

**E** COMPACT  
SF

**NEW WORLDS**  
**3/6**

# **J. G. Ballard**

## **THE DAY OF FOREVER**



# NEW WORLDS SF

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## Guest Editorial

# THE MAN WHO INVENTED INVENTING THE FUTURE

Brian W. Aldiss



THERE ARE THREE sorts of author: the major writer, the minor writer, and Mr. H. G. Wells. How do we classify him? Where do we place him?

Mr. Cyril Connolly, in his *The Modern Movement*, puts Wells nowhere; doesn't even mention him. But even if you ignore him, Wells won't go away—too many of us were influenced by him for that. For forty years, he was a one-man symposium, and cropped up in too many guises to be ignored.

In the teens of this century, he was regarded as one of the three great Edwardian novelists, along with Bennett and Galsworthy, with Wells as a sort of latter-day Dickens. In the twenties emerged Wells the rebel and educator, the brisk Wells of *Ann Veronica* and planning ahead. In the thirties, we had Wells the World Brain, talking seriously in the White House and Kremlin, trying to provide for the work, wealth and happiness of mankind as if we were all his heirs. In the 'forties, we saw the death of a disillusioned prophet.

The real Wells, of course, was all these men. It is precisely because we cannot pigeon-hole him neatly away that he still seems so alive and puzzling and interesting. You still love or loathe Wells.

Without disregarding all his other facets, I believe that Wells survives best in one of the first guises in which he appeared before the public, as the writer of scientific romances. He is the godfather, if not the father, of science fiction. He invented the inventing of the future.

Before we get down to that, however, I want to declare a personal affection for Wells, over and above any duty I owe him as a writer. There was a comical side to Wells, of which he was himself aware. The thought of him in the

Kremlin trying to get Joe Stalin to join the P.E.N. has a certain horror-comic touch.

But Wells also had an heroic side. As a boy in the 'thirties, I read *Mr. Polly* and *Kipps* and *Mr. Lewisham* and *Tono-Bungay* before I got round to the science fiction, and I cheered at the way Wells clearly felt the joys and sorrows of shop-keepers were worth consideration—I was threatened with being kept in a shop myself, in those days. Wells changed my view of literature, which up till then I had regarded as a sort of club where the privileged talked about the privileged. Twenty years later, I suppose, down-trodden young men were to be delighted in much the same way by *Lucky Jim*.

So I imagined that Wells was on my side from the start. The thing that put me on *his* side was the way he had a kind word to say about sex—a kind word and a frank one, when grown-ups of my acquaintance plainly regarded sex as something that was there but was best ignored—rather like their view of Winston Churchill about the same time. At public school in the early 'forties, it was the same: however much Wells bored us about politics and the establishment of utopias we admired him because he was for sex. He made the dreary repressions of school life that much more tolerable.

George Orwell felt as we did forty years earlier. In one of his critical essays, he says, "Back in the nineteen-hundreds, it was a wonderful experience for a boy to discover H. G. Wells. There you were, in a world of pedants, clergymen, and golfers, with your future employers exhorting you to 'get on or get out,' your parents systematically warping your sex life, and your dull-witted schoolmasters sniggering over their Latin tags; and here was this wonderful man who could tell you about the inhabitants of the planets and the bottom of the sea, and who *knew* that the future was not going to be what respectable people imagined."

Wells seemed to rise out of the blue—a male Venus Anadyomene with a B.Sc. It was particularly this ability to know about the planets and the future that set him apart. With regard to his scientific romances, I want to ask and, I hope, answer two questions: who influenced Wells and whom did he influence?



Some forms of sf have been with us a long while. The third century Lucian of Samosta wrote of voyages to the moon and sun; and the thread can be traced through Dante—who has something of the sf syndrome—through Cyrano de Bergerac, who is extremely readable, through sundry eighteenth century bishops, who are extremely unreadable, and so on, right up to date. But it is only when Darwinism takes hold, and men are able to see the development of the future as qualitatively different from the past, that true sf can enter, with Verne and Wells, and Olaf Stapledon a little later.

The influences on Wells seem to have been threefold. He was indebted to Jonathan Swift, most obviously in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*; he was indebted to Edgar Allan Poe, especially in his short stories, where some of the horrific effects are reminiscent of *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*; and he was influenced to some extent by some of his contemporaries, notably three Frenchmen: Flammarion, Jules Verne, and Albert Robida, the draughtsman who specialised in future wars.

Wells wrote about future wars more than once. In that, he was not alone. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 alarmed Europe. The uprise of German nationalism was frightening; so were the mobility of the Germans and the effectiveness of their new weapon, Krupp's breach-loading artillery. Britain realised she was ill-prepared for a modern war; and in BLACKWOOD'S in 1871 there appeared a story that was to have a great and immediate effect all over Europe, Colonel Chesney's *Battle of Dorking*. It postulated a successful invasion of England. All other nations copied, seeing themselves—according to the hopes and fears of the writer—invading victoriously or invaded ingloriously. In the ferment of the times, these stories bred others, and continued in full spate right up to 1914.

From such future wars, it may seem a small step to having England invaded by Martians instead of Germans, like a man keeping ducks instead of chickens. In fact it's a radical step, like a man eating chicken food instead of chickens. When *The War of the Worlds* appeared in 1898, it must have seemed staggering—and it was staggering, for a very good reason.

Wells not only jacked up the significance of the con-



flict to the  $n$ th degree by making it an interplanetary conflict; he showed war itself in a new light. For the popular view of war at that time was that it increased the power of the winning nation, did not do too much harm to the loser, developed international trade, and speeded up progress generally; rather like the Eurovision Song Contests today. When it was a war against savages, who then filled the whole globe except for the north-west chunk of Europe and possibly Manhattan Island, war was beneficial for all concerned. Enlightenment was spread by Mr. Gatling and the Bible on a fifty-fifty basis.

*War of the Worlds* looks at the matter rather differently. It shows the British as the savages; the Martians have the Gatling Gun and we have not, and they treat us as the beasts that perish. Far from being a glorification, here was a condemnation, showing the misery and degradation of war, showing that nobody won anything worth having. So Wells showed his true visionary quality and his true originality. He loathed muddle, and was always against the forces that bring muddle.

He showed the same wonderful originality in his other early scientific romances.

In *The Invisible Man*, he turns upside down the saying, "In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king," which he also treated in perhaps his most masterly story, *The Country of the Blind*. *The Invisible Man* is a more scientific treatment of the theme. Griffin, discovering a way to match the refractive index of his body with that of the surrounding air, plans to use his discovery solely for his own advantage. Wells draws him throughout in an unsympathetic light, as an irascible man the reader is not meant to love. The reviewers did not love Griffin and failed to see what Wells was getting at. They wanted a Jules Verne adventure and Wells was not giving them that.

In *The Time Machine*, 1895, Wells uncovers another almost wholly original theme, the story of travel through time. Since then, we have had some excellent plays on time themes by a Yorkshire playwright; but as a story—despite considerable competition from many sf writers—*The Time Machine* stands alone. In it, Wells uses an extension of Disraeli's *Two Nations*. The underdogs, the workers of the Industrial Revolution, have literally been ground down

and down until they survive only underground—but they take their revenge by devouring the idle and pampered classes above ground. To a capitalist Victorian society, it can't have made relaxing reading.

Of all Wells's novels, *The First Men in the Moon* would seem to owe most to Jules Verne, who also wrote of a moon journey. But the two accounts are no more similar than a pineapple is to a triffid. Wells's picture of Selenite society is startlingly novel. There, you will recall, each infant Selenite is forced into the mould demanded of it, conditioned for its adult station, fed only such knowledge as will fit it for its job, trained to be content with its lot.

