessness."

After this rather metaphysical defence of his craft the writer attempts to relate the geometry of water to the search for the elixir, the water of life. He claims to have discovered, in some fashion he never makes quite clear, the *fons juventis* in his craft. He closes with a prayer to water. In an appendix there is another letter to this eccentric lady. It is a description, very practical and workmanlike, of the construction of a fountain commissioned by the First Emperor; it is the same fountain as I have described. He opens with an evocation of the village as he rode into it early one morning to supervise the new work:

"Around the square old white houses stood starchly. Dusty olive trees shrivelled their way around the pavements, and dusty sparrows frittered in their brittle branches."

PETER TATE

How many dimensions does one man have? Three outside? One . . . two . . . three inside? And are all of them his own personal property? Or perhaps a sensitivity that transcends mysticism cuts loose from the individual ration. Perhaps the proper reference to young Spirsh'ak was . . .

FIFTH PERSON SINGULAR

SPIRSH'AK HOVERED IN the octopath and tried to read a meaning into the day.

From his station in the outermost catwalk of the eight that spanned the canal, he could see purple grasslands

spread liberally with butterflowers. Stately orange birds tacked and veered like Raleg's stunt squadrons across the water. The populace that would not stand still for him grumbled like overstuffed bees and the ready-mix air held a tension that confused a beginning man of 17.

The youth let the canal carry his gaze to its bend above the weir and then lifted his eyes to the storm-clouds coming in over the outrider hamlets.

A day that irritates the nostrils like mustard, he thought. I like it and I don't like it. I fear it.

Pregnant.

The word came a second ahead of the reasoning. For that second, he pondered. Then . . .

Clouds made mysterious by a sun's concealment hung with fat underbellies, ready to give birth to a strangeling something. But what?

Spirsh'ak swore at his own complexity and tried to ignore the question. Its very inessence, its reliance on one disembodied word annoyed him. He reasoned diffusely that if there were to be any genesis, it could be within himself.

He turned his attention to the birds and looked on them as birds, swimming because it was natural to them. Flowers growing in fields because where else could they grow? Customs painstakingly reproduced.

There were occasions of late when he wondered, in the midst of a Progress, whether he really belonged to any century or place, or whether he was destined to be one of the timeless people, striding across the aeons, filling his folding-file with stars.

What do I care, he liked to tell himself, for the hour of the day or the position of the feet. I am here. I am alive. I am my own creation.

It was the maturely simple philosophy, the return to basic considerations, that gave him a glimpse of his imminent full stature. An original conclusion that had no Galactic primer for a pillow. The thoughts were coming more and more often these days and he revelled quietly in the power they gave him.

But now with prospect of tempest, the precocity train broke. He had nothing to chase away the childhood fear that was part celestial folklore, part product of an educa-

tion that was too much involved with the thinkers and the mystics and not enough with the technological and the weightily informative.

The clouds had moved no closer and thunder beat no distant tympan. There was perspiration along the developing hairs of his upper lip and his brow, between tumbling auburn hair and hazel eyes felt moist.

He ran a sleeve across his face and felt no better for it.

To Ahn, the movement was an ending to his deep-brown study. She had watched the auburn head—a rare, beautiful mutation—all up the canalside,

She was a woman of 25 summers, with hair the careful colour of harvest wheat and a skin kept wisely free of cosmetalc. Her dress, too, was simple—a modest, functional coverage of the body.

Her family was Virtuist by classification. But her own trait was rebellious. Her father, Rik'ha had twice been matched and had procreated two generations—Ahn and her brother, B'ar, with his first mate, and then, with the second, another brood to which, on the woman's death, Ahn was expected to become mother.

At Agraria Settlement Q, she was mother, daughter, housekeeper, timekeeper, bookkeeper, pacekeeper. Twenty-five years and as many men had been ordered to pass her by because of her value to the unit.

She was weary of the situation, she reflected as the cool blades of purple caressed her feet, and there was an action about today's air that suggested a conclusion not Virtuist. The vacuum in her womb could have been apprehension, frustration, loneliness. It was all three.

On the causeway to the octopath, even as the moistness of him registered with Spirsh'ak and he ran a hand across his face to test its measure on his palm, Ahn selected the track that would lead her inevitably to him, noted the swollen clouds and thought, they look to be with child.

"A cauldron of mischief brewing," she said, confident that they shared a similar thought.

Spirsh'ak caught her gaze and held it because she looked upon him with such intensity. When shall we three meet again, he heard himself think.

In thunder, lightning or in rain,
When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's o'er and won . . .

Madness. He checked himself. I am wandering wildly. There are only two . . .

"Rain," he said. "Thunder, lightning. All coming. You're a long way from home."

He felt ill at ease. Confronted suddenly with a need, he knew his power to satisfy came only in bursts, geared to the sunshine. Today, there was no sunshine, and words were sneaking up on him.

"If the sky should weep on me," Ahn fed him, hoping for poetry, "What should I do? Rust away?"

An assault on the insides of his teeth, the words, fighting . . .

But I am weaker than a woman's tear,
Tamer than sleep, fonder than ignorance,
Less valiant than . . .
Hold your tongue, fool Spirsh'ak!

The words come to me in an echo, he thought. A part of me somewhere has conducted this very conversation before. In dreams? I can recall no such dreams and my dreams stay with me like comrades. In another world? Shouldn't I know the centrifugal blow of my coming and going? Is my mind running ahead of my tongue? Let me see what she says next without my prompting.

And is rusting away so improbable, wondered the woman. Why does he regard me with such wide eyes? Am I so awesome to behold? And why doesn't he speak?

She began to regret that she had stopped. But it would be difficult to squeeze past him now on the catwalk, to think floorward and then select another track. Where, in any event, would she go?

Something about my scribblings, conjectured Spirsh'ak with an eerie certainty. I know it. I know too well what is coming. But how long before the vision mists?

Ahn grew impatient.

"They say you are very good with words," she said. "Have you no answer for me? Shall I stand here and bleed brown?"

Spirsh'ak looked away at the false calm on the waters

of the canal. It had some kind of significance. But the metaphor was too forced, too trite.

Ahn grew more impatient.

Perhaps she would leave him. Yes, that would be an answer. No, it would be an admission that she had stopped with a hope. She must be satisfied to wait out the silence.

"You spoke to me," he said. "You must have wanted more than a polite rejoinder. Why did you stop if it comes to that?"

No time for duelling, thought Ahn. Time to cut. Time to thrust.

"Questions and answers," she said in scorn. "Are they the power of your rhetoric? Questions and answers are so much dandelion puff. A man asks, a man answers. Perhaps there is something to be learned outside their words. The problem is too complex. I said I had heard you were good with words. Well, are you?"

"I talk prettily enough," said Spirsh'ak. He shifted his weight to face her fully.

"I seem to say what men have yet to think, or what they forgot to think when they rode roughshod over the galaxies. I can set a thought to the ancient music of the mouth. It is as simple as that."

"Simple indeed," said Ahn.

"As simple as this, if it rains, we get wet. If we get wet, we can always get dry. But being wet feels different from being dry. It is therefore interesting if uncomfortable."

"How you Aesthetes thrive on sensation," said Ahn, conscious of a warming.

"You seem to know us well," said Spirsh'ak, happy with the generalisation.

It was no surprise to either that they were moving together from the causeway and descending to the canal walk. To Spirsh'ak, it was all there, even to the number of paces he took in a moment of time. But when he tried to look ahead, to seek out a climax, a mist veil hung.

Perhaps last time, some other time, that other he had left her (her?) at the polished metal track curving over the agrarian sectors to her home. Perhaps they had argued. Perhaps he had impressed her only with his immaturity. Perhaps . . .

Ahn did not cast her thoughts ahead. She felt only that whatever happened to end this overlong, prickly afternoon, it was decreed. It was all arranged.

What did she know of Aesthetes, he had asked.

"I know they can call a thing beautiful without ever knowing that thing," she said. "That they echo like empty vessels when tapped. At eighteen, a youth may bind some words together for effect, and at 25, he will know that there is no effect; that making the words look pretty was just one way of avoiding the fact that he does not know what they mean. A child's charcoal drawing portrays toadstools as big as people. What happens as the child ages? Does he grow larger, or the toadstools smaller?"

"So you spoke to me as one whose toadstools are changing shape," he said. "How do you find them? Shorter or taller than I?"

"I suspect you are a virgin," said Ahn. Spirsh'ak turned his face away to hide the flush.

"You should not feel ashamed," said Ahn. "I am a virgin and I know that it can be a burden."

Her face had been almost coquettish. Now it was suddenly sad, shameful. He wanted to comfort her over the revelation.

"No merry wife of Windsor, thee," he said, nonsensically.

She regarded him strangely.

He coughed, as though clearing the throat would obliterate the words. He stopped to pluck a wild pansy from the regulated rows along the edge of the path, and caught her by the arm to still her as he wound it into her hair.

"Love-in-idleness," he smiled. "I like these wild flowers. I have studied their origin . . . Perhaps I should pick one for myself."

She scanned his face as he made the flower secure, noting his intentness in the task, the gentleness about his eyes. For no good reason, her eyes brimmed and he kissed her lightly on the forehead, a little-boy kiss.

He stood back, finally.

"There," he said, watching how the flowers sat in her harvest hair. "Experience is as old as man's mistakes. You

were no man's mistake unless it was in not taking you for a wife."

Humour crinkled his nut-brown eyes.

The gulf between their ages still bothered him. No longer because he felt unable to account for himself—he knew what he would be expected to do but was apprehensive. But because they knew too much about each other just to be able to part and forget.

Ahn read this in his silence and threaded her fingers through his. She must do something . . . perhaps . . . a little . . . younger than herself. Somewhere a natural link might show itself, so that the relationship would seem less freakish, less contrived.

Towards the fibrous fly-over, cantilevered across sweet countryside, a feeder was tickled to mirth on its bed of pebbles.

"It is so close now," she said. "There seems no true coolness in all this cluster."

She sat on the bank of the feeder and began to remove her sandals. Spirsh'ak, uncomfortable with the unconscious display of limb, moved a short distance away and searched for smooth stones to skim against the current.

The movement in the void above them was violent. The clouds spun and twisted and the shadows of the trees lay heavy about them like the fallen columns of some decaying temple. Spirsh'ak lowered himself to the bank and pushed his mind into oblivion.

The feeling was still there. Somewhere, he thought, perhaps not even on this plane, perhaps not even in this constellation, someone has done everything that I will ever do. Somewhere, someone is doing it now, an hour, a minute, a second behind me, somebody so like me that we are joined twins across time and distance, I feeling when he is hurt, he laughing when I am happy.

And the words, the wandering words, were there again, shuffling themselves neatly before his mind's eye so that he did no more than recite . . .

> Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
> Bliss on our brow's bent. None our
> Parts so poor, but was a race of Heaven . . .

Ahn called him.

"Walk with me in the water," she invited. "It is cool right up to the head."

He turned to watch her and marvelled that, with golden hair tumbling about her shoulders and her dress up above her knees, she had the presence of a mist maiden, some radiance from a dog-eared world.

At the same time, a fever started low down in his stomach, a fire that licked its way up through his hips, his chest, his throat.

"Walk with me," called Ahn.

Again, he hesitated and instead forced himself to seek more pebbles to cast away the mysteries rising within him.

His body was tense now ; he wondered whether he would stumble if he walked.

Ahn's dress was about her thighs, the current creaming around her legs, one shoulder of her garment somehow slipped away and the globe of a breast plainly visible.

The sky, the trees, his thoughts fell about him in fables. Time was a darkness and a light and a standing still. When he spoke he talked with an intelligence that was not his own.

"Venus," he cried out. "Leave the stream. Know you not that the gods sow seeds of creation that way. Come this way, away from the wind, for that. too, carries their seed. Shelter here with me."

And as she came, wondering, Adonis caught her by the shoulders and laid her gently down on the bank.

And suddenly a wind sprang up among the plasticated trees and beat about the purple grasses, flattening them to the earth. It whispered, talked, shouted, magnified by a thousand hollows in a thousand synthetic trunks until it fell upon the bank of a certain irrigation feeder in a spacecraft roar.

The wind has the voice of a woman and of an instant, it clings with fingers and has a face and a sawing movement, and when the wind is passed, the planet is in a state of autumn. The wind has gone and its voice has gone with it, and only then, lying quietly, sucked dry, does the body recall that the wind said, "Spirsh'ak . . . Spirsh'ak . . . Spirsh'ak."

Memory is a smarting face and the agony of a blow in the groin and fly-over feet pounding down pansies between X and Q, young Spirsh'ak and Agraria Settlement. Futile and alien is the voice that cries after her, "It was the wind not I, my Anna. I gave you but shelter . . ."