A remarkable echo of that world was heard thirty years later, when Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* was published.

Many of Wells's ideas were rejected as unpalatable at the time of their first appearance because they were so original—only to be digested later, almost unknowingly. In *A Modern Utopia*, 1905, Wells speaks of racial equality, which was quickly rejected by his contemporaries. He spoke of tank warfare, of atomic warfare, of interstellar travel, of super-fertilisers, of harnessing the sun's energy, and was disregarded as a crank.

I want to mention just one more of Wells's early novels, one which horrified and disgusted its first critics and has perhaps been the most neglected of the romances ever since. In *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, 1896, Wells created a savage parody of creation, a scientist's look at the Biblical myth which seems to echo the cry of Fulke Greville:

Oh wearisome condition of humanity!

Born under one law, to another bound.

Wells's Beast People are animals remade in the image of man by the abysmal Moreau, and then forced by him to behave in human fashion. They worship and fear Moreau, and sing a sort of liturgical chant called the Law. *Dr. Moreau* is clearly a fine piece of post-Darwinian writing; but equally, Wells was interpreting Darwin more truthfully than many of his contemporaries—who seem to have regarded evolution as a rather British invention designed to keep the Victorians on top even though the rest of the world might wane: a sort of Wax Britannica.





From Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*

So the critics and public as a whole did not get Wells's message in *Dr. Moreau*, any more than they did in *The Invisible Man*. They are to be excused, because Wells is such a spell-binder as a story-teller that one reads on in that precious awakening oblivion which few writers bestow. In these two novels especially, *Moreau* and *Invisible Man*, and also in *War of the Worlds* and *Time Machine*, and to a lesser extent in *The Food of the Gods*, Wells makes his message intrinsic, sublimating it through the entire structure of the novel, with masterly indirection.

These novels are extremely accomplished; *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, on its modest scale, is a work of art. But Wells was misunderstood, and that he could not bear. We



have heard it said so many times that he forsook art to turn propagandist; might not one reason be that he learned from the stupid reception he received so early in his career? After that, Wells took to making his message clearer and clearer, until the message finally drowned out the fiction.

Despite its debt to Swift, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* is one of the true originals of our age, mirroring as it does a struggle between beliefs which is not dead today. To achieve his effects, Wells naturally borrowed a little from other writers. The Saying of the Law is reminiscent of the Law of the Jungle in Kipling's *Jungle Book*.

But here I want to turn from Wells's originality to glance at what he originated; for if he was slightly in debt to a few other writers, there are immeasurably more writers who owe a debt to him, among them Orwell and Aldous Huxley, who have written the most important sf since Wells.

In *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, the first line of the Law of the Beast People, which is a sort of horrid pastiche of the Creed, runs: "Not to go on All-Fours: that is the Law." There's a strong reminder of this in the famous dictum in Orwell's *Animal Farm*: "Two Legs Good, Four Legs Bad." And the ending of *Animal Farm*, where the pigs become indistinguishable from men and the men indistinguishable from pigs, is in very much the same key as the end of *Dr. Moreau*. There, Prendick, the central character, escapes from the island and returns to civilization, only to be haunted by traces of ox, hyena, and ape in the faces about him. Prendick says, "My trouble took the strangest form. I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not another, still passably human, Beast People, animals half-wrought into the image of human souls; and that they would presently begin to revert, to show first this bestial mark and then that."

In 1984, Orwell again shows Wellsian influence. His division between proles and intellectuals corresponds to the division between Eloi and Morlock in *The Time Machine*, and perhaps to the Selenite world in *First Men in the Moon*.

I have mentioned that Wells can be shown to have influenced Aldous Huxley—not only in *Brave New World*, but also in *Ape and Essence*, where the humanity in the humans

is feared and guarded by as many prohibitions as the bestiality in the Beast People.

What about Wells's effect on the modern school of sf writers? I'm sure that Arthur Clarke and John Wyndham have had my experience of being labelled "the true inheritor of the mantle of H. G. Wells"—probably by that reviewer on the *Birmingham Post*. (Why is a reviewer like an old clothes man? Because both like to hand on old mantles.) In fact, there is a noticeable break between H. G. Wells and the modern tradition. We are all clearly in his debt but we have not emerged straight from his still overpowering shadow, but from the sf magazines, which belong to a different tradition.

When the first science fiction magazine was launched, in America in 1926, it was called AMAZING STORIES and carried at the top of its contents page a gravure cut of Jules Verne's tomb in Amiens, which portrays his immortality. Verne's figure, dressed in cerements, is rising out of the grave with a gesture that in context suggests the greeting "Hi!" It was Verne who was the guiding spirit of the magazines: a much coarser spirit than Wells's: a man who dealt gaily in caricatures rather than characters, who missed the significance of science but fastened on its pedantry, who preferred adventure to speculation.

Magazine sf was cut very much to this pattern between the wars. It was written either by optimistic teenage Americans or by a few English who copied American idiom and dream. But the war and increased responsibility has brought a new inquiring spirit to American sf, as to other forms of literature; a note of scepticism we might once have regarded as English has crept in. The adventures still rattle on, of course, in a rather stereotyped way; but questioning is in fashion, and this brings it very much into the Wells camp.

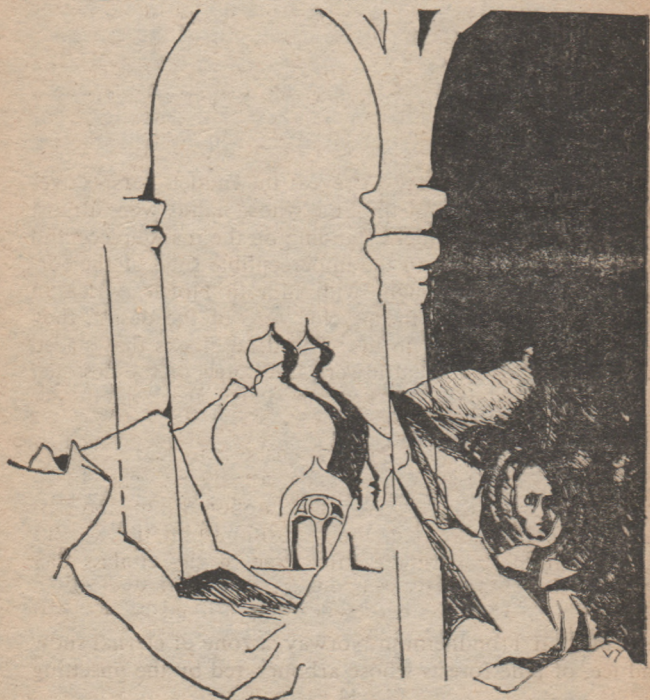
We now have some extremely interesting American writers: Philip K. Dick, Kurt Vonnegut, James Blish, Ward Moore, William Tenn, Thomas Disch. These writers, like the present English group, use the Wells technique of thrusting a splinter of the unknown into a human situation in order to examine man, his circumstances, his defects, his conditions, his conditionals. They would gladly admit,

(Continued on page 28)



**J.G.BALLARD**

**THE DAY  
OF  
FOREVER**





AT COLUMBINE SEPT Heures it was always dusk. Here Halliday's beautiful neighbour, Gabrielle Szabo, walked through the evening, her silk robe stirring the bone-like sand into cryptic ideograms. From the balcony of the empty hotel near the artists' colony Halliday would look out over the drained river at the unmoving shadows across the desert floor, the twilight of Africa, endless and unbroken, that beckoned to him with the promise of his lost dreams.

The dark dunes, their crests touched by the spectral light, receded like the waves of a midnight sea. Despite the almost static light, fixed at this unending dusk, the drained bed of the river seemed to flow with colours. As the sand fell from the banks, uncovering the veins of quartz and the concrete caissons of the embankment, the evening would flare briefly, illuminated from within like a lava sea. Beyond the dunes the spires of old water towers and the half-completed apartment blocks near the Roman ruins at Leptis Magna emerged from the darkness. To the south, as Halliday followed the winding course of the river, the darkness gave way to the indigo tracts of the irrigation project, the lines of canals forming an exquisite metallised gridwork.

This continuous transformation, whose colours were as strange as the bizarre paintings hung from the walls of his suite, seemed to Halliday to reveal the hidden perspectives of the landscape, and of the time whose hands were almost frozen on the dozen clocks standing on the mantelpiece and tables. The clocks, set to the imperceptible time of the forever day, he had brought with him to North Africa in the hope that here, in the psychic zero of the desert, they might somehow spring to life. The dead clocks that stared down from the municipal towers and hotels of the deserted towns were the unique flora of the desert, the unused keys that would turn the way into his dreams.

With this hope, three months earlier, he had come to Columbine Sept Heures. The suffix, attached to the names of all cities and towns—there were London 6 p.m. and Saigon Midnight—indicated their positions on the Earth's almost stationary perimeter, the time of the endless day where the no longer rotating planet had marooned them. For five years Halliday had been living in the international settlement at Trondheim in Norway, a zone of eternal snow and ice, of pine forests whose arbours, fed by the unsetting

sun, rose ever higher around the fringes of the town. This world of Nordic gloom had exposed all Halliday's latent difficulties with time and his dreams. The difficulty of sleeping, even in a darkened room, disturbed everyone—there was the sense of time wasted and yet time unpassed as the sun hung stationary in the sky—but Halliday in particular found himself obsessed by his broken dreams. Time and again he would wake with an image before his eyes of the moonlit squares and classical façades of an ancient Mediterranean town, and of a woman who walked through colonnades in a world without shadows.

This warm night-world he could find only by moving south. Two hundred miles to the east of Trondheim the dusk-line was a corridor of freezing wind and ice, stretching on into the Russian steppe, where abandoned cities lay under the glaciers like closed jewels. By contrast, in Africa the night air was still warm. On the west of the dusk-line was the boiling desert of the Sahara, the sand-seas fused into lakes of glass, but along the narrow band of the terminator a few people lived in the old tourist towns.

It was here, at Columbine Sept Heures, an abandoned town beside the drained river five miles from Leptis Magna, that he first saw Gabrielle Szabo walking towards him as if out of his dreams. Here, too, he met Leonora Sully, the fey unconcerned painter of bizarre fantasies, and Dr. Richard Mallory, who tried to help Halliday and bring back his dreams to him.

Why Leonora was at Columbine Sept Heures Halliday could understand, but sometimes he suspected that Dr. Mallory's motives were as ambiguous as his own. The aloof physician, with his uneven temper and eyes forever hidden behind the dark glasses that seemed to emphasise his closed inner life, spent most of his time sitting in the white-domed auditorium of the School of Fine Arts, playing through the Bartok and Webern quartets left behind in the albums.

This music was the first sound Halliday heard when he arrived at the desert town. In the abandoned car park near the quay at Tripoli he found a new Peugeot left behind by a French refinery technician and set off south along the seven o'clock line, passing through the dusty towns and the half-buried silver skeletons of the refineries near the drained river. To the west the desert burned in a haze of gold



under the unmoving sun. Rippled by the thermal waves, the metal vanes of the water-wheels by the empty irrigation systems seemed to revolve in the hot air, swerving towards him.

To the east the margins of the river were etched against the dark horizon, the ridges of exposed limestone like the forestage of the twilight world. Halliday turned towards the river, the light fading as he moved eastwards, and followed the metal road that ran near the bank. The centre of the channel, where white rocks juttied from the drifts of pebbles, lay like the exposed spine of an ancient saurian.

A few miles from the coast he found Columbine Sept Heures. Four tourist hotels, their curtain walls like dead mirrors, stood among the dunes that drifted through the streets and over-ran the chalets and swimming pools near the Fine Arts School. The road disappeared from sight outside the Oasis Hotel. Halliday left the car and walked up the steps to the dust-filled lobby. The sand lay in lace-like patterns across the tiled floor, silting against the pastel-coloured elevator doors and the dead palms by the restaurant.

Halliday walked up the stairway to the mezzanine, and stood by the cracked plate-glass window beyond the tables. Already half-submerged by the sand, what remained of the town seemed displaced by the fractured glass into another set of dimensions, as if space itself were compensating for the landscape's loss of time by forcing itself into this bizarre warp.

Already deciding that he would stay in the hotel, Halliday went out to search for water and whatever food had been left behind. The streets were deserted, choked with the sand advancing towards the drained river. At intervals the clouded windows of a Citroën or Peugeot emerged from the dunes. Stepping along their roofs, Halliday entered the drive of the Fine Arts School. Against the cerise pall of the dusk, the angular building rose into the air like a white bird.

In the students' gallery hung the fading reproductions of a dozen schools of painting, images of worlds without meaning. However, grouped together in a small alcove, Halliday found the surrealists Delvaux, Chirico and Ernst. These strange landscapes, inspired by dreams that his own could no longer echo, filled Halliday with a profound



sense of nostalgia. One above all, Delvaux's "The Echo," which depicted a naked Junoesque woman walking among immaculate ruins under a midnight sky, reminded him of his own recurrent fantasy. The infinite longing contained in the picture, the synthetic time created by the receding images of the woman, belonged to the landscape of his unseen night. Halliday found an old portfolio on the floor below one of the trestles and began to strip the paintings from the walls.

As he walked across the roof to the outside stairway above the auditorium music was playing below him. Halliday searched the faces of the empty hotels, whose curtain walls lifted into the sunset air. Beyond the Fine Arts School the chalets of the students' quarter were grouped around two drained swimming pools.

Reaching the auditorium, he peered through the glass doors across the rows of empty seats. In the centre of the front row a man in a white suit and sunglasses was sitting with his back to Halliday. Whether he was actually listening to the music Halliday could not tell, but when the record ended three or four minutes later he stood up and climbed onto the stage. He switched off the stereogram and then strolled over to Halliday, his high face with its inquisitorial look hidden behind the dark glasses.

"I'm Mallory—Dr. Mallory." He held out a strong but oblique hand. "Are you staying here?"

The question seemed to contain a complete understanding of Halliday's motives. Putting down his portfolio, Halliday introduced himself. "I'm at the Oasis. I arrived this evening."

Realising that the remark was meaningless, Halliday laughed, but Mallory was already smiling.

"This evening? I think we can take that for granted." When Halliday raised his wrist to reveal the old 24-hour Rolex he still wore Mallory nodded, straightening his sunglasses as if looking at Halliday more closely. "You still have one, do you? What is the time, by the way?"

Halliday glanced at the Rolex. It was one of four he had brought with him, carefully synchronised with the master 24-hour clock still running at Greenwich Observatory, recording the vanished time of the once-revolving

earth. "Nearly 7.30. That would be right. Isn't this Columbine Sept Heures?"

"True enough. A neat coincidence. However, the dusk-line is advancing, I'd say it was a little later here. Still, I think we can take the point." Mallory stepped down from the stage. "Seven-thirty, old time—and new. You'll have to stay at Columbine. It's not often one finds the dimensions locking like that." He glanced at the portfolio. "You're at the Oasis. Why there?"

"It's empty."

"Cogent. But so is everything else here. Even so, I know what you mean, I stayed there myself when I first came to Columbine. It's damned hot."

"I'll be on the dusk side."