Will Shakespeare complete with star-filled folding file moves slowly, not aware of touching the ground, past the gaunt soul of Holy Trinity, fearing the steel sky may descend and crush him.

He seeks desperately for Clopton Bridge, Stratford, for a white panic of swans, for a butter smear on green grass, for a cobbler's shop in Henley Street, just to remember, just to remember. But he finds only darkness and no familiar place in his vortex.

A rain he can neither see nor hear burns him with its drops and his screams echo echo echo echo.

In all this black limbo, he feels for a place of contact and knows only gaping space.

But suspended as he is, he knows contact with some Siamese soul, a smile in space, a thought in the 31st century, a wandering, wandering word.

He goes plummeting and panting, groping through the celestial downpour, flailing for a handhold on a new universe or the old universe or some kind of bloody universe.

I go alone, like to a lonely dragon . . .

BOB PARKINSON

A MAN LIKE PROMETHEUS

"Peter R. Yorke. Please write.
Rosamund, 11, Langley Road,
Xxxington."

—*Personal Advertisement,*
"The Science Fiction Magazine."
October 1987.

THE AIRLINER CRUISED high in the rarefied stratosphere at six hundred knots, and he cursed its slowness. Cursed with impotent fury the miles and the minutes separating him from the event of his reunion. *Oh, the stars, Rosamund; the ice-cold beauty of the far, high stars!* And from somewhere, the thin whine of the jets permeated his consciousness; flying homeward into the sunset.

Everyone had been so kind, so helpful, so understanding. How much had it cost, he wondered; how many of the Earth's dollars/pounds/roubles had been spent to take him from Out There at a moment's notice, and put him on an airliner that would fly halfway round the world before he reached his destination? How much did it cost to bring two people transitory happiness? *How I love you, even now, my dearest Rosamund.*

Well, the money did not matter any longer; and now they had what they wanted. But still they showed concern.

Only a month ago—why a month ago was all eternity, when he was still lost in a world of lambda-sub-eye-jay's. Then he had been buried in the mazes of the Project, forgetful of a World Elsewhere; and now he flew at thirty-five thousand feet to where a Rosemary—his Rosamund—waited by the soft lights of that City her home.

The advert, two brief lines on a magazine page, that had brought it back with a rush. Suddenly he had been caught in the surging, rushing tide released by the crumbling dam. Then the mystery had been how he had forgotten for so long—five years amid a world of meson pairs and conductivity tensors.

Outside, the flames of dusk darkened into night, and the airliner began its long, slanting descent towards the lights appearing below. *How long, Rosamund, how long since we walked together hand in hand beneath the high stars?* The jets' keen took on a deeper throated note; and abruptly the lights of the airport were rushing up at them —ranked rows of yellow lights that marched off toward the horizon. Then it was all over, and they were rolling across the darkened concrete towards the welcoming lights of the Terminal Buildings.

Suddenly the thought came to him, and was gone before the fear half formed; what will she be like now—*will she be there?*

Briefly—a crowd hurried in ragged line across sodium-lit concrete, up a flight of stairs, and pausing in an excited, expectant queue. A momentary wait while luggage caught up and was collected, and then the final barrier passed. Suddenly—amazingly—she was there before him, running towards him. They met, embraced, and only then did he weep; holding her in his arms and sobbing—unable to speak. But words were not necessary—not now.

He picked up his bag, and they walked away hand in hand—fingers intertwined like two young lovers—oh, so very much in love.

"How did you know?" he asked, when they drove away, and the sodium and neon flickered by in pools of varicoloured illumination. "How did you know?" he asked in wonder.

"I didn't," she answered, "or rather, I did. I had no idea where you were; but I knew that wherever it was you would still be reading the science fiction magazines. I knew it was there I would have to contact you—for you never used to read anything else but the technical journals; and I had no idea where you had gone. But even then I had no real hope.

"Do you know," she said, and smiled, "I spent a month reading through all the magazines 'till I found one that sounded like you. And even then I had no real hope, but nothing else worked.

"I somehow knew that you must be feeling the way I was feeling too. I *knew* we had to see one another again. It *had* to work."

And he felt a little guilty, remembering the card in his pocket, and the conversation at the Launch Site, just a few brief hours before.

—Remember, they had said, when you want out, just pick up the phone and dial this.—

—And what do you do if I don't come back, he had asked.—

—Don't worry. We'll charge the loss up to progress, or the cost of increasing human happiness. Something like that. Just you keep the card.—

But now he wasn't going back—ever. He was home; home beside the fair, dark Rosamund. *Home—that something you somehow haven't to deserve.*

There was so much he had forgotten, he thought later, beside her; watching the slow rise and fall of her breathing as she slept. So many things he had not thought to remember again; the soft, rounded warmness, the joy and the yearning, and her laughing eyes looking up at him like that. They had hardly exchanged a word since meeting, but words were unnecessary. For we talk when we are unsure of ourselves—when we fear what the silences may bring. But how could he have any uncertainties now?

He gently stroked the long, dark hair that lay on the pillow about her head, and softly whispered, "Rosamund, I do so love you." But she did not hear, sleeping there peacefully after two thousand restless nights.

They had first met twelve years previously, when he had been just beginning his career. He—a penniless physicist with a newly attained Ph.D. and ideas that burned with incandescent fury in his brain; she—the daughter of a family wealthy enough not to worry about their daughter falling in love with an impecunious research man. They had offered him then—with all due tact and discretion—a

job in the family suited to his undoubted talents; but he already had other ideas about his life's work, and equally politely declined. But—whatever happened—it had become unlikely that he would ever now be able to qualify as a destitute genius, starving in some garret.

Still—and he had consoled himself—poverty is not a prerequisite for genius; and in his own way he had been moderately successful. Perhaps not after the manner in which Rosamund's family recognised success; but in the right circles they still talked with some enthusiasm of the York Trigger Series, or of his work on Tertiary Disturbances in a Bunched Plasma. He had been just thirty when they had asked him to become Technical Director of the Project; and even now he usually managed to publish some moderately important paper perhaps once or twice a year. It was not their kind of success—admittedly; but it *was* a success for all that. His marriage certainly had not interfered with his success.

Then half a dozen national Space Programmes had merged to become the United Nations Space Administration; and the nature of his success had ruined his marriage.

Why, oh why did it have to be this way? And in the darkness, tears ran wetly down his cheeks, as he slept.

This—in brief—was how Johnny came marching home again; with success in his pocket, and love in his heart, and his back to the far, bright stars. For the moment it did not matter where home was, it mattered only that he was there.

But Yorke was more than the sum of these few parts; and this homecoming brought with it new requirements in his life. Soon he would have to find new work to do; if not for material need, then to satisfy the incessant, impatient demands of his hyper-active brain—and to forget the confining walls of this world he had chosen as enough.

Perhaps he would teach. He had the qualifications to take some position in some small university, where Rosemary and he could settle down in quiet and comfort—away from the rising scream of the rocket, hunting the stars. Perhaps he could teach, and forget the wonder of

creation of mighty engines by which Man might cross the heavens.

Except that occasionally he forgot. The habit of five years died hard; and once, when they were dining with Rosemary's brother and his family—Frank, Joan and their fifteen-year-old son Michael—he had fallen into the older pattern of thought before he had noticed. Michael was a tall, polite youngster with dark, solemn eyes, who seemed to Yorke full of serious concentration—as though he might find enjoyment (entertainment would be too frivolous a word) in books on the tensor calculus, or in listening to the later works of Schoenberg. It was he who, apropos of the conversation at that particular point, supplied the specific cue.

"Have you been to Mars then, Dr. Yorke?" he asked politely.

There was sudden silence, in which Yorke answered unthinking, "Not yet. Much of the work I have been doing has been done on the Moon, and in satellite orbit. Mars is still very much explorer's territory, with no room yet for research physicists like me. I may get out there in a few years, when more permanent bases have been set up." And then he realised what he had been saying.

"I thought you had promised not to talk shop, Peter," chided Joan brightly, moving the conversation on to safer topics; while he caught Rosemary's hand beneath the table and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

But in that instant he had seen something else, and wondered whether this family had now another reason for their sudden concern. For he had seen the flash of starlight in Michael's ever grave eyes as he asked his question—seen the hardly disguised enthusiasm light that serious face. So this family had lost, first a husband, and now a son to the cold, cruel stars.

The music coming from the radio paused for a moment while somebody read the news. He had been listening to neither, and it was only as Rosemary appeared from the bedroom that he became aware of what the news-reader was saying.

". . . announced that they have successfully tested a new

'thermonuclear' space engine, developed by a team working under Dr. Peter Yorke. A Space Administration spokesman reported this as 'a major breakthrough in Space Exploration—comparable with the orbiting of the first Earth Satellite,' and . . ."

Rosamund stood transfixed in the middle of the room, as the words suddenly made sense. She looked at him wide eyed.

"*You!* That's you?"

"Yes," he said with difficulty. "That's what we've been working on for the last five years. *Oh, Rosamund, I'm sorry; it was so beautiful. I do wish you could share it.*

"Do you know what we've done?" he said in an ecstatic half-whisper, "we've given man the stars!

"Spaceflight was never very much more than its glamour; and when the glamour went, we knew they would soon lose interest in spaceflight too. We had to do something that would make spaceflight independent of Earth, that would put men out among the stars so that they could never be called back."

He moved to where she stood, took her in his arms. "We've done it, Rosamund, we've done it! In a dozen years from now there will be men who have never walked on Earth. Now they will never call us back. I—Peter Yorke—I have taken the heart out of a star and built a fiery chariot for Man. If only you could share it with me, dearest Rosamund. I'm so sorry—so sorry. *If only you could see.*"

But for the first time *he* was seeing clearly. Seeing the brown skin, the black hair, and the broad, thick lips that told of her negro ancestry. Blood told, now blood told so heartbreakingly; he remembered.

—Sicklaemia, the flight surgeon had said. It is a condition of the blood often found in people of negro descent. Originally it seems to have been a protective adaptation against malaria; but at reduced atmospheric pressure it is as though the person suffered from acute anaemia.— .

—At the sort of pressures we work at in Space, Dr. Yorke, your wife would be physically unable to extract sufficient oxygen from the air to stay alive. She would be dead of anoxia in minutes, I'm afraid.—

That had been the barrier that had separated them irrevocably. His work had gone into space, and he had to follow it; but Rosamund would never see the blue-green globe of Earth dwindle behind them, and the stars like scattered diamonds in the sky. Now the stars burned cold, hard, unattainable lights in the sky.

"I'm sorry, so sorry, Rosamund," he whispered into her hair.

There was a pause, and then—quite surprisingly—she put her head back and looked at him. "No," she said. "It isn't you who should be sorry, it is I. I should be sorry for thinking that we could ever share life together like that. You are not one of the rest of us. You are some great nova-star in the sky that we can only look at and wonder. I have been a little closer to you than others, perhaps; but no one will ever share your world with you. In this century there is only one Dr. Peter Yorke; I'm sorry that I wanted you different."

"But I am too human," he protested with amazement. "I *am* too human. I feel, I breathe, I bleed like anyone else.

"Look," he said, "I'm not much good at things like this; but I love you as you love me. Can't you see all this?"

"Yes," she said, "but all that doesn't count any longer."

The following day, or perhaps a day or so after, he found himself alone for a few moments; and his mind returned to familiar channels of thought . . . if we can express this by an equation S, and that by an assumption A, then this follows, and that, and that . . . and before he had noticed he was thinking of the Project again, and scribbling mathematics on the notepad by the telephone. In the deep reaches of his mind his mysterious subconsciousness had never really stopped working; and now he was surprised how simply resolved were difficulties he had thought insuperable.

He did not even notice when Rosemary entered the room from the bathroom—about to say something. Nor did he notice her half-stifled squawk, and her quiet withdrawal again, trying to pretend she had not seen.

A moment or two later he became conscious of his

surroundings again, and looked at the scattered notes on the table and floor about him. He smiled at his slight lapse, and began to gather them up; and then he thought again.

"Darling," he called, "have we any envelopes?"

"In the writing desk," she answered from another room, "why?"

He found what he wanted, and made a package to send back to the people still working on the Project. "I've just dropped a note to the boys back on the Project," he called back; "congratulations and all that."

"That's nice," came the noncommittal reply from the next room; but suddenly he felt guilty about the whole thing.

Despite that, he duly posted the letter. On the way back he bought himself a pencil and a notepad in case it should happen again.

Headlines: Jan. 1988.

PAN-AFRICAN BLOC DEMAND FIFTEEN PER CENT CUT IN SPACE BUDGET.

MORE GOVERNMENT AIR ATTACKS IN MADAGASCAR.

The excitement and glamour that had pushed men into Space at the beginning of the sixties was beginning to wear thin; the Earth had her own troubles now. The nearer planets had been reached, and the position in space had now to be consolidated before further targets could be attempted. As year succeeded year the budget the world was prepared to vote such work got smaller. A crowded and disturbed Earth prepared to turn from the stars—in upon its own troubles.

Later there came a time when she sat next to him, and looked at him sadly.

"It's over, isn't it?" she asked quietly; and he nodded, not daring to speak.

"I think I have known it for a long time," she said, "but I haven't dared admit it—even to myself."

There was a pause. "I think perhaps I have been selfish. It was selfish to imagine that I could have you to myself; you are far more than that."

"Selfish?" he asked. "No, not that. What did you want that anyone else does not have by right? What is it that makes us so different?" But it was a foolish question.

It *was* over; a brief episode between two lives, finished. And yet he knew that even now, had she asked him "stay," he would have stayed. Instead, she had given him back his life; and perhaps—incidentally—given mankind the stars.

Question: what does it take to take men to the stars? What causes a man to leave home and climb mile after long mile into the sky?

A sense of adventure? Perhaps?

Perhaps not. A sense is all very well for navigating by—to tell you where you are and where you are going. But where is the sheer brute force that lifts a man off the ground and out towards the heavens? What has *that* power?

Question: what drives men to the stars?

Answer: the Power of Love.

And now there was only the minor matter of leaving.

Home?

Home is where we start from.

He went through his pockets until he found the rather bent piece of card he had been looking for. Sitting down on the bed, he picked up the phone and dialled the number they had given him so long ago. There were a few discreet buzzes from the other end, and then a man's voice answered.

"This is Dr. Peter Yorke," he said quietly, "I'm at—" and he gave the address. "I'm through here now; you can come and pick me up."

"Fifteen minutes," said the man.

"Fifteen minutes"—it was as easy as that. No questions, no sympathy—they would have been out of place—but still they *cared*; cared enough to have a man watch over him unobtrusively from a distance, and pick him up again when he hurt himself. Fifteen minutes—that was all it was to care. Call me, and I'm on my way.

Fifteen minutes.

He moved slowly around the bedroom, collecting his belongings, and stuffing them into his bag anyhow. When

he eventually went back into the lounge, Rosemary was sitting on the couch—sobbing silently. He sat down beside her, and put one arm about her to comfort her.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I really am. But there are still things that have to be done. I don't really have any alternative. You know that."

She said nothing; just rested her head against him and gave an occasional sob.

"Look," he said, "we still aren't certain."—As though the world could contain any more certainty than this moment.—"There are still things to be done before we can be certain that men won't turn their backs on the stars. They so often have tried to, and there is only one chance left now. We *must* make certain. In the name of all the unborn human race we must make certain."

Still she said nothing.

Then he realised that there would never be a time of certainty. Always there would be something else to be done, some further step to be taken. This was the damnation of the Flying Dutchman, never to be allowed to rest lest the glittering prize just beyond his reach was lost forever. He could stay even now, but the price of his remaining would be the sacrifice of his dream.

The soft chime of the outside bell told him that his car had arrived. The last minutes were slipping away.

"I do so love you," he said; and suddenly they were holding each other tightly. "Oh, Rosamund," he whispered, "remember me. Please remember me—write me another letter in a year or so."

The outside bell chimed again. "That's for me," he said. "I've got to go now."

She gave him a wan smile. "I'll remember," she said; and suddenly the word—saying all that was pent up inside her—crystallised in all its beauty in her mind.

"Godspeed," she wished him.

He picked up his bag, and left the flat without looking back; not trusting to, not daring to.

And all the way back he cursed the airliner in its slowness.

MICHAEL BUTTERWORTH

GIRL

one

AGAINST THE SQUARE walls of the barn, two marble trees grew up. I suppose they aimed to reach the moon. But whenever the moon was hidden (which was often) they stopped growing.

One moonlit night I was walking down this road for the very first time. The air was clear ; the wind had blown all day knocking down fences and drying up pools of rain. The road wound along under the stars and lost itself in the night country.

A globe of light suddenly shot across the sky and thinned out into a wavery jagged line. The line flexed and squirmed, then burst into flame and sent a red glow over the ground.

The same time I turned a bend in the road and faced north. I found myself looking at the old barn. The red light lit it up eerily. It was soon on fire. Then the glow died and the barn was put out. Only the light of the moon was left to shine on the last outpost of man.

I hadn't seen a building for years.

By the side of the barn, about fifteen feet high, somebody had planted two saplings and caged them off. They were already quite high. The barn was some forty feet tall, and about to collapse.

I didn't care. The barn and its man-planted trees were sacred to me. I visited them every night.

As I left the first night the red glow came on again from the sky, pictured in the same wavery line. For the first time in my life I wondered what it was.

One night I spent too long wandering round the old barn. The night was magic. The stars and the moon were out, blanked every half-hour or so by the red glare.

Funny to describe this but the night captured me. It did so every night. A feeling of . . . I don't know, heaviness if you like, of the space between the stars filtering down on me . . . the barn was a cold rock-hearted fire that purged me of feeling. Emotions drained on the trees by the barn. I felt a desire to communicate with a power that inevitably died before it existed . . . does that make sense? Died before it existed?

Then without realizing why I walked toward the barn doors. I stood before them, unafraid. They were flaky, wooden doors. Surely they couldn't exist? I tried to unlatch them. I might have unlatched the night. They wouldn't give. The hinges were too weak . . . I didn't smash the hinges.

The doors stayed shut. I was no better off. The poet in me vanished. I felt afraid of the night as it flowed by over the ground, and the still, looming sound of the barn's magnitude, edged with stars.

A new fear faced me.

Real sounds were coming from behind the barn doors. I walked off. I hesitated. I saw a vision of horses trodden in blood; splintered bone gleamed whitely under a mammoth hoof. Then a bell was ringing down at me. I ran as fast as I could along the road, away from the doors.

Nothing followed in my tracks. When I looked back the barn was already gone, out of sight. There was a red glow in the sky for a half hour.

The next night I scrubbed the barn altogether. I stayed at home and drank myself to death.

The night after, three o'clock, with a dawning a few hours away:

Black clouds swam like hands across the sky. Few stars were visible and only the glimmer of a red light sluiced through the clouds.

I walked down the road towards the last bend. The road was pitted with holes.

I felt shock. Bullets sank in my stomach. The gun would not fire. I pulled several times on the trigger whilst my heart pounded. Shaking all over I lowered my arm and put the gun away.

The animal fled, momentarily, but would not die. The horse would *not*.

I never saw the barn in such a strange way before. It was squatting on the ground, bumping its roof on the low sky, whilst two thin pieces of wire like straws rose up at its side. Leaflessly.

I wanted to suck the dry earth through them in long refreshing draughts, but I felt weak and gaspish, shaking all over. The vision of the horse flashed on and off, projected on the house in a red intermittent flash of blood.

Instead of running away, I advanced, compelled to run, slowly on legs of rubbish. I knew the same strange dead power tried to contact me over again.

I was a part of the cloud that descended and whorled its fingers in the cool ground and dug them up again, then broke down a thousand doors, advanced, rotated round and watched over the earth from the dim shadow of the barn.

With a shudder the wind left and the cloud dissolved in the old wood and the dry straw, leaving me alone. The interior of the barn was black.

When the dark cleared I made out the forms of grey furniture covered in straw. I wanted to get out.

All was left was a ripping knife that cleaned-out my skull and ran around inside its cage screaming to be let out. In the form of a rat its fire eyes bored out of my own onto the black waves. I stared out over the perfect waves and suddenly over the imagery of impulsiveness and need.

The white bones of a horse, and I looked further, in

the arms of its rider. The rider was a replica of my father. He had been a great historian in his time. So great the horse's laughing skull kissed his own and jerked up and down over his collar bone until the bones of both animals fused into one long and glorious past.

The vision left me. I turned away to blot out the after-image that still burnt in my brain.

I ran out of the barn doors. They gaped open after me.

I ran to catch the clement bed in the road and fell headlong over something solid and sharp. It rose, panting, higher than my chest, and hovered there metalline and meaningless. Sigh after sigh caught up with the clouds and raced them to the horizon. The thing fell back under the low clouds, filling me with pain, and broke up streaming, in arrows to the barn.

Somehow I got home, stumbling through the night, the vast open expanse of dead road stretching away in the galactic unknown of night.

two

a sequence

EACH ARTICLE in the shack seemed to have its own personal hatred of me—the table with its warped top, the demanding books, the autumn-leaf carpet, the sagging undone mattress, the chair that seated a phantom figure, the decaying walls, the smiling cracks in the floor.

There was nothing left for me to stay home for. I packed up a bundle.

The bang I waited for sounded behind. I turned exhausted after the climb to the hill-top, and looked down into the ravine.

The shack smoked against the rocky sides. It would not burn. Nothing happened. The smoke from the bomb vanished in a few seconds.

I picked up the polythene bag I'd brought with me and walked on to the down-slope of the hill. I kept on walking in the doll-sized country for a week, following no road.

I tried to forget everything and tried to lead a perfectly normal nomadic life. I never thought of anything. Lying awake at night I thought of the red line flashing in the sky.

On the eighth day the country changed. Once alien it now harboured fears a lot worse. I began to recognize prominent landmarks such as twisted steel sticking out of trees, white bones, softly-bleached sand, a few car-wrecks . . .

Tired of life I lay down for the night. I looked up at the stars. I was a microscope with an infinite resolving power. Something was using me to observe the universe.

I felt the latent, ebbing power focus itself on me in a dry gazeless search for something I could give. I fell in a pond.

The worker of the great microscope met me the next day. It was a plain ordinary meeting.

From one end of the table a red-hot dot appeared travelling fast over its airy surface. The white blue-white stars shot down an abyss by its side.

In a long frantic billiard-cue of red the leading dot plopped the stars into deep invisible pockets.

There it hung, in the neon-infringed-on skies above, my mind.

The ground trembled in my sleep. I awoke. A red light was fading in the sky. Several stars were beginning to reappear, only to absolve themselves of night and fade away altogether with the rising orange. Soon it was day.

I had a breakfast, picked up the lighter bag and journeyed on. Familiar faces shone out of every rock, distorted, smitten with dust. I glanced microscopically at the familiar country, to see its eyes. I arrived at the barn. I knew it was there, lying in sand, smashed, scattered, broken-boned thing. It had the biggest, dying eye of all.

"Ha," said a voice. "Hy-ya!"

I turned.

"These damn trees. They don't plant them right anymore."

I looked more closely, startled by the first man I had seen in many years. I wondered who 'they' were.

"They don't *grow*," he added.

"No," I admitted, drawing closer. He was tending to the marble trees, paying me little attention. The more I looked at the man, the more it became clear to me what was happening. A strange sensual energy built up inside me. I was wary of approaching him. My body cried out for him.

". . . so the red rocks grow in the garden, trees under Adam and sink slightly in the soil when buses trample on the graves of horses and flash red all the time but stone's not arrived and metal's outrun itself, really the world's in a helluva state, gone mad, the barn's down and the bloody shitty trees won't grow . . ."

"You're not surprised," I said, hiding my interest.

"*You* are," he said, spitting black stuff out of his mouth. "Care for some?" He offered me a stick.

I took hold of it, broke a bit off and handed the rest back to him. I kept the bit for later.

There was a silence in which I heard the sea drumming thousands of miles away.

"I would've taken you in there," he pointed to the collapsed barn. "Used to be my home." He stared sadly at the remains. "I painted horses outa neon tubes, gotta kick . . . all sort of marvellous things, crazy inventions . . . you've bust the lot. You caused a lot of damage . . ." He broke off as if to decide what to do with me. I knew what was coming.

I felt guilty.

"We'll do it here," he said softly, slowly and thoughtfully. His eyes grew as big as a doll's. He looked exactly like a doll now. "Now," he said.

I fell in his eyes. "Now," he muttered (round and round in the swirling flotsam pools of his eyes): "Now."

We did it there on the sand, in homage to the vanquished goddess, Girl.

"Right," he said. "Let's get this barn done up . . ."

"I'll help," I said.

"Of course you will," he said. "There's only you."

RALPH NICHOLAS

CLEAN SLATE

DEATHLY TROUBLE ABOARD the small stellar ship compelled it to enter the normal space of a sable wilderness, thinly populated by widely dispersed stars.