Mallory inclined his head in a small bow, as if acknowledging Halliday's seriousness. He went over to the stereogram and disconnected a motor-car battery on the floor beside it. He placed the heavy unit in a canvas hold-all and gave Halliday one of the handles. "You can help me. I have a small generator at my chalet. It's difficult to recharge, but good batteries are becoming scarce."

As they walked out into the sunlight Halliday said: "You can have the battery in my car."

Mallory stopped. "That's kind of you, Halliday. But are you sure you won't want it? There are other places than Columbine."

"Perhaps. But I take it there's enough food for us all here." Halliday gestured with his wristwatch. "Anyway, the time is right. Or both times, I suppose."

"And as many spaces as you want, Halliday. Not all of them around you. Why have you come here?"

"I don't know yet. I was living at Trondheim, I couldn't sleep there. If I can sleep again perhaps I can dream."

He started to explain himself but Mallory raised a hand to silence him. "Why do you think we're all here, Halliday? Out of Africa, dreams walk. You must meet Leonora. She'll like you."

They walked past the empty chalets, the first of the swimming pools on their right. In the sand on the bottom someone had traced out a huge zodiacal pattern, decorated with shells and pieces of fractured tile. They approached the next pool. A sand-dune had inundated one of the



chalets and spilled into the basin, but a small area of the terrace had been cleared. Below an awning a young woman with white hair sat on a metal chair in front of an easel. Her jeans and the man's shirt she wore were streaked with paint, but her intelligent face, set above a strong jaw, seemed composed and alert. She looked up as Dr. Mallory and Halliday lowered the battery to the ground.

"I've brought a pupil for you, Leonora." Mallory beckoned Halliday over. "He's staying at the Oasis—on the *dusk* side."

The young woman gestured Halliday towards a reclining chair beside the easel. He placed the portfolio against the back rest. "They're for my room at the hotel," he explained. "I'm not a painter."

"Of course. Can I look at them?" Without waiting she began to leaf through the reproductions, nodding to herself at each one. Halliday glanced at the half-completed painting on the easel, a landscape across which bizarre figures moved in a strange procession, lunatic archbishops wearing obscenely painted mitres. He looked up at Mallory, who gave him a wry nod.

"Interesting, Halliday?"

"Of course. What about *your* dreams, doctor? Where do you keep them?"

Mallory made no reply, gazing down at Halliday with his sealed eyes. With a laugh, dispelling the slight tension between the two men, Leonora sat down on the chair beside Halliday.

"Richard won't tell us that, Mr. Halliday. When we find his dreams we'll no longer need our own."

This remark Halliday was often to repeat to himself over the subsequent months. In many ways Mallory's presence in the town seemed a key to all their roles. The white-suited physician, moving about through the sand-filled street, seemed like the spectre of the forgotten noon, reborn at dusk to drift like his music between the empty hotels. Even at their first meeting, when Halliday sat beside Leonora, making a few automatic remarks but conscious only of her hips and shoulder touching his own, he sensed that Mallory, whatever his reasons for being in Columbine,

had adjusted himself all too completely to the ambiguous world of the dusk-line. For Mallory, Columbine Sept Heures and the desert had already become part of the inner landscapes that Halliday and Leonora Sully still had to find in their paintings.

However, during his first weeks in the town by the drained river Halliday thought more of Leonora and of settling himself in to the hotel. Using the 24-hour Rolex, he still tried to sleep at "midnight," waking (or more exactly, conceding the fact of his insomnia) seven hours later. Then, at the start of his "morning," he would make a tour of the paintings hung from the walls of the seventh-floor suite, and go out into the town, searching the hotel kitchens and pantries for supplies of water and canned food. At this time—an arbitrary interval he imposed on the neutral landscape—he would keep his back to the eastern sky, avoiding the dark night that reached from the desert across the drained river. To the west the brilliant sand beneath the overheated sun shivered like the last dawn of the world.

At these moments Dr. Mallory and Leonora seemed at their most tired, as if their bodies were still aware of the rhythms of the former 24-hour day. Both of them slept at random intervals—often Halliday would visit Leonora's chalet and find her asleep on the reclining chair by the pool, her face covered by the veil of white hair, shielded from the sun by the painting on her easel. These strange fantasies, with their images of demented bishops and cardinals moving in procession across ornamental landscapes, were her only activity.

By contrast, Mallory would vanish like a white vampire into his chalet, then emerge, refreshed in some way, a few hours later. After the first weeks Halliday came to terms with Mallory, and the two men would listen to the Webern quartets in the auditorium or play chess near Leonora beside the empty swimming pool. Halliday tried to discover how Leonora and Mallory had come to the town, but neither of them would answer his questions. He gathered only that they had arrived separately in Africa several years earlier and had been moving westwards from town to town as the terminator crossed the continent.

On occasions Mallory would go off into the desert on



some unspecified errand, and then Halliday would see Leonora alone. Together they would walk along the bed of the drained river, or dance to the recordings of Masai chants in the anthropology library. Halliday's growing dependence on Leonora was tempered by the knowledge that he had come to Africa to seek, not this white-haired young woman with her amiable eyes, but the night-walking lamia within his own mind. As if aware of this, Leonora remained always detached, smiling at Halliday across the strange paintings on her easel.

This pleasant *ménage à trois* was to last for three months. During this time the dusk line advanced a further half a mile towards Columbine Sept Heures, and at last Mallory and Leonora decided to move to a small refinery town ten miles to the west. Halliday half-expected Leonora to stay with him at Columbine, but she left with Mallory in the Peugeot. Sitting in the back seat, she waited as Mallory played the last Bartók quintet in the auditorium before disconnecting the battery and carrying it back to the car.

Curiously, it was Mallory who tried to persuade Halliday to leave with them. Unlike Leonora, the still unresolved elements in his relationship with Halliday made him wish to keep in touch with the younger man.

"Halliday, you'll find it difficult staying on here." Mallory pointed across the river to the pall of darkness that hung like an immense wave over the town. Already the colours of the walls and streets had changed to the deep cyclamen of dusk. "The night is coming. Do you realise what that means?"

"Of course, doctor. I've waited for it."

"But, Halliday . . ." Mallory searched for a phrase. His tall figure, eyes hidden as ever by the dark glasses, looked up at Halliday across the steps of the hotel. "You aren't an owl, or some desert cat. You'll have to come to terms with this thing in the daylight."

Giving up, Mallory went back to the car. He waved as they set off, but Halliday made no reply. He was watching Leonora Sully in the back seat with her canvas and easels, the stack of bizarre paintings that were echoes of her unseen dreams.

Whatever his feelings for Leonora, they were soon for-

gotten with his discovery a month later of a second beautiful neighbour at Columbine Sept Heures.

Half a mile to the north-east of Columbine, across the drained river, was the empty colonial mansion once occupied by the managers of the refinery at the mouth of the river. As Halliday sat on his balcony on the seventh floor of the Oasis Hotel, trying to detect the imperceptible progress of the terminator, while the antique clocks around him ticked mechanically through the minutes and hours of their false days, he would notice the white façades of the house illuminated in the reflected light of the sand-storms. Its terraces were covered with dust, and the columns of the loggia beside the swimming pool had toppled into the basin. Although only four hundred yards to the east of the hotel, the empty shell of the house seemed already within the approaching night.

Shortly before one of his attempts to sleep, Halliday saw the headlamps of a car moving around the house. Its beams revealed a solitary figure who walked slowly up and down the terrace. Abandoning any pretence at sleep, Halliday climbed to the roof of the hotel, ten storeys above, and lay down on the suicide sill. A chauffeur was unloading suitcases from the car. The figure on the terrace, a tall woman in a black robe, walked with the random, half-certain movements of someone barely aware of what she was doing. After a few minutes the chauffeur took the woman by the arm, as if waking her from some kind of sleep.