In the drive chamber, John Sumpter squatted beside an explosion-torn casing, probing a cavity with an oil smudged hand. Without effort, he smoothly unfolded to stand erect and stretch his tall frame. Physicist, drive engineer and rake were the terms he honestly applied to his activities; the latter attribute was made possible by well-formed regular features usually reinforced by an attractive smile. His black curly hair struggled in an unruly tangle allowing one curl almost to reach equally black eyebrows. He was not smiling when he looked over his shoulder on hearing the other member of the crew, the Captain, enter the room.

Orlando Rees stood beside him and contemplated the visible damage with a worried scowl. Thrusting hands deeply into the pockets of a stained jacket, he switched his stare to the other man and in a controlled gruff voice said, "Out with it, John, what's the verdict?"

John shook his head. "This is the end of the line. The coil blowing, caused this." He kicked the casing with no real malice. "The coil, I can rewind, but I can't repair this." He opened his hand to display four broken pieces of glittering crystal. "The phase balance control."

The Captain queried, "The two spares?"

With a jerk of his head, John indicated a shattered wall cabinet, with a jagged tooth of torn casing metal still protruding. "The spares are in more pieces than these."

They exchanged rôles as John became the hopeful

interrogator. "Where are we, Orl, and what are the chances of reaching a system?"

The complete loss of the drive and its final consequence had made no visible impact on the Captain, but his reply was abnormally slow. "We're twenty light years from the nearest system, so our present position and the star's name doesn't really matter. You'd need pencil and paper to calculate how many life spans we'd need to reach a planet."

For the last thirty minutes, John had been thrusting away in his mind, such a possibility and even now he only allowed the hopeless verdict to skate around the periphery of his thoughts. Finding a weak point in the barrier, the information poured through to the very core of his being. Shaking off the mental paralysis and fear which threatened to develop, he forced himself to say, "Well, now we know the worst, let's have a drink."

Orlando silently nodded and led the way to the cramped living quarters, followed by John who first deposited the broken crystal on a work bench. Sitting in a comfortably padded chair, he studied Orlando as the latter splashed two stiff drinks into plastic beakers.

He saw a gaunt pole of a man, even taller than himself with ruthlessly snipped grey hair topping a blemish marred swarthy complexion. A prominent nose was traced with lines of another hue, in a singularly unattractive face. To the discerning observer, an aura of forbidding sorrow clung to the man.

"The nose would be a clue, if I didn't know him," reflected the younger man. "Too many drinks for too many years; that's why he's not in a senior base job or running a plush star liner, instead of this accursed courier ship."

Orlando flopped into the other chair and tossed the liquor down his throat and recited words which savagely measured their remaining existence. "We've food for a year, air for nine months, so the limit is nine months." He stared tiredly at John. "Or we needn't wait."

Panic at the inevitability of the eventual death sentence almost caused John, for the second time, to slacken control of his chaotic brain activity. Only by snatching at the reality of his still living body, did he halt the flight to-

wards madness. He decided that he was not yet prepared to face oblivion. With a vague glimmer of long forgotten jollity, he said, "I vote we continue to breathe; you know I'm scared of the hypodermic needle."

Orlando allowed the hint of a smile to skim across his ugly face. "That's two of us. We can always change our minds."

As his engineer arose, he asked, "And where do you think you're going?"

Now that the decision had been settled, John felt relieved as he replied, "I might as well rewind the coil and repair the casing, it's something to keep away the boredom."

Stroking his tinted beak, Orlando nodded approvingly. "Good idea, I've the log to complete, just in case someone or something reads it."

A day later, after completing their self-imposed tasks and a sleep period, both men were vainly attempting to combat utter depression. John gazed through the observation port at the unattainable stars. Finally, he spoke. "I've just been making a mental balance sheet of my life, Orl. Nobody'll really miss me; no close relatives and I don't even have a current girl friend."

The harsh lines of Orlando's face momentarily softened as he gently teased his companion. "How about the dozens of broken hearts bordering space ports up and down the Galaxy?"

"I've been thinking about that." John was still thoughtfully serious. "There shouldn't be any broken hearts; I've always made it clear from the start that I'm a wandering spaceman, without the slightest intention of heading for matrimony. There've been many attempts to convert me but in all honesty my conscience is quite clear. Still, when you have to face a situation like this, there's a gnawing thought that you can't be much of a human being if there's no-one to care."

Orlando clenched his fists, digging nails into his palms, as he said, "You're still the lucky one John, I've a lot to answer, although, God knows, I've punished myself enough the last twenty years." He noted the other's quick quizzical glance and made a decision. "Yes, you might as

well know. My damnation started almost twenty years ago when I was a junior officer on the Centauri passenger run. I'd been married to Greta for six months and I still thought that Paradise could be no improvement on our life together. Until, I discovered that she was a bitch of the first order." His seated figure flinched as if from physical pain.

"She was deep in the throes of an affair with a brother officer from the same ship. A few hours before flight time, I returned home an hour early to be sickened with what I saw through the window. They were too engrossed in each other to notice me and somehow I managed to find my way back to the ship. For the first of many times, I drank myself insensible."

He closed his eyes as if in an effort to make the self-torture more real. "A few hours out, before we switched to the star drive, a small meteorite damaged our radar antenna and bracket and I together with her lover, were detailed to make external repairs. He stumbled and fell ripping his suit on the jagged antenna bracket. I was only a pace away and could've slapped on a patch in seconds with every chance of saving his life. Instead, I watched him bubble away his life."

With elbows on the table and head resting in his hands, Orlando almost whispered the conclusion. "I never set eyes on Greta again and later discovered that the man I'd as good as killed, was only one of a queue receiving her favours."

John nodded his head in understanding, the enigma of Orlando, was now solved. The bottle to deaden and the futile flitting from start to star, to flee the inescapable shadow which always accompanied him.

"Orl, I think you almost welcome the present situation with its dreadful finality, don't you?" John's voice was sympathetic.

"I thought I did," replied the other, raising his head. "Many times, I've thought of suicide but I've never had the courage to take the ultimate step. Now the decision is out of my hands, I'm not certain any more."

John resumed his pointless observation through the port. "Look at it this way, Orl, most men in a similar position

would've done exactly the same thing. On the other hand, even if you'd acted quickly, it still might have been too late." His following chuckle was quite genuine as he added, "Fate couldn't have selected two better candidates for the chopper."

The ensuing silence lasted some minutes to be broken by an urgent splutter from John. "Quick, check if I'm having an hallucination."

The urgency and tone, instantly reacted on Orlando, who a second later was standing next to his engineer. The latter winced as his companion's powerful hand crushed his arm in an unthinking grip.

In the limitless darkness, only ten yards away, a tiny nucleus of bluish radiance was slowly expanding. As it became larger, the shape was discernible as a perfect sphere, whilst the vivid blue luminescence was speckled with darker indefinable shifting shadows. The gentle glow had obliterated the faint stars, and suddenly and quite perceptibly, the sphere ceased growing in diameter.

"What the dickens is it?" blurted John as the two men watched the object which appeared to have no substance, only the glory of radiance.

Orlando shook his head in awe. "Never seen or heard of anything like this before."

As if another thought had occurred to the sphere, it suddenly commenced expanding again, this time at an accelerating rate and the two observers instinctively recoiled as the blue surface leapt towards them, encompassing them and their ship.

Their eyes automatically recorded a warm blue haze, through which they could no longer see the structure of the ship. This information hardly registered, so overwhelmed were their intellects by concepts they could not hope to understand. Permeating this flood of glorious intelligence, was a recognizable emanation of forgiveness and love on which they thankfully and humbly anchored their inadequate thought patterns.

The haze withdrew, the sphere quickly diminished in size and seconds later, John and Orlando were only viewing empty space. For minutes, they stared out into space in quiet contemplation. They looked at each other in wonder

and new perception, as the echoes of the experience still resonated in their minds.

The guilt shadow which had occupied Orlando's grim visage for so many years, was fast being banished. His back had straightened as he regarded John with clear level eyes. "I think I know what we saw," he said, his normal gruffness subtly smoothed.

The engineer ran fingers through his unruly hair, more subjectively thoughtful than ever before, as he asked, "What d'you think it was? It's practically turned me inside out; a kind of mental springclean, very much for the better, too."

"Remember your cosmology lectures at Space School?" said Orlando. "Particularly the ones dealing with concepts current over a hundred years ago. Hoyle and Bondi postulated a state of continuous creation where atoms of hydrogen were created to keep the balance of the expanding Universe. The theory lost favour when the quasars were discovered. Now, I think they were right."

John after his experience was convinced. "You're on the ball, Orl, the old theory claimed that an atom of hydrogen had to be created or introduced from somewhere, in every cubic metre of space, once every three hundred thousand years."

"We know a little more now." Orlando paused, the awe returning to his face. "Just imagine that wonderful and marvellous entity is present at the birth of every hydrogen atom."

They regarded each other, their new found deference, preventing them saying the single syllable word.

With expectant eyes, Orlando abruptly turned and watched by his crew mate, walked to the drive chamber. A few seconds later, he reappeared in the doorway, silently holding aloft, a shining control crystal now whole and renewed.

Crewed by two whole men, in less than an hour the ship was heading for base.

JOHN BRUNNER

A DIFFERENT KICK or HOW TO GET HIGH WITHOUT GOING INTO ORBIT

The following is a special abridgment for NEW WORLDS *of an address given at the 23rd World SF Convention, London, 1965.*

HERE'S A QUOTATION which stirs my emotions in the same way science fiction does. Let's begin by considering it.

"Going from surprise to surprise, Esteban discovered a plurality of beaches, where the sea, three centuries after the Discovery, was beginning to deposit its first pieces of polished glass—glass invented in Europe and strange to America; glass from bottles, from flasks, from demijohns, in shapes hitherto unknown on the New Continent; green glass, with opacities and bubbles; delicate glass, destined for embryonic cathedrals, whose hagiography had been effaced by the water; glass fallen from ships or saved from shipwrecks, polished by the waves with the skill of a turner or a goldsmith till the light was restored to its extenuated colours, and cast up as a mysterious novelty on this ocean shore . . .

"Carried into a world of symbiosis, standing up to his neck in pools whose water was kept perpetually foaming by cascading waves, and was broken, torn, shattered, by the hungry bite of jagged rocks, Esteban marvelled to

realise how the language of these islands had made use of agglutination, verbal amalgams and metaphors to convey the formal ambiguity of things which participated in several essences at once. Just as certain trees were called 'acacia-bracelets', 'pineapple-porcelain', 'wood-rib', 'ten o'clock broom', 'cousin-clover', 'pitcher-pine-kernel', 'tisane-cloud' and 'iguana-stick', many marine creatures had received names which established verbal equivocations in order to describe them accurately. Thus a fantastic bestiary had arisen of dog-fish, oxen-fish, tiger-fish, snorers, blowers, flying fish; of striped, tattooed and tawny fish, fish with their mouths on top of their heads, or their gills in the middle of their stomachs . . .

"Sometimes a great silence foreshadowing an Event would fall over the water, and then some enormous, belated, obsolete fish would appear, a fish from another epoch, its face placed at the extreme end of its massive body, living in a perpetual fear at its own slowness, its hide covered with vegetation and parasites like an uncareened hull. The huge back emerged amid a swirl of remoras, with the solemnity of a raised galleon, as this patriarch of the depths, this Leviathan, ejecting seafoam, emerged into the light of day for what might perhaps be only the second time since the astrolabe was brought into these seas . . .

"The Event concluded, the sea went back to its business."

Probably that will strike some readers as being like passages in stories by J. G. Ballard. But it's not sf at all. It's from an historical novel, *Explosion in a Cathedral* by Alejo Carpentier (Gollancz). Contrast it with this one:

"This we do, not hastily; this we do, not in passion; this we do, without hatred.

"This is not the battle, when a man strikes fiercely and fear drives him on. This is not the hot quarrel when two strive for place or the love of a woman.

"Knot the rope; whet the axe; pour the poison; pile the faggots.

"This is the one who killed his fellow unprovoked; this is the one who stole the child away; this is the one who spat upon the image of our God; this is the one who leagued himself with the Devil to be a witch; this is the

one who corrupted our youth ; this is the one who told the enemy of our secret places.

"We are afraid, but we do not talk of fear. We have many deep thoughts and doubts, but we do not speak them. We say, 'Justice' ; we say, 'The Law' ; we say, 'We, the people' ; we say, 'The State'."

That forms a perfect capsule history of human social development, so good that I recall persuading C. S. Lewis to read the whole book on the strength of it. It comes from *Earth Abides* by George R. Stewart, one of the undisputed masterworks of modern sf.

The reason I've opened with these two passages is simple: it is that my subject unfortunately is *not* simple.

When I was asked to pick a subject to talk about at the Con, it occurred to me to examine the preferences in fiction exhibited by people who enjoy sf, because it might open a line of attack on the vexed question of the relationship between sf and mainstream fiction. Charging ahead on this facile assumption I ran into the difficulty those quotes exemplify.

The Stewart is of a classical simplicity. It goes like a machinegun in a deliberately primitive English, reminiscent of the Authorised Version of the Bible, and it's packed with formally archaic images—yet it's from an sf novel.

On the other hand the Carpentier is a treasure-chest of the exotic. Consider the feeling of being dominated by natural processes, the awareness of huge strange distances where man can only make an impression slowly—the glass turning up after three centuries, still unfamiliar and made more so by the sea's working—all this, culminating in the vision of an "enormous, belated, obsolete fish", could perfectly be transposed to some alien planet. Yet *Explosion in a Cathedral* is an historical novel!

Faced with contradictions of this magnitude, I had to abandon my original superficial assumptions. I'd intended to look at the common denominators linking sf and regular fiction. Instead, the course of my argument tended to the conclusion that if we fence off sf as something uniquely admirable we are doing a disservice to it and to ourselves. Let me try and show how I was driven to this position.

We must begin by studying the peculiar appeal sf

exercises. I'm not going to lay down standards for *good* sf —I'll take it for granted that we shall agree such-and-such a story is good, and be less likely to agree on what's superlatively good. What I think we can do is identify some of the qualities which draw its readers to sf.

I conceive greatness in art in terms of being made *more wise*. I'm sure you know "the authentic *frisson*"—the shiver of awe which goes down the spine when you encounter brilliant inspiration. Housman said that true poetry made the whiskers on his chin bristle if he recited it while shaving. It's the same thing: a sense of being made—however briefly—better able to appreciate and comprehend the world. This is the primary sense of the word "wisdom".

It's too much to hope for the shiver of awe and the moment of enlightenment to recur whenever we read something; anyway, most people would find it unbearable. But it seems reasonable to suggest that a given person prefers some special kind of reading because it gives an extra bonus—the faint shadow of the *frisson*—suited to his temperament. Accordingly, some people will typically buy, talk about, enjoy sf rather than westerns, detective stories, or historical novels.

"Typically!" People don't read *only* sf and the daily papers. We have at best a statistical distribution skewed along an sf axis, barely sharp enough to isolate elements of sf's appeal to its fans, but I think we can make a shot at that.

I can't be exhaustive about the subject, so I'm going to throw out some opinions that seem provocative of further discussion. I'm going to disregard some generally accepted aspects of sf, such as its usefulness for social satire or as a vehicle for technological speculation, simply because I don't think these are likely to turn a new reader into an addict.

I'm going to take four prominent features of sf in two groups, and examine each in relation to other forms of entertainment fiction. I shall be guided by three main lines: the preferences sf fans have acknowledged; what writers with an sf background have chosen when they tackled themes outside sf; and the opinions sf readers and writers

have expressed regarding the incursion of non-sf writers into sf.

The attributes I'm going to study begin with a pair I'd call "expansive". One attraction of sf which springs to mind is the mood it can generate of appreciating huge impersonal forces at work. Lovecraft once said the true hero of a "marvel tale" is never a person but always an event; closer to home, John Wyndham has contrasted the "feminine" approach of realistic fiction with the "masculine" approach of sf, the latter being harder, less concerned with subjective insights and more with the impact of external events on the characters.

The ultimate example would probably be *Last and First Men*, but there are so many less ambitious instances you must have your own favourites. Both Stewart and Carpentier can repeatedly be cited in the course of this argument: *Earth Abides* contains magnificent images of the world getting along without man. An outstanding visual case is the shot of the underground power station in *Forbidden Planet* where two ant-sized men come slowly into view from the side of the screen.

This bears out my thesis of being enlightened by one's chosen reading. It's a commonplace that really big numbers are meaningless: a million miles, a million years . . . Suddenly to feel in the guts what a geological epoch comprises, or what it would be like to be adrift beyond the Solar System, is a real emotional discovery akin to seeing a high mountain for the first time after being raised in flat country, and sf has enabled many people to make it.

But this sense of appreciating vast forces and vast changes is not unique to sf. Consider some of Stewart's other books which fit Lovecraft's dictum to a T: *Fire*, whose hero is a forest fire, and *Storm*, whose heroine—Maria—is literally a storm. It's no coincidence that having tackled themes of this nature Stewart walked fully equipped into the SF field and carried off the International Fantasy Award.

And let's cite another example: Mary Renault's Theseus novels, *The King Must Die* and *The Bull from the Sea*. These engage the characters directly with vast forces of destiny beyond the scope of the individual to defy, yet

capable of being controlled—a pure sf attitude—and also brilliantly imply the gulf of time between Theseus's day and ours by revealing the contrasting mental assumptions of people then and now.

This has also been done by Mika Waltari in *The Egyptian* and *The Etruscan*, and by John Masters, who in *Coromandel!* performed the astonishing feat for a post-Freudian writer of creating a pre-Freudian hero, a wholly integrated "natural man".

Mary Renault's novels lead me conveniently to the second of my "expansive" attributes: they are acted against a gorgeously exotic background. The allure of the exotic is something I shall have to examine in considerable detail, but to get where I'm going I shall have to dig back into the origins of contemporary sf.

First, though, I should point out that this too fits my underlying thesis: to have one's imagination enlarged by concepts alien to one's humdrum background is certainly a form of enlightenment.

One significant fact about the rise of modern sf is that it coincided with the departure from the maps of the last spaces in which one could write "Here be Tygers". It seems to me the classical travellers' tales—the voyages of Marco Polo, the works of John Mandeville—are more direct precursors of modern SF than the speculative or didactic utopias. Just as Edgar Rice Burroughs gave a "real" setting to his adventure stories by cashing in on the ideas of astronomers like Percival Lowell and Camille Flammarion and calling the background "Mars", so the retailers of legends like that of Prester John paid lip-service to the ideas of their day and named their fabulous countries "Cathay" or "Norumbega" or "California". This is precisely what I do in an sf story if I call my alien environment "Tau Ceti II".

And here's another intriguing correlation with SF. George Stewart's *Names on the Land* (a history of American place-naming) contains accounts of the tales formerly circulated about the New World. Texas, or Techas, was originally as mythical as El Dorado, and California was supposed to be an island of Amazons ruled by a queen called Calaf, who kidnapped men to be the fathers of her subjects' children and then had them and the resultant boy-children killed,

Stewart points out amusingly that in consequence anyone who claimed to have discovered "California" was regarded as a liar or touched in the head; all well-informed people knew it must be mythical!

It's interesting to note that Stewart, who made such a success of his venture into sf, shares this sense of the grandiose in myth and legend with us.

I was pointing out that sf took root as the last blanks in the atlases were filled in. Now I'd maintain that writers like Rider Haggard are spiritual ancestors of much modern sf. Their heyday, and that of the lost-land romance, was in the decades when sf assumed its modern form at the hands of Wells and Verne. Conan Doyle bridges the two forms neatly: *The Lost World* is a tale of jungle adventure, but borrows the appeal of a time-travel story by importing dinosaurs to the twentieth century.

The mention of Rider Haggard cues me into a further stage of my argument about the exotic, as well as handily underpinning my earlier point about vast forces and vast changes. His historical romances, *Red Eve* and *The Virgin of the Sun*, are full of quasi-science fiction elements.

In *Red Eve* a dominant motif is sustained by the Black Death and the displacement of the black rat by the plague-carrying brown rat. One might compare the use Wells made of the Red Weed in *War of the Worlds*—which the producers of the film version left out because they didn't get the point. Similarly, the opening section of *Virgin of the Sun* centres on a stranger in medieval London who has never seen soap, who wears a strange idol on a chain around his neck, and so on. He turns out to be from the land of the Incas, where the hero eventually winds up. This duplicates a device common in sf.

In talking about the lure of the exotic and the sense of vast changes, I refer again and again to historical novels. This is not by chance, but I'll have to preface my explanation of why not with a couple of further points.

It's worth noticing that more than one strand of exotica has developed since the decline of the lost-land romance. One is found in sf, in the work of people like Jack Vance. Another is found in the contemporary novel—influenced, I suspect, by the cinema—and increasingly on TV; I'd

adduce the employment of semi-abstract or surrealist settings for series where the suspension of disbelief is as necessary as in sf. Another yet, the one in the most direct tradition, has retreated into unashamed fantasy, where it makes contact again with sf. Works set in never-never lands, like the Tolkien trilogy, connect sf and the historical novel; there's a mood of primitivism implicit in them, yet no one could mistake them for realistic historical works.

Against that snippet of background, let's consider the phenomenon that sf fans and writers often display interest in areas of history about which one doesn't get taught much at school. (I say *often* to take care of people like Fletcher Pratt, who was an authority on the American Civil War, and of the widespread liking for C. S. Forester I've noticed among sf fans, which I'm coming to under a different heading.)

To take a couple of examples: Poul Anderson has written gaudy historical adventure, like *Rogue Sword*, choosing the confused milieu of the Mediterranean in the fourteenth century, which in my education was lightly skimmed over—perhaps out of patriotism, since under the Angevin kings England was regarded as a pretty second-rate piece of real estate. Similarly, L. Sprague de Camp has written delightful books about such undertakings as the building of the Colossus of Rhodes.

The close relationship between sf and the offbeat historical story where one feels carried beyond the humdrum information drilled into one at school can be further illustrated by the historical elements imported by sf writers into their regular work. The only André Norton book I've ever enjoyed, *Time Traders*, struck me as good because she brought to life the Bronze Age culture her time-travellers visited. And last year at the Oakland Convention Frank Herbert explained how he drew on desert cultures like the Bedouin to shape his Dune World stories. To most of us the concepts he used are alien; yet by invoking genuine human experience he achieved a depth no purely imaginative exercise could provide. Moreover, when writing the third of the Society of Time stories (*Times Without Number*, Ace Books), I helped myself freely to George

Stewart's information regarding mythical countries in the Americas.

The majority of sf readers and writers appear to find a kick parallel to the one they get from sf in historical periods marked by confusion productive of paradox, resembling our own century in that ordinary people's lives can be turned topsyturvy without warning—by a barbarian horde coming over the hill, or by a man in a laboratory making a discovery.

The same "sense of wonder" can be generated by Frans Bengtsson (in *The Long Ships*), by John Masters, or indeed by writers working with much less promising material, as is found in sf. The lure of the exotic, though a prime element of sf's appeal, is therefore not a unique attribute. Here I'm going to cite Carpentier again. His *The Lost Steps* is a time-travel story which doesn't leave the twentieth century; in it a New York musicologist voyages up the Amazon until he is among people so far in the past they haven't even invented music. It's a *tour de force*, and many people say it reminds them of J. G. Ballard's work.

Let's turn now to the pair of attributes I'm terming "constrictive". I could have called them "inward-looking" —or even "cosy". Because there are two ways one's preferred entertainment reading can make one feel more connected to the universe: first, which we've been dealing with, is the enlargement of you to contain the externals; second is the shrinkage of the externals to fit you.

And it's definitely reassuring to have the enormous, sometimes terrifying cosmos shrunk to fit and fenced around with a crashproof barrier.

Perhaps that's too sweeping. What I want to examine is the reverse of what I've discussed up till now: the applicability of rule and system to the universe. Many definitions of sf fall down on things like time-travel, which clearly is not fantasy yet is not scientifically feasible according to present knowledge. My feeling is that the unifying thread running through sf is a recognition of scientific method, which affords us a handle to grasp such remote concepts.

The corollary, then, of my first "expansive" attribute—the sense of vast changes and vast forces—is the generation

of the wholly self-consistent construct, bounded by a set of perfectly definable propositions. I'd subsume under this head most of the ambitious, highly intellectualised stories written by authors with an orthodox scientific training. Whether I'm doing them an injustice or not, I have the impression that people like Asimov and Clement hanker after a tidier framework for their characters' lives than real life can offer.

But this tendency isn't confined to writers with a strong scientific bent. It's clearly revealed in the habit many of us have of building stories around a systematised central assumption. The *reductio ad absurdum* technique of stories like *The Space Merchants* is a reflection of this tendency; so too is the love-hate relationship sf has with the Catholic Church. In at least two recent Hugo winners (*Case of Conscience* and *Canticle for Leibowitz*) you see this plainly, and I exploited it myself in *Times Without Number*. Paradoxically it also appears in sf writers' concern with magic, which in my *ad hoc* classification might seem to fall under the head of the lure of the exotic. I don't think so. I think this fondness for theology and magic is because these are *par excellence* the result of the unfettered exercise of human intellection, untrammelled by the impact of contrary experimental facts.