Halliday watched from the roof, waiting for them to reappear. The strange trance-like movements of this beautiful woman—already her dark hair and the pale nimbus of her face drifting like a lantern on the incoming dusk convinced him that she was the dark lamia of all his dreams—reminded Halliday of his own first walk across the dunes to the river, the testing of ground unknown but familiar from his sleep.

When he went down to his suite he lay on the brocaded settee in the sitting room, surrounded by the landscapes of Delvaux and Ernst, and fell into a deep slumber. There he saw his first true dreams, of classical ruins under a mid-



night sky, where moonlit figures moved past each other in a city of the dead.

The dreams were to recur each time Halliday slept. He would wake on the settee by the picture window, the darkening floor of the desert below, aware of the dissolving boundaries between his inner and outer worlds. Already two of the clocks below the mantelpiece mirror had stopped. With their end he would at last be free of his former notions of time.

At the end of this first week Halliday discovered that the woman slept at the same intervals as himself, going out to look at the desert as Halliday stepped onto his balcony. Although his solitary figure stood out clearly against the dawn sky behind the hotel the woman seemed not to notice him. Halliday watched the chauffeur drive the white Mercedes into the town. In his dark uniform he moved past the fading walls of the Fine Arts School like a shadow of an invisible spectre.

Halliday went down into the street and walked towards the dusk. Crossing the river, a drained Rubicon dividing his passive world at Columbine Sept Heures from the reality of the coming night, Halliday climbed the opposite bank past the wrecks of old cars and gasoline drums illuminated in the crepuscular light. As he neared the house the woman was walking among the sand-covered statuary in the garden, the crystals lying on the stone faces like the condensation of immense epochs of time.

Halliday hesitated by the low wall that encircled the house, waiting for the woman to look towards him. Her pale face, its high forehead rising above the dark glasses, in some ways reminded him of Dr. Mallory, the same screen that concealed a potent inner life. The fading light lingered among the angular planes of her temples as she searched the town for any signs of the Mercedes.

She was sitting in one of the chairs on the terrace when Halliday reached her, hands folded in the pockets of the silk robe so that only her pale face, with its marred beauty—the sunglasses seemed to shut it off like some inward night—was exposed to him.

Halliday stood by the glass-topped table, uncertain how to introduce himself. "I'm staying at the Oasis—at

Columbine Sept Heures," he began. "I saw you from the balcony." He pointed to the distant tower of the hotel, its façade raised against the dimming air.

"A neighbour?" The woman nodded at this. "Thank you for calling on me. I'm Gabrielle Szabo. Are there many of you?"

"No—they've gone. There were only two of them, a doctor and a young painter, Leonora Sully—the landscape here suited her."

"Of course. A doctor, though?" The woman had taken her hands from her robe. They lay in her lap like a pair of fragile doves. "What was he doing here?"

"Nothing." Halliday wondered whether to sit down, but the woman made no attempt to offer him the other chair, as if she expected him to drift away as suddenly as he had arrived. "Now and then he helped me with my dreams."

"Dreams?" She turned her head towards him, the light revealing the hollowed contours above her eyes. "Are there dreams at Columbine Sept Heures, Mr.—"

"Halliday. There are dreams now. The night is coming."

The woman nodded, raising her face to the violet-hued dusk. "I can feel it on my face—like a black sun. What do you dream about, Mr. Halliday?"

Halliday almost blurted out the truth, but with a shrug he said: "This and that. An old ruined town—you know, full of classical monuments. Anyway, I did last night. . . ." He smiled at this. "I still have some of the old clocks left. The others have stopped."

Along the river a plume of gilded dust lifted from the road. The white Mercedes sped towards them.

"Have you been to Leptis Magna, Mr. Halliday?"

"The Roman town? It's by the coast, five miles from here. If you like, I'll go with you."

"A good idea. This doctor you mentioned, Mr. Halliday—where has he gone? My chauffeur . . . needs some treatment."

Something about the woman's voice suggested that she might easily lose interest in him. Not wanting to compete with Mallory again, Halliday said: "To the north, I think, to the coast. He was leaving Africa. Is it urgent?"

Before she could reply Halliday was aware of the dark figure of the chauffeur, buttoned within his black uniform,



standing a few yards behind him. Only a moment earlier the car had been a hundred yards down the road, but with an effort Halliday accepted this quantal jump in time. The chauffeur's small simian face, with its sharp eyes and tight mouth, regarded Halliday without comment.

"Gaston, this is Mr. Halliday. He's staying at one of the hotels at Columbine Sept Heures. Perhaps you could give him a lift to the river crossing."

Halliday was about to accept, but the chauffeur made no response to the suggestion. Halliday felt himself shiver in the cooler air moving towards the river out of the dusk. He bowed to Gabrielle Szabo and walked past the chauffeur. As he stopped, about to remind her of the trip to Leptis Magna, he heard her say: "Gaston, there was a doctor here."

The meaning of the oblique remark remained hidden from Halliday as he watched the house from the roof of the Oasis Hotel. Gabrielle Szabo sat on the terrace in the dusk, while the chauffeur made his journeys to Columbine and the refineries along the river. Once Halliday came across him as he rounded a corner near the Fine Arts School, but the man trudged on with his jerrican of water. Halliday postponed a further visit to the House. Whatever her motives for being there, and whoever she was, Gabrielle Szabo had brought him the dreams that Columbine Sept Heures and his long journey south had failed to provide. Besides, the presence of the woman, turning some key in his mind, was all he required. Rewinding his clocks, he found that he slept for eight or nine hours of the nights he set himself.

However, a week later he found himself again failing to sleep. Deciding to visit his neighbour, he went out across the river, walking into the dusk that lay ever deeper across the sand. As he reached the house the white Mercedes was setting off along the road to the coast. In the back Gabrielle Szabo sat close to the open window, the dark wind drawing her black hair into the slipstream.

Halliday waited as the car came towards him, slowing as the driver recognised him. Gaston's head leaned back,

his tight mouth framing Halliday's name. Expecting the car to stop, Halliday stepped out into the road.

"Gabrielle . . . Miss Szabo—"

She leaned forward, and the white car accelerated and swerved around him, the dust cutting his eyes as he watched the woman's masked face borne away from him.

Halliday returned to the hotel and climbed to the roof, but the car had disappeared into the darkness of the north-east, its wake fading into the dusk. He went down to his suite and paced around the paintings. The last of the clocks had stopped. Carefully he wound each one, glad for the moment to be free of Gabrielle Szabo and the dark dream she had drawn across the desert.

When the clocks were going again he went down to the basement. For ten minutes he moved from car to car, stepping in and out of the Cadillacs and Citroëns. None of the cars would start, but in the service bay he found a Honda motor-cycle, and after filling the tank managed to kick the engine into life. As he set off from Columbine the sounds of the exhaust reverberated off the walls around him, but half a mile from the town, when he stopped to adjust the carburettor, the town seemed to have been abandoned for years, his own presence obliterated as quickly as his shadow.

He drove westwards, the dawn rising to meet him. Its colours lightened, the ambiguous contours of the dusk giving way to the clear outlines of the dunes along the horizon, the isolated water-towers standing like beacons.

Losing his way when the road disappeared into the sand-sea, Halliday drove the motor-cycle across the open desert. A mile to the west he came to the edge of a wadi. He tried to drive the cycle down the bank, then lost his balance as the machine leapt away and somersaulted among the rocks. Halliday trudged across the floor of the wadi to the opposite bank. Ahead of him, its silver ganties and tank farms shining in the dawn light, were an abandoned refinery and the white roofs of the nearby staff settlement.