This fascination with a bounded world and a collection of rigid laws is possibly sf's most nearly unique attribute, but it's not our private property any more than the previous two. Take Asimov's robotics stories, which are changes rung on a set of three postulates with loopholes in them. These are akin in spirit to the classic "locked-room" detective story, resolved by an insight deducible from the information given or assumed to be the common property of reader and writer. A lot of sf writers are Sherlock Holmes fans, and there's another not-coincidence. Underlining this is that there are writers aplenty who have turned from SF to detective stories with a fantasy element—Fredric Brown's work, for instance, is inarguably related to his science fiction.

The parallel to the detective story goes a long way in this area of sf. It covers alien-planet stories which turn on the question of how to do it rather than who-dun-it, but which

are resoluble in intellectual terms. It covers parallel-worlds stories where the crisis of the plot depends on the arbitrary difference between the real and the imaginary world. But the overlaps occur elsewhere too. The self-consistent universe, the bounded world, may be of the Lewis Carroll type ; another not-coincidence is the recurrence of attempts by sf writers to work out chess-stories. Poul Anderson has succumbed to this, and so have I, in *The Squares of the City*, due this December (1965) from Ballantine Books in New York.

I'd carry the argument further, and say that the creation of a self-consistent world is so far from the prerogative of SF writers it can be done by writers who dislike SF. Consider Colin MacInnes's *Absolute Beginners*, allegedly a novel about teenagers in the London of the early sixties. It bears no resemblance to real life, but the mood of containment within a set of rules is so flawlessly sustained it doesn't matter—it becomes a fantasy. The successful spy stories of recent years on the Fleming/Deighton axis (as opposed to the John le Carré axis) have likewise depended on this for their appeal.

One cannot, of course, within the confines of a story of publishable length, set out all the rules applicable to a situation. Unfortunately the tendency does spread far enough to engulf the characters as well as their setting, and this connects to a subsidiary aspect of my first "constrictive" attribute.

Edmund Crispin has pointed out that sf is the last refuge of the morality tale. John Wyndham can take time out for pages of straight lecturing in *Consider Her Ways*, and nobody feels this much amiss, any more than a chunk of Christian preaching was in a romance about King Arthur. Heinlein frequently uses sf to put over social and political theses.

Likewise, sf is a late refuge for the hero-type. I don't mean heroes in the James Bond sense, but in a rather special sense I'll try and define.

Few sf stories honestly tackle the information made available by psychology and anthropology. We get social psychology, but mainly tied to social criticism and satire. In other words, sf is least happy with the element least

susceptible of being constrained within definable bounds, and the sciences which analyse that intractability are taking longest to filter into our accepted vocabulary of images and associations.

This relates to sf readers' and writers' wistful regard for disciplined organisation. The liking for C. S. Forester I promised to revert to seems to me an instance. Aboard a sailing ship you have both the bounded world and the definable rules (naval discipline and seamanship) which together compose this "constrictive" attribute. Moreover, here's a secondary reason for our obsession with theology. The rules of a monastic order, or the dogmas of a religious faith, impose handy limits on the "orneriness" of the characters.

This pattern dictates the nature of the sf hero-type, and also serves to relate it to my idea of feeling enlightened by one's chosen reading.

The essential gift possessed by the sf hero is that *he knows what he's doing*. Heinlein is extremely good at portraying such types; he can make us think, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if the universe were domesticated? How much better if everybody in it were straightforward and manipulable!"

Granted, limiting the complexity of one's characters can be done in many ways: sticking labels on and parading them on a field of preconceptions is simply a sign of bad writing, whereas I've arrived at this point while discussing the appeal of good sf. A paradox somewhere!

I think, though, that the mystery of how limitation of the depth of one's characters can be a positive source of science fictional appeal resolves when one considers the last of my four attributes.

I think a lot of sf—more than most people admit—is downright wishful thinking, on the same footing as the romance where the heroine always gets her adoring husband or the thriller where the private eye always collects three blondes *en route* to the showdown with the boss of the syndicate.

There is no reason why wishful thinking should not be incorporated into a successful whole. In Arthur Clarke's *Childhood's End* the starspanning Overlords envied man-

kind because they were at the end of their racial path while we were still capable of evolution. However, it has a drawback: it gives the illusion of enlightenment instead of the reality.

When it serves to make an ultimate ideal seem attainable, hence worth striving for, it has value. Taken as undiluted escapism it reduces instead of enhancing our connection with the world. Among sf fans I've noticed people who find the world too much for them, and certainly there are writers whose work suggests they're in the same plight. I propose to spend no more time on this aspect of sf, because although it's notable it's scarcely noteworthy.

These four attributes aren't the only ones, but they seem to me both conspicuous and characteristic. I can't think of any sf story which doesn't contain at least one or perhaps all of them in varying proportions.

I've concluded that not one of the four is unique, and most of the time you can turn up examples outside SF where the writer has made a better job.

Is one to deduce that SF is a waste of time? Not at all. What one is to deduce is that it's a fruitless pastime analysing a subjective reaction so thoroughly. There still remains the inarguable fact that occasionally SF can conjure up a moment of pure magic distinct from what occurs in any other branch of literature.

The closest analogy to this situation is one used by Arthur Porges in FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION to make a delightful story called *$1.98*, concerning an underprivileged genie whose power to reward the hero was limited to goods of that value. The gimmick was that allegedly this represented the market value of the constituents of a human body; for his dollar ninety-eight the hero got his girl into bed with him, and this was worth more than mere money. These isolated elements don't equate to sf any more than single notes equate to the symphony—indeed, I'd carry the conclusion further, and say that there is not, if indeed there ever was, such a thing as science fiction. We'll go on talking as if there were, but purely for convenience.

I can make that clearer by standing my earlier points on their heads. Let's work backwards from general fiction to sf for a change and consider the resemblance between the

kind of kick one gets from other forms of fiction and its counterpart in sf.

For me no one can hold a candle to Philip K. Dick. Not only his ambitious works like *Man in the High Castle*, but his comparatively casual Ace books—*Dr. Bloodmoney, The Simulacra*—possess staggering depth and richness. Their impact is closer to the work of, say, Vance Bourjaily than anything else in sf.

And there's the Swiftian element in Kurt Vonnegut; possibly one might invoke Evelyn Waugh, in books like *The Loved One*, where a fine sense of the ridiculous is heightened to true absurdity.

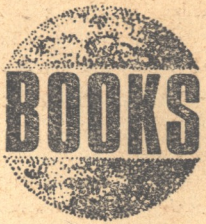
A new and encouraging tendency can be observed when non-sf writers tackle sf themes. Formerly, on these occasions, the publishers and reviewers said WOW and the sf fans said UGH! Lately it's been notable that non-sf authors have taken the trouble to find out what sf can do before starting an sf plot. Anthony Burgess made a *tour de force* out of *A Clockwork Orange*, and Naomi Mitchison applied her knowledge of African customs analogically to *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*—not a great book, but one which sf fans can read with admiration where a few years back things like *Level 7* were so hamfistedly written as to be unreadable.

Do these trends not foreshadow a long overdue breakthrough, when we'll be able to apply the standards of general fiction to sf without qualification? When the best sf was by A. E. van Vogt, or worse yet Ray Cummings, one had to apologise because it wasn't up to the standard set by Wells!

It remains a sad reflection on our "literature of the future" that it's still so heavily conditioned by the old pulp tradition. When Bester pulled typographical tricks in *The Demolished Man*, when Wolfe executed his pyrotechnics in *Limbo 90*, it came as a shock—yet Philip Wylie had done it in *Finnley Wren* in 1934 when it was already old hat. Even now the number of people who have brought the full range of modern fictional techniques to bear on an sf plot can be briefly listed, and they include outsiders like Stewart, Vonnegut and Edgar Pangborn as well as regular sf writers like Dick, Theodore Sturgeon and James Blish.

Still, there *are* some regular sf writers in there, which is cause for optimism. When someone can talk about the way the kicks obtainable from general fiction are paralleled in sf, instead of the way the kicks of sf are paralleled in general fiction as I've been doing, we shall really have got somewhere.

THE LANGUAGE OF FANTASY



Langdon Jones

DREAMS AND DREAMING by Norman MacKenzie, published by Aldus books, 63s.

THE DREAM HAS always exerted a peculiar fascination, and in the 352 pages of this volume, despite the unthrifty use of space, there is packed a great deal of information about this absorbing subject. To ask: "What is a dream?" is not a futile undertaking because, although we still know but a fraction of the psychic processes that cause them and, in fact, why they exist, the analysis of dreams and their use in therapeutic work is helping many people on the way to recovery, and is telling us a great deal about the human mind. Also, a study of the dreaming process is affecting our attitudes towards many other aspects of life. So the question is certainly more than rhetorical.

In the first chapter, MacKenzie discusses the dream in general terms. He divides dream-research into three main categories—the psychoanalytical, the physiological and the chemical, but explains that this is merely a grouping of convenience which has no real significance. However, this is belied to a certain extent by the rest of the book, which often demonstrates that closer co-operation between the various schools of thought would provide a valuable spur to dream-research.

In this chapter, a number of interesting facts are given. Dreams collected from many different geographic and social sources show a remarkable similarity of content that would not be expected if they were purely random

phenomena, and the first chapter alone demonstrates that dreams have, in fact, great psychological significance and are certainly worth much study. Also, MacKenzie points out the relationship between dreaming and the other kinds of fantasy produced by the mind—daydreaming, hallucination and even the creation of art. In this book there is a great deal to interest the science fiction reader—or writer; many writers of SF are aware that in their fiction they are working out, in symbolic form, deep and unconscious impulses. In fact there is little difference between a writer at his typewriter and a child at play.

The next section of the book deals with the development of dream interpretation, from Egyptian times onwards. In ancient times, dreams, generally believed to be of divine origin, were regarded in a very important light, and were often responsible for far-reaching decisions made by rulers. Also we are told about the interesting practice of 'incubation'. This consisted of heightened dreaming induced by physical privation or drugs which was carried out in an appointed location, usually a temple or church, the visions being interpreted by the priest. This practice survived a great period of time, almost to the present day. Another early idea, surprisingly long-lived, was that of the division of dreams into 'good' or 'bad', sent either by gods or demons. In the section on Greece, an interesting quotation is made from Plato's *Republic*, which has an uncanny relevance to present-day psychology:

> "In all of us, even in good men, there is a lawless wild-beast nature, which peers out in sleep."

It was Aristotle who questioned the divine source of dreaming. If the gods wished to communicate with man, why did they not do so in daylight, and why were they so unselective about whom they actually wished to communicate with? Also Aristotle was responsible for many more advanced ideas on dreaming, although this part of his teaching was ignored for a long time.

A link between the dream interpretations of ancient times and those of the present day is provided in the work of Artemidorus. He realised that dreams did carry some kind of 'message' to the dreamer, but he know also that the interpretation of the dream images should not be rigid and

that the cipher would vary with the place and with the individual.

This interest in dreams and dreaming continued into the Christian period. Christianity ushered in a more occult view of dreams, and the idea of interpretation was often combined with the Christian practice of self-punishment, as for example in an Augustinian monastery in Donegal, where, undergoing incubation, the postulant would fast for a week, be imprisoned in a metal cell which was small enough to make movement impossible, and then would be lowered into a cave for a day. The visions of the pilgrims who emerged sane were treated with great reverence. Occultism spread, until the idea of dream interpretation could not fail to be tinged with the disrepute of superstition.

Over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, a more rational attitude began to develop among the advanced thinkers. Some of the ideas which contributed to Freud's theories were developed at this time. It was noted, for example, that in ritual and folk-lore all over the world, particular themes had a tendency to recur. Some of this thinking was eventually amalgamated to become a foundation stone of the work of Freud, who significantly advanced knowledge of dreams.

A chapter is devoted to the work of Freud, and then another to that of the other prominent psychoanalytic workers of the time. Although a large section of the book is devoted to Freud's thinking, I can't help feeling that the attitude exists that the man's work is now largely outmoded, and although he was responsible for the general enlightenment of present-day work, his own ideas have been largely invalidated in the light of modern physiological discoveries. However, MacKenzie writes extremely objectively, non-committal and neutral throughout.

After a chapter on dreams and psychotherapy, MacKenzie reports on developments in studying the physical nature of dreams. It was discovered that certain rapid eye movements (christened REMs!) occurred during dreaming moments, and it appears that they may only occur during these periods and be directly connected with the dreaming process. The interesting fact emerges that, if this

is true, dreaming follows a particular pattern, appearing at fairly regular intervals throughout the night. Although, on the surface, this appears to contradict Freud's view that the dream was 'the guardian of sleep', in fact recent physiological evidence suggests that there may be a very strong connection between instinctual impulses and emotional release in sleep, and this fact fits in very well with the Freudian view.