As he walked between the lines of chalets, past the empty swimming pools that seemed to cover all Africa, he saw the Peugeot parked below one of the ports. Sitting with her easel was Leonora Sully, a tall man in a white suit beside her. At first Halliday failed to recognise him, although the



man rose and gestured to him. The outline of his head and high forehead were familiar, but the eyes seemed unrelated to the rest of his face. Then Halliday recognised Dr. Mallory, and realised that for the first time he was seeing him without his sunglasses.

"Halliday . . . my dear chap." Mallory stepped around the drained pool to greet him, adjusting the silk scarf in the neck of his shirt. "We thought you'd come one day. . . ." He turned to Leonora, who was smiling at Halliday. "To tell the truth we were beginning to get a little worried about him, weren't we, Leonora?"

"Halliday. . . ." Leonora took his arm and steered him round to face the sun. "What's happened?—you're so pale!"

"He's been sleeping, Leonora. Can't you see that, my dear? Columbine Sept Heures is beyond the dusk line now. Halliday, you have the face of a dreamer."

Halliday nodded. "It's good to leave the dusk, Leonora. The dreams weren't worth searching for." When she looked away Halliday turned to Mallory. The doctor's eyes disturbed him. The white skin in the orbits seemed to isolate them, as if the level gaze was coming from a concealed face. Something warned him that the absence of the sunglasses marked a change in Mallory whose significance he had not yet grasped.

Avoiding the eyes, Halliday pointed to the empty easel. "You're not painting, Leonora."

"I don't need to, Halliday. You see. . . ." She turned to take Mallory's hand. "We have our dreams now. They come across the desert like jewelled birds. . . ."

Halliday watched them as they stood together. Then Mallory stepped forward, his white eyes like spectres. "Halliday, of course it's good to see you . . . you'd probably like to stay here——."

Halliday shook his head. "I came for my car," he said in a controlled voice. He pointed to the Peugeot. "Can I take it?"

"My dear chap, naturally. But where are——." Mallory pointed to the western horizon, where the sun burned in an immense pall. "The west is on fire, you can't go there."

Halliday walked towards the car. "I'm going to the

coast." Over his shoulder, he added: "Gabrielle Szabo is there."

This time, as he fled towards the night, Halliday was thinking of the white house across the river, sinking into the last light of the desert. He followed the road that ran north-east from the refinery, and found a disused pontoon bridge that crossed the wadi. The distant spires of Columbine Sept Heures were touched by the last light of sunset.

The streets of the town were deserted, his own footsteps in the sand already drowned by the wind. He went up to his suite in the hotel. Gabrielle Szabo's house stood isolated on the far shore. Holding one of the clocks, its hands turning slowly within the ormolu case, Halliday saw the chauffeur bring the Mercedes into the drive. A moment later Gabrielle Szabo appeared, a black wraith in the dusk, and the car set off towards the north-east.

Halliday walked around the paintings in the suite, then he gathered his clocks together and carried them onto the balcony. He hurled them down one by one onto the terrace below. Their shattered faces, the white dials like Mallory's eyes, looked up at him with unmoving hands.

Half a mile from Leptis Magna he could hear the sea washing on the beaches through the darkness, the on-shore winds whipping at the crests of the dunes in the moonlight. The ruined columns of the Roman city rose beside the single tourist hotel. Halliday stopped the car by the hotel, and walked past the derelict kiosks at the outskirts of the town. The tall arcades of the forum loomed ahead, the rebuilt statues of Olympian deities standing on their pedestals above him.

Halliday climbed onto one of the arches, then scanned the dark avenues for any sign of the Mercedes. Uneager to venture into the centre of the town, he went back to his car, then entered the hotel and climbed to the roof.

By the sea, where the antique theatre had been exposed from the dunes, he could see the white rectangle of the Mercedes parked on the bluff. Below the proscenium, on the flat semi-circle of the stage, the dark figure of Gabrielle Szabo moved to and fro among the shadows of the statues.



Watching her, and thinking of Delvaux's "Echo," with its triplicated nymph walking naked among the classical pavilions of a midnight city, Halliday wondered whether he had fallen asleep on the warm concrete roof. Between his dreams and the ancient city below there seemed no boundary, and the moonlit phantoms of his mind moved freely between the inner and outer landscapes, as in turn the dark-eyed woman from the house by the drained river had crossed the frontiers of his psyche, bringing with her a final relief from time.

Leaving the hotel, Halliday followed the street through the empty town, and reached the rim of the amphitheatre. As he watched Gabrielle Szabo came walking through the antique streets, the fleeting light between the columns illuminating her white face. Halliday moved down the stone steps to the stage, aware of the chauffeur watching him from the cliff beside the car. The woman moved towards Halliday, her hips swaying from side to side.

Ten feet from him she stopped, her raised hands testing the darkness. Halliday stepped forward, doubting if she could see him at all behind the sunglasses she still wore. At the sound of his footsteps she flinched, looking up towards the chauffeur, but Halliday took her hands.

"Miss Szabo. I saw you walking here."

The woman held his hands in strong fingers. "Mr. Halliday——." She felt his wrists, as if relieved to see him. "I thought you would come. Tell me, how long have you been here?"

"Weeks—or months, I can't remember. I dreamed of this city before I came to Africa. Miss Szabo, I used to see you walking here among these ruins."

Together they moved off among the columns. Between the shadowy pillars of the balustrade was the sea, the white caps of the waves rolling towards the beach.

"Gabrielle . . . why are you here? Why did you come to Africa?"

She gathered the silk robe in one hand as they moved down a stairway to the terrace below. She leaned against Halliday, her fingers clasping his arm, walking so stiffly that Halliday wondered if she were drunk. "Why? Perhaps to see the same dreams, it's possible."

Halliday was about to speak when he noticed the foot-

steps of the chauffeur behind them. Looking around, and for one moment distracted from Gabrielle's swaying body against his own, he became aware of a pungent smell coming from the vent of the old Roman cloaca below them. The top of the brick-lined sewer had fallen in, and the basin was partly covered by the waves swilling across the beach.

Halliday tried to point below but the woman was holding his wrist in a steel grip. "Down there!" he shouted. "Can you see?"

Pulling his hand away, he pointed to the basin of the sewer, where a dozen half-submerged forms lay heaped together. Bludgeoned by the sea and wet sand, the corpses were only recognisable by the back and forth movements of their arms and legs in the shifting water.

"For God's sake—Gabrielle, who are they?"

"Poor devils. . . ." Gabrielle Szabo turned away, as Halliday stared over the edge at the basin ten feet below. "The evacuation, there were riots. They've been here for months."

Halliday knelt down, wondering how long it would take the corpses—whether Arab or European he had no means of telling—to be swept out to sea. His dreams of Leptis Magna had not included these melancholy denizens of the sewers.

"Months? Not that one!"

He pointed again to the body of a man in a white suit lying to one side. His long legs were covered by the foam and water, but his chest and arms were exposed. Across the face was the silk scarf he had seen Mallory wearing at their last meeting.

"Mallory!" Halliday stood up, as the black-suited figure of the chauffeur stepped onto a ledge twenty feet above him. Halliday went over to Gabrielle Szabo, who was standing by the step, apparently gazing out to sea. "Dr. Mallory—he lived with me at Columbine Sept Heures! How did he—Gabrielle, you knew he was here!"

Halliday seized her hands, in his anger jerked her forward, knocking off her glasses. As she fell to her knees, scrambling for them, Halliday held her shoulders. "Gabrielle! Gabrielle, you're——"

Her head lowered, she held his fingers and pressed them



into her orbits. "Mallory, he did it—we knew he'd follow you here. He was my doctor once——."

Halliday pushed her away, his feet crushing the sunglasses on the floor. He looked down at the white-suited figure washed by the waves, wondering what nightmare was hidden behind the scarf over its face. He sprinted along the terrace past the auditorium and raced away through the dark streets.