An interesting part of the chapter consists of the description of an experiment in which a subject was allowed to sleep, but was woken as soon as physical changes indicated that a dream was about to take place, after which he went back to sleep. Over the fifteen nights that the experiment lasted, with the patient assisted by drugs, the periods of dreaming broke their normal pattern and became more and more frequent. At the end of fifteen days ". . . the experiment had to be halted because it had become absolutely impossible to awaken the subject and interrupt the dream periods. Eye-movements could be temporarily halted by struggling with the subject holding him upright, shouting in his ear, etc., (though this never produced a waking EEG), but as soon as the stimulation ceased, the eye-movements resumed." When the subject was allowed to sleep undisturbed, the diagram of his REM periods shows that a great deal of compensation was made, for the periods are much longer than is normal. It is clear that physiological research into the human psyche will give rise to developments as exciting as those from space exploration. Although, probably, not many of us will live to see the full flowering of this research, this book indicates that in future we may expect constant exciting new developments in this field.

Drugs and dreaming is the subject of the next chapter. It is now clear that all the fantasy states—however they are produced, through sleep, creativity, drugs or psychosis—are very strongly related. Drugs like mescalin and LSD 25 are giving us a deep insight into the nature of psychosis, and hallucinogen substances are used today as a matter of course as psychotherapeutic tools.

In the last chapter, MacKenzie stresses that the various schools of thought concerning dreams should be regarded

as moving together from different directions to the same goal: "The more we know about dreams, the more we must look for an explanation of them that takes account of both the physiological and the psychological evidence."

Despite the detail of this book, it is clear how little we know about the human mind. What we do know, however, makes very exciting reading.

The book is very nicely produced, with hardly a page on which does not appear an illustration—many attractive full-colour plates and some delightful engravings—and although some of the pictures are rather unnecessary, they are grandly so, and add to the general luxury of the production.

This is a book that should certainly be read by the science fiction reader, who will then find that he has a far deeper insight into the basis of all fantasy.

Langdon Jones

BREAKING OUT

James Colvin

IF THERE IS any further need for evidence that sf has broken out of its old restrictions and holds its own in the short story genre if not quite yet in the novel, then these two collections from FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION should supply it. *The Best from F&SF 11* (Ed. Robert P. Mills) comes from Ace (45 cents) and Panther (3s 6d) in paperback and *Best from F&SF 13* (Ed. Avram Davidson) is from Gollancz (21s) in hardback.

Many of the best stories in the collections are only borderline SF or fantasy to say the least. They certainly bear little resemblance to pulp fiction of any kind. In John Anthony West's *George* for instance, the suburban protagonist slowly 'atrophies' until his whole body is as rigid as rock. Such a story has closer affinities with Kafka and Samuel Beckett than Bradbury or Sturgeon even and though its message is a familiar one to sf readers, it's put across without the sidetracking trappings of a lot of sf, *George* is in No. 11. This anthology contains Avram

Davidson's *The Sources of the Nile*, which again is hardly sf or fantasy and is about the quest by various ad-men and others to find the secret of a dead old man's ability to predict fashion trends way ahead in the future. Jay Williams's *Somebody to Play With* is one of those intermidable American stories about kids and aliens, no better or worse than most. Evelyn E. Smith writes an atmospheric little vampire story, *Softly While You're Sleeping*. The Asimov inclusion isn't Asimov at his best, a gimmicky squib with a twist ending, *The Machine that Won the War*. One of the most entertaining stories is Jody Scott's *Go for Baroque* about a visitor to a psychiatrist who convinces the psychiatrist to rave along with him. The old-guard purist might complain that this story had no sf or fantasy in it, but it is certainly *imaginative*, which a great deal of the conventional stuff no longer is. I found this to be rather the case in the Poul Anderson, *Time Lag*, which is a gimmicky story of pioneer planets and space wars, written, one feels, with half Anderson's attention and a quarter of his real ability. He has a habit—has always had a habit—of filling in details and character-background by means of a crude trick—italicised thought-reverie—which is so much a personal cliché that it jars every time I read it these days. It was an easy trick to start with, and now it's a boring one as well. Simak's *Shotgun Cure* is about aliens who may or may not have given a cure-all medicine to mankind out of benevolence alone. *The One Who Returns* is a snippet by John Berry about Yetis and mysticism—it has a somewhat 19th century air about it. Charles G. Finney has *The Captivity*, a moral tale without quite enough of the irony that runs through *Circus of Dr. Lao*. Cordwainer Smith's *Alpha Ralpha Boulevard*—the first of his Rediscovery of Man stories—remains one of Smith's finest, unflawed by the tendency to over-decoration and whimsy which the later stories, much as I enjoy them, contain. There's a couple of fairly mediocre poems by Rosser Reeves that make for variety, if nothing else. Kurt Vonnegut writes about a future where everyone is made equal, quite literally, by law—so that if you have above average intelligence you are forced to wear a little mental handicap radio in your ear which stops you from thinking too often for too

long—*Harrison Bergeron* lacks the literary posturing that mars Vonnegut sometimes. The last story in the collection is *The Haunted Village* by Gordon R. Dickson, about a village that is haunted by the 'real' world.

No. 13 doesn't come off quite so well, on the whole, in comparison with No. 11, but there are a number of stories that, individually, are far superior to most of those in the earlier collection. There's J. G. Ballard's near-vignette *Now Wakes the Sea*, about a man who dreams every night that his town is flooded by the sea, Alfred Bester's *They Don't Make Life Like They Used To*—the last man and woman on Earth continue to live exactly the same repressed lives they lived before the disaster until something happens to break the illusion; the ending is savage and powerful. Richard McKenna's *Hunter Come Home* has just recently been reviewed here when I was dealing with *A Century of SF Short Novels*. If you didn't read it in that, read it in this. Zenna Henderson's *Deluge* is typical Zenna Henderson. Avram Davidson's *What Strange Stars and Skies is* even more typical Avram Davidson—crammed with pseudo-literary (even I descend to this sort of language on occasions) mannerisms that made the story that much more unreadable. It gives a Walt Disney picture of George V's London which, though intended as a parody, shows Davidson's underlying crudity of vision that is emphasised by his never-so-ponderous-as-here style. Heavy-handed, over-mannered humour seems a trade-mark of F&SF during a particular period and a number of the stories fall into this category—*Peggy and Peter Go To The Moon* by Don White, *McNamara's Fish* by Ron Goulart among them. Harry Harrison's *Captain Honario Harpplayer, R.N.* is also a trifle heavy-handed, but in its zesty way reminiscent of *Bill, The Galactic Hero*. Karen Anderson writes quite a pleasant fantasy about centaurs, *Treaty in Tartessos*, Felix Martin-Ibañez contributes *Niña Sol*, which appears to be a nicely-told rewrite of a Peruvian legend, Jack Vance has *Green Magic*, written in his usual good, clear style but somehow too reminiscent of a children's fantasy for my taste. P. M. Hubbard's fantasy in the classic English manner may have appeal to U.S. readers, but *The Golden Brick*

was a bit hard-going for me—a Cornish fishing village, a mysterious ship, 'something' in the hold . . . Ray Nelson's *Eight O'clock in the Morning* is a fast-paced, neatly-written little sf chiller.

On the whole the best stories in both collections are those which are imaginative without falling into the generally accepted category of fantasy and SF, though Bester's is a classic SF situation brought alive by a skilled hand. This is by no means a biased judgment on my part —it was one I reached while reading the stories. I found those like Anderson's and Simak's and Asimov's hard going because the backgrounds did not stimulate my imagination—they were almost more familiar than the everyday world and offered no stimulus and little plain escapism even. Is it the stories, the authors, or me? It could be the authors, incapable of giving old backgrounds a freshness, for Bester succeeded where they failed. I found the backwater of New York depicted in Evelyn E. Smith's *Softly When You're Sleeping* far more atmospheric and convincing than the near-virgin planet of Anderson's *Time Lag*. I don't believe in change for its own sake, but I really can't see many of sf's stock backgrounds lasting much longer. The thing that gives these two collections their appeal is, on the whole, their lack of familiar sf imagery and the variety and individuality of the authors' personal vision. They seem to be writing out of themselves, not manipulating permutations on basic ideas, scenery and characters. It is by encouraging this that F&SF sets an example to its competition in the U.S.—an example that they would do well to follow if they have an eye on long-term survival.

How Penguin came to publish Lloyd Biggle's *All the Colours of Darkness* (3s 6d) is a mystery to me. The standard is so far below the one they have set that one can only think that it was published in mistake for some other book with a similar title. It's about a muddled matter-transmitter and one man whose actions will decide the future of humanity. A weary book.

Panther's SF list is improving all the time. They seem to have a policy of some sort, which other paperback publishers often lack, in their selection of sf. Walter M. Miller's *Conditionally Human* is three long novelettes from

the early fifties. Not quite up to what you'd expect from the author of *Canticle for Leibowitz*, but above-average stories which have influenced later, and on the whole inferior, ones by other authors. The title story is about the disposable baby, the neutroid; *The Darfsteller* is about the Autodrama and the robots who've replaced human actors; the best story is *Dark Benediction*, about a strange plague that befalls the human race and the victims who crave to make others like themselves. The stories have a slightly dated flavour. Things have moved on since they were written—and Miller is one of the people who has helped in the move.

I haven't yet been able to understand the enthusiasm for Daniel F. Galouye that exists in sf circles, so I don't feel altogether up to criticising his latest novel *The Lost Perception* (Gollancz, 16s) which has a much better title than it has a plot. The foreword is purple sf prose at its worst. The rest of the writing is unremarkable at very least. This novel, too, is about plague (from outer space), alien menace and a semi-superman. No attempt is made at putting these elements to any particular use so far as I can see. One of these novels is much like another and I find them unsuccessful as escapism or anything else.

James Colvin

All correspondence to:
The Editor,
NEW WORLDS SF,
87a, Ladbroke Grove,
London, W.11.

The New Prism

Dear Sir,

Your editorial in NWSF 158 was extremely interesting and supports my own views regarding the potential position of Science (in all its forms) in the future. It has often seemed to me that the modern scientist is much more liable to question his ethical standpoint in the world than the artist or religious person is likely to question his. On the whole scientists I have met and read are serious, thoughtful people who are increasingly becoming concerned with the nature and meaning of Science as a force. Far from becoming narrow-minded and concentrating on only one small branch of Science, they are widening their horizons all the time as the relationship between the 'hard' and the 'soft' sciences becomes clearer every day. Men I know who are experts in one discipline, find the need to know more about other disciplines becomes more evident as they progress. Your metaphor of a prism is a good one, I feel, but if one wanted to state the case in less abstract terms one could say that there is an enthusiasm existing in the world of science today that is, on the whole, meaningfully lacking in the world of religion. The scientist in science fiction tends to be either an ogre or a hero (an ogre in *Cat's Cradle* and most of Vonnegut's other work; a hero in Hoyle's) and philosophical attitudes towards the nature of science are too rarely found. Might I make a plea for more stories in NEW WORLDS concerned with the

position of the modern scientist in the world and with Science as an *idea*?

Dr. A. D. P. Cornelius, Madingley Road, Cambridge.

Dear Sir,

I must protest about your editorial in issue 158. In this you say: 'A good fundamentalist must for one thing believe science is the Devil's instrument'. (You also define a non-fundamentalist as one who excepts God only as an abstract ideal). This statement interests me, as I know (or know of) several Evangelical Christians who are scientists or technicians, including a computer programmer, two biologists and a nuclear physicist! I think you will agree that Evangelical Christianity is about as 'fundamental' as it comes. In *The Wrecks of Time* (which I realise, of course, you did not write, but you must at least not disagree with, or presumably you wouldn't have printed it) Faustaff remarks that religion discourages reason, yet more research has gone into dating (etc.) the Bible than any other ancient books. Also, Matthew's Gospel is surely a carefully thought out proof of the deity of Christ that should please any mathematician.

While on this subject, although perhaps it is not entirely relevant to your magazine, the scientific arguments against Christianity have been put forward so often that I would like to point out some arguments for it.

Firstly, with the proviso that early Hebrews could not have known of the existence of space, and so the 'watery chaos' was probably the nearest they could get to this, and that the Hebrew 'day' often meant just 'a period of time', Genesis 1 reads just like a synopsis of evolutionary theory, plus an introduction on the formation of the universe. The next two chapters tell of the birth of man in Mesopotamia (a known fact) and the advent of reason. Remember that the ancient Hebrews had no knowledge of science! Yet such parts of the Mosaic Law as the washing of hands before meals and not eating pork (as they probably would not have cooked it properly) are now elementary rules of hygiene. Biologists are still wondering if it is a coincidence that Jewish men are circumcised at birth and that Jewish

women do not get cancer of the womb. Finally when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, their plague was accompanied by a plague of rats. Rats carry bubonic plague.

Having established the authenticity of the Old Testament it is not necessary to do so for the New, as Matthew's Gospel, as I said before, already does so.

Stephen Ellacott, 41 Hillview Gardens, Kingsbury, N.W.9.

It is impossible to resist the comment, here, that this letter, and the one which follows it, are inclined to support Faustaff's remark as well as our view that committed Christians are incapable of following the exhortation 'Know Thyself' to any exact conclusion.

Dear Sir,

Permit a paradox on the theme of fundamentalism. Belief has suffered at the hand of religion.

In fact, permit a sermon. A fundamentalist is not a slow-witted Christian ; neither is he inclined to look upon science as the Devil's own invention. Almost the whole of past research and the vast portion of present exploration is in effect a seeking for answers that people ask about themselves. Since the questions have been put during the whole of man's recorded existence only the ability to answer can be regarded as progress, and that in a sideways motion rather than forwards.

It is a mistake, too, to consider that religion, in Mr. Moorcock's sense (*i.e.*, belief in God) can be regarded as a prism. To function at all, a prism needs a light to shine through it. One would deduce from this that Mr. Moorcock believes religion came after creation—and as a result of some human need to worship, to generate a light of Truth, to manufacture a superstition.

The need to be aware of a Greater Presence, presumably, stems from the distant days when large amoebas ate up smaller amoebas.

But it is difficult to explain, if this be so, why certain

people should get a great deal of joy and comfort out of a belief in God.

God is not a sucked thumb. Fundamentalists, taking the Bible as their basis (and the Masoretic texts rather than the Catholic Douai or English Standard versions) can find answers for such relatively simple disputations as life after Death and meaning of life before Death, explained in the Hebrew texts and corroborated in the Greek.

Fundamentalists, for instance, do not ask of the crucifix —Why is it there? Apart from the fact that the mode of Christ's crucifixion was, in fact, a torture STAKE and not a CROSS (as fundamen know), the reason for his death is easily understood.

Adam had been created as a perfect man. By his fall, through Satanic intervention, he brought death to the world—scientists have said and will keep on saying that there is no reason why a well-tended body should not live forever (why death?). It was necessary for Christ, who described himself and who had been described by Old Testament writers, as a "second Adam" to show that a human could defy the wiles of the Devil (to use a good old Methodist phrase).

By so doing, he made eternal life possible for those whose "hearts were right".

The stake is no more of a symbol for fundamentalists than a wrecked car is for careful drivers. The truth was in the manner of death and not the method.

And that manner does not become outmoded and replaced by an atomic cloud.

It is too optimistic to think that a mushroom cloud can deter humanity from warring. Much damage can be done with non-nuclear devices and present conflicts show that those who want to fight are not dissuaded by the possibility —remote maybe—that the harassed side may drop a bomb.

Mr. Moorcock makes a common intellectual error of dropping each stage in a world's progress into a neat little niche. But some factors are lasting and some are not, and therefore defy such classification. The idea of changing prisms may appeal to those who prefer discussion and dispute to acceptance of facts.

To my mind, the suggestion was no more than a writer's device for the editorial of NSWF 158.

Peter Tate, 7 Hanover Street, Canton, Cardiff.

Why did the stake become a cross?

Dear Sir,

I found your editorial in NWSF 158 quite stimulating and, as I hold an opposite view from yours on religion, thought provoking.

Your assumption that "to any religious person who is not a fundamentalist, God is an abstract ideal" is an easy one to make because the most vocal advocates of Christianity today do make it sound that way but there is another form of religious feeling to take into account; that of the prophets, saints and mystics of all the great religions. To these people God is not an abstract idea but a living reality in their lives; the love, the power, the creativity of God are not just notions dreamt up by pre-scientific philosophers but something deeply felt to be operating in them. It was because of people with this sort of experience that the great world religions got started and, as I see it, it is only as the adherents of a religion have or want to have this sort of experience in life that a religion's existence is justified. I would attribute the decline of religion in this century to lack of people with this vision rather than to the advance of science.

Science is certainly the best method we have ever devised for gathering facts about the universe. Through the use of the scientific method we may one day uncover as much of the mysteries of life, space, time and the human spirit as we are capable of comprehending but there are two things about science that would make it unable to be the prism through which men can focus their hopes and fears you would like it to be. Firstly, you cannot use science to make the value judgments on which we depend for our ethics and aesthetics; for example, a physicist can tell you that the rapid fusion of tritium to form a helium nucleus will result in a catastrophic explosion but he cannot *as a*

scientist tell you whether this is a good or a bad thing or whether the effect is beautiful or ugly. His decisions on that point will be made in the light of his ethical, political or religious convictions, his experience in life and his feelings about other people. Secondly, science cannot reveal the purpose behind the universe or even if there is any purpose there at all; in fact, I understand some scientists think there is no order, purpose or pattern behind it.

The nature of mystical experiences on the other hand makes them able to fill this gap science leaves. They are able to give the person having them the vision of some sort of purpose in life, to make the universe seem transformed and to produce a great compassion for other people. With this sort of vision, a religion based on mystical experience can continue to play a part in human affairs; giving depth, value and significance to the facts about the universe and about ourselves we unearth by scientific investigation. I would go further than that and say that without such a vision, we may not be able to avoid some of the nastier futures science fiction writers dream up. Already some of the developments in our present society look rather sinister, and the most well meaning of the secular philosophies, humanism, seems to be unable to capture the imagination of the man in the street or to produce enough dynamism to counter the malevolent tendencies in our present society.

Possibly the world needs not the replacing of religion but a new vision of God which harmonises more with the findings of modern science and with the practice of what you think is true by experiment.

Anyway, I hope the discussion on the rôle of religion in a scientific age will go on in NEW WORLDS, both in its readers' columns and in its stories and I hope it will not endlessly repeat the sterile battles of the past but break through to new ground, and I hope it will not be too one sided.

John Bell, 11 Highfield Road, Hornchurch, Essex.

You, of course, are only referring to the physical sciences whereas we were referring to all sciences, including psychology and sociology.

Dear Sir,

A common theme in modern sf is that of the multi-dimensional universe, the components of which may be completely different from our own system, as in Michael Moorcock's *The Sundered Worlds*; or the other systems may be the same as our own, differing only in the way in which they have developed. Such a theme is used in James Colvin's *The Wrecks of Time*, in which the other dimensions differ from many in that their origin is of importance.

This short novel also has an all-powerful external influence, which cannot be said to be religious, although the influencing body has assumed for itself a somewhat god-like rôle. The external beings carry on experimenting with their earths while maintaining a barrier between themselves and their subjects, so that the victims of their system destroyings do not know what is happening to them. The idea of the D-squaders is something of a puzzle to begin with. Who would want to destroy the ground underneath his feet?

This is not the only apparently inexplicable occurrence in the novel, another is the mysterious Steifflomeis. The rôle of this character is supposed to be the destroyer of Prof. Faustaff, the hero of the piece, but at this he is inadequate. Perhaps the answer lies in the anagram of himself. Another inexplicable appearance, for which there is no answer, is that of Gerry Bowen. He is supposed to be a new recruit to the organisation, but his only purpose in life would seem to be in providing a link with the reader which could be used to provide information on the set-up and the system of many dimensions. This rôle could have been more satisfactory had Bowen not vanished completely as soon as his rôle was played out. His place would have been best taken by the ubiquitous Nancy Hunt, who appears regularly during the narrative but does not become prominent until quite near the end.

In his editorial comments on the concluding part of the novel Michael Moorcock suggests that the idea of science replacing religion as the focus for man's hopes and fears would seem outrageous to many people. I think he is over-estimating the novelty of this idea which is not at all new,

and would probably shock very few readers of NEW WORLDS.

Michael Moorcock's interpretation of James Colvin's suggestions seems to go further than does Colvin. It seems to me that the ritual played out by the prospective inhabitants of E-Zero suggests that religion is being replaced by psychology, which is a little more specific that Mr. Moorcock's more general statement.

Another point. Scientists are not trying to offer remedies to anything. The physical scientist, for one, is more interested in the intellectual pursuit of knowledge of the universe and its workings than in the solution of man's problems. Perhaps this is a fault of scientists, which allowed them to produce an atom bomb as an intellectual challenge rather than as a fight against a physical enemy. It is probably true that the world has gained something from the birth of the bomb, and this something is not only the amount of scientific knowledge which has sprung from the development of atomic weapons.

Michael Keward, 31 Mottisfont Road, London, S.E.2.

We appreciate that the idea we put forward is not new but, judging by some of the letters preceding yours, your optimism is not quite so well-founded as we should have liked. . . .

Unpopular Art

Dear Sir,

As regards popular art, referred to in your very stimulating editorial (NEW WORLDS, January), this term is, of course, a misnomer. Art is far from popular. It never has been, and I doubt that it ever will be. If art galleries were forced to subsist by charging admittance like some of the stately homes of England, and there was no subsidization, they would have been turned into Bingo halls long ago.

In other words, art is popular like poetry is popular. It just isn't, except amongst a very small minority, a few

of whom are genuine enthusiasts. The rest participate either because it enjoys a certain cachet or, in the case of painting, because there is money to be made in daubs, or dealing in daubs.

I have been talking about art in general; but glancing at abstract art as represented by, for example, some of the prizewinners in Liverpool's current *Exhibition of Modern Art,* it occurred to me that, after all, there *is* a level at which this type of artform is popular with the vast mass of the people. The designers of the more with-it wallpapers and floor-coverings are surely frustrated exhibitors, or is it the other way round?

Anyway, this is probably the only level at which the majority of people meet modern art. What we need to do, I think, is to improve the status of the designers. We could, perhaps, hold exhibitions devoted to their work, and encourage the 'reputation makers' to expatiate on their excellence, or otherwise. Who knows; but that a century from now connoisseurs and collectors will be eagerly pursuing bits of a particular roll of wallpaper, or the cracked and worn fragments of a rare square of linoleum, last seen at 9, Railway Cottages, Walton-On-The-Hill? I can imagine them speaking in hushed whispers of finding a piece of genuine William Jenkins, *circa* 1930-1966. 'I'd know that effortless sweeping line anywhere, old boy, and those red-and-white squares. Besides, the stiletto heel marks date it.' Or: 'Yes, this is a small fragment of an Evans roll. He designed for Crown, you know. I would say that it is part of a roll sold to a Maggie Dingwood for two-and-eleven at Levis's in their January sale, 1963. Oh yes, quite priceless. A similar piece was auctioned at a quarter-of-a-million pounds just three years ago.'

Stranger things have happened, like a chimp's first painting selling for three-hundred pounds only a few weeks ago. This, of course, reduces the art boom to what it really is, a beautiful but invisible suit, like that immortalized by Walt Disney. A suit woven of snobbery, gullibility, and sheer damned avarice! While the king remains 'in the altogether' he can expect nothing but hilarity from the majority of us. In all fairness I must add that I personally

find modern art exciting. However, I do wish that there was less monkey business.

Edward Mackin, 17 Oxford Street, Liverpool 7.

David Sylvester, the art critic, commented recently that the kind of talk he could at one time only broadcast on the Third Programme is now broadcast regularly on the Home Service. He added that public taste has improved greatly since the war. The evidence for this is everywhere, in the steadily improving standards of pop music, films and television plays, etc., as well as the number of new public and private galleries and theatres established recently. All this supports our view that the public is demanding, and getting, higher standards in its entertainment. Sf, essentially a form of popular entertainment but often verging on being 'serious' literature, seems to be one of the areas where this tendency can be encouraged for its own benefit and that of the public.

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IN THIS ISSUE

NEW WORLDS

COMPACT SF

BOB SHAW's

latest long story is written in his usual sharply realistic style. Garnett, chief engineer and owner of an aircraft company specialising in highly experimental planes, begins to hear voices. The word "Xoanan" occurs more than once. What does it mean? How does it relate to the mysterious new uses to which his factory is being put? The revelations are surprising in

PILOT PLANT

Also in this issue are contributions by

E. C. TUBB
PETER TATE
RICHARD GORDON
GEORGE COLLYN
DAPHNE CASTELL
JOHN BRUNNER
and others

Plus our usual features, including readers' views on Science versus Religion, book reviews, etc.