As he reached the Peugeot the chauffeur was only twenty yards behind him. Halliday started the motor and swung the car away through the dust. In the rear mirror he saw the chauffeur stop and draw a pistol from his belt. As he fired the bullet shattered the windshield. Halliday swerved into one of the kiosks, crushing the flimsy hardboard, then regained control and set off with his head down, the cold night air blowing fragments of frosted glass into his face.

Two miles from Leptis, when there was no sign of the Mercedes in pursuit, he stopped and knocked out the windshield. As he drove on westwards the air grew warmer, the rising dawn lifting in front of him with its promise of light and time.

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## Editorial

*(Concluded from page 9)*

I think, that they work within a field developed almost single-handed by Mr. H. G. Wells.

*(This is a slightly revised version of a talk given by Mr. Aldiss to the P.E.N. Club on the occasion of H. G. Wells's centenary.)*

# **saint**

# **505**

## **by john clark**

"GOODNESS IS glowing," said the Dean.

And so it was.

It had a stone pineapple perched on top of it as do so many pinnacles of that period. The pineapple was glowing like a night-light in a child's nursery.

• • •

"Goodness is on fire," said the Head Porter.

He was right too, or nearly so.

Like a torch of stone the walls and windows were bathed in a cloud of light.

• • •

"It's that Mr. Thaxted," said Mrs. Witney, his bedmaker. And she was right, also.

Isadore Bentham Thaxted was a Research Fellow, a psycho-linguist, an ascetic and a bore. He had a computer called 505 in his set of rooms.

• • •

"He's gone mad," said the Master.

Now, he was not far from the truth. Thaxted was one of those brilliant, narrow, paranoid people who are, per-



haps, never quite sane. They tend, like their most famous exemplar, Newton, to seek out the Secret of the Universe. Often, like Thaxted, they dabble in the Hidden Science. Nevertheless it must be admitted that a computer was an interesting new addition to the Armamenta Alchemica.



"It's that damned adding machine," said the Professor of Poetry.

He was rude, but nearly right.

505 was a cut above an adding machine.

505 may or may not have been damned.

505 was certainly glowing.



"It's an aura," said somebody's psychic aunt who happened to be passing by.

Bang on target.

"But we can all see it," said the Professor of Poetry, "I thought only weirdies like Yeats could see auras."

"Auræ," interjected an elderly Fellow, noted for his collection of Huntingdonshire bus-tickets.



"There are only 10 to the 10," said Thaxted who had crept up behind them all, as they stood in Circulation Court, in the dusk, watching Goodness, which was glowing.

He was right, statistically speaking.

The human nervous system gets along with ten thousand million nerve cells. Not much punch there. Only microvolts, as Berger found in '29.

"505 has got ten to the hundred neuronal modules," said Thaxted.

Now that means millivolts.

The Master was irritated.



"Come, come, Mr. Thaxted, please explain yourself. What is causing that glow? It looks dangerous."

He may well have asked. Up till then the Occult Sciences had suffered from a lack of voltage.

"It's glowing because it's good," said Thaxted fiercely, and, pushing his way through the crowd, he ran up the stairs of the Tower of Goodness.

Harvey College is famous for its three towers, Goodness, Holiness and Truth. They were built by a pious Master,

Leotinus (pronounced "Locks") just before he was be-headed by Henry the Eighth.



"Harvey! An encyclopædia of iconography—in stone," the Professor of Religious Art would say, as he showed a guest round his rooms, in Truth.

Thaxted's rooms were at the penultimate turn of the spiral staircase inside Goodness.

The last turn of those stairs leads to a hexagonal room with six round windows, called "Nowhere."



"505 is controlled from nowhere," Thaxted used to say, rather too often, at dinner.

He was quite right.

Especially when he added the Pasque-box. These became the vogue in the late '60's.



"A Pasque-box renders the programmer unnecessary," said Anthony Gabriel Spurgeon Pasque to the International Congress of Bio-simulation, at Prague, in '67.

"Let the Redundancy of Potential Command work for You. Catalyse your Computer with a Pasque-box," said Oyber-Matics, Inc., before they went bust in the Recession of '68.

Thaxted added a Pasque-box to his 505 in the Spring of '67 which is when Goodness started to glow.

Once a Pasque-box had been added to a computer you just couldn't say what was going on inside. Under Pasque-control automation gained a new dimension overnight.

"It's fantastic!" said Gatling Deere, the Managing Director of Vector Mobiles Limited, "The production line is branching."

He did not lie.

And, what is more, the new model, the Vector-Pasque '66, was a wow, until the metal-fatigue bug hit, that autumn. The Great Magnesium Strike didn't help either.



The crowd at the foot of Goodness was growing larger every minute.



"Good evening, Chief Constable," said the Bursar.



"Thanks for coming so quickly, though God knows whether this is in your sphere."

He spoke the truth.

"More likely to be in mine," said Father Murphy, who had joined the spectators. "You see, Isadore tells me a lot about his work. He has a calculating machine up there, you know. He says he is teaching it to pray."

● ● ●

"To pray!" exclaimed the astonished Master.

"But how can you explain what is glowing? Goodness shouldn't glow!"

"Oh but you are wrong," said Father Murphy whose favourite author was, inevitably, the 'Immortal G.K.' "Goodness should *always* glow! But I really mustn't stop as Isadore asked me to bring along my Things."

And without further ado the Catholic Chaplain to the University popped through the doorway and up the stairs of Goodness.

● ● ●

"You're too late, Father," said Isadore Bentham Thaxted, "505 is dying."

He was right, in a manner of speaking.

The trouble about Pasque-boxes was that they used to give computers what Babbage might have called Brain-Fever. Put more crudely, they got too hot and burnt out. Later on Pasque introduced his Mood-Control or Thymostat which kept the temperature down. It also made the outputs less bizarre.

● ● ●

"Well then, I'll anoint him at once," said Father Gervaise Murphy.

He did too.

*Nihil obstat* and all that.

● ● ●

Goodness stopped glowing at 11.20. Thaxted came down the spiral stairs with Father Murphy and left the college at once. No one spoke to them as they passed through the crowd. Thaxted went into retreat that night and is now the lay head of a Technical College in Belgium.

● ● ●

He keeps off computers nowadays.

# sun push

by graham m. hall

TIME ST. JOHN Smith stood in the grey, glutinous, sup-sucking mud, hunched miserably as the rain rat-pattered down.

Private 563287 Smith, Time Saint John (Sinjun), of the 3rd Battalion, the Manchester Regiment, British Army, half-squatted in a trench, a lone sentinel ; face-shade grey, dish-washed and watered.

A sole battery lantern, hitched to a tuft of straggling hair-like grass, lit up a stretch of ground, revealing in its scope a dirty streak of road marching solidly north-east.

Smith was drawing in the lantern light, sparrow fingers trailing charcoal lines over wet cartridge paper. The sketch, weeping mascara tears, was a view of the road from the trench, with shallow ditches and other trenches radiating out into the darkness like the *canali* of Mars.

Smith shaded in the sky vista.

To the west, the night sky was tide-washed by summer lightning flashes, silhouetting briefly the bulk of the hill, to be followed by the flickering crumpthump of heavy artillery. Suddenly, the barrage swung closer, cresting the hill in sunburst brilliance, and Smith, cringing, ducked further into the small cover of the trench parapet. He haunched down on his mildewed leather heels, squatting on the uneven trench boards.



Bedraggled, a rat, also on guard duty, slithered away in the mud, dragging a nameless meat-thing behind it into the shadows.

With deft slices, Smith continued his sketch, shading in a grey wash with spat-on charcoal. The single colour process.

Grey.

Grey.

And grey.

Grey the trench, the mud, the wire, the sandbags ; grey the darkness and grey the smell.

Smith heard the scuffling of many feet behind him, and suddenly crumpled the half-completed sketch, treading it into the underfoot mud. The rat scurried away further, its feet scratching on the discarded brass of a shell-case.

Soon a platoon of Naafi-scented soldiers were filling the trench. The sergeant, Charlie "The Arse" Trelawney, spoke quietly to the appointed sentry.

"It's a foul night, Private Smith. You can bet your last bottle that the seepees will be following this up. They're giving the western lines a hell of a pounding."

Smith nodded. A trickle of rain took the opportunity to breach an eyebrow, misting one eye.

"Hope you were keeping a sharp look-out, Smith. This light shouldn't be here for a start," Trelawney took the lantern down, dousing it.

"One thing, though. There can't be any seepee snipers around, else you'd be a gonner for sure."

Slushing and swearing, the fresh platoon had taken up their positions against the lazy parapet, zurrs at the ready. Command was obviously expecting an attack (ah, the blinding LIGHT, the bloodpounding roar of guns, the SCREAMING godDAMN scheming KILLERS!!!)

Controlling an important route to the north-east, the sector was a likely target. Smith wished he was far, far to the west, in gut-safe America.

Heart-stopping, there was a pause in the barrage, now much closer. Chinking, pattering, wet grey silence.

Under orders, an eager corporal was leading half-a-dozen troopers over the top, on patrol. They skittered in the night across the mud like kids in snowland, racing each other for the cover of the bulk-shadowed far hedge.

They were halfway there when the first shell burst, shooting a fountain of chocolate mud high against the stars. There was an impossible hurricane of physical noise, 10-G beating on ears and skin.

Smith crouched, Jesus-muttering (Let me escape, oh God GOD God why me? Let ME escape!) while second and third shells boomed down into the field, into the trench, spreading soil and limbs and grass. A fourth hit the road, slag-transforming tarmac and half-filling the trench with debris, tumbling and burying. Then the poxing shells hopped off drunkenly to the east, crunching terror and death on a computer-planned path.

Time St. John Smith, foetus-wrapped, lay quivering. The sergeant was still alive—could hear him breathing—and somewhere out in the ruined field a man was moaning, slipping into death-rattle.

The bowel-loosening fear faded with the noise of the shells, now passing high overhead with a soft pigeon whine.

Near whimpering, Smith hunched himself to his feet and began to climb, scramble, out of the trench.

Sergeant Trelawney's voice came clear in the darkness.

"Where do you think you're going, soldier?"

"For"—cracked and dry—"For help."

Smith hung on the rim of the trench (out of here, God, please let me GET!).

"Come back, you stupid bastard. D'you think this is the only place they've hit tonight? Up on the hill, they've had a couple of thousand directs. We're just an *en route* accident."

Reluctantly, Smith dropped back onto the trench boards, sat on his heels.

"But, Sarge, we might as well get out of here. There's nothing we can do—except get killed like the poor sods out there." Smith's voice still fear-trembled in the soft-raining quiet.

"Smith, the seepees are going to try for this sector tonight. We're going to hold it."

Smith deliberated. How far to press . . . ? Then. "Come on, Sarge. Let's get out of here."

A new voice came in the night, broad North. "Nay, we'd best stop. There'll be hell t-pay, else."

"Who's that?"



"Private 777967 Eamus here, Sarge."

Later, the sergeant went off to investigate the dead and the dying.

Sharing a cigarette, Eamus and Smith huddled down against the cold earth wall of the trench.

"T'war's over for a lot of blokes tonight," Eamus said, almost huskily.

Smith spoke low, in a voice like a Henry Moore sculpture. "Yeah. But not back to Civvy Street for them."

"I was a cricketer—afore the war, like. Played openin' bat for Yorkshire. Jesus, it's hard to think of it all now, with all this. I haven't held a bat in years. What were you?"

"Me?" The cigarette glowed low. "Oh, I was a painter—like."

Eamus thought. Then, "Houses and things?"

Houses, yes, and sunlight, Smith mused. The silence lengthened into dozing sleep, fear-drained and care-less.

Smith lay against the scrawnily sand-bagged parapet, half-dreaming.

He dreamt of sunlight. Sunlight in a wood, with a green-mottled frog-pond clearing and the sun trickling in pipe-pipe notes from the throats of birds, feathered like some unmelted Icarus.

He dreamt of gold beach sunlight; of sunlight on the body of a naked girl, cascading like gold water over her breasts, waterfalling its way through her hair.

Most of all, he dreamt of sunlight on canvas. Transforming sail-stuff into miniature suns; and, oh, how to catch it! How to capture sunlight in vermilion and ultramarine, in sienna and lake and ochre, and pin it in paint prisons on canvas or paper or wood.

Sunlight.

The sergeant hissed.

Smith swam through the sun-ocean, groped for the zurr at his side. Eamus stirred too, and, in the grey dimness, the sergeant pointed silently out into the field.

Skirting round the lipped craters were six dark shadows.

Suddenly, a tenuous laser beam probed out from the group, searching across the grass towards Smith with the

familiar faint buzzing, like fog-bound pylons. Eamus raised his own zurr, clicking the circuit to ready, but Trelawney waved him down.

As the enemy crept cautiously on toward the trench, Trelawney lobbed a grenade.

"Look out, for crissakes!" one of the shapes yelled, in a London accent, and all six of the darkness zurrs sprang into hoses of light.

"Get the bastards!" the Londoner shouted, beginning to charge the trench.

Then all burst like a rose into roaring red and white agony as the grenade blew.

The enemy group was successfully taken out.

#### ORDERS FOR THE DAY 29/5/83

*All non-commissioned officers and men will prepare to march at 0500 hours tomorrow, 30/5/83.*

(Signed)

*Lt.-Col. A. T. Scott-McCabe.*

*Officer Commanding, 3rd Battalion  
Manchester Regiment.*

Smith, Eamus and Trelawney, mud-spattered, scanned the bare notice, tacked, curled like a leaf, on the Camp Orders board.

"Aye," said the sergeant. "We lost five hundred men killed on Bredon Hill last night, and two thousand more injured. My bet's that we'll be leaving that little hill feature to the seepees, and we're to draw back south."

"True," said Eamus. "To Gloucester or Cheltenham, for a dollar."

Smith prepared to march, packing blanco-bright kit, regulation uniform, for dying, the occasion of.

The men's quarters at the Tewkesbury camp were sited in a vast old building, with colonnades towering like proud missiles, and a high, vaulted roof. The camp was little more than an advance supply depot, and a marshalling point for the cynically-named 'walking wounded.'

Smith was sitting on his cot, watching sunlight trickling and chinking through the shattered stained glass, when Eamus came over. He was a small man, bearded and weary, like seeded grass. He looked like an abridged version of D. H. Lawrence.



"This used t'be a church, y'know," Eamus said. Smith knew, and said so.

"Church must've been a funny thing."

"Maybe they abolished it because it was competition for television. . . ."

"The Praesidium of Europe meets in a church, y'know—they call it the Basilisk, or something. My bet's Rogers'll be there soon, too. . . ."

Smith rummaged in his kit-bag, produced pencil and paper and began to sketch with deliberation the church and sunlight.

Eamus went on.

"It *is* funny, though. I mean, there being a war *here*, and France and that lot going Red. Just 'cause of Malinski."

Smith put down his pencil, splinter of a democratic forest (U.S. of A.).

"There was a little more to it than that, Eamus. . . ."

"Aye, but London's ruled from Moscow. That's facts, mate. You can't argue with *them*. And we're here sloshing and dying in our own mud like the stupid sods we are, for the Yanks."

"What about the Bristol Government . . .?"

"That Punch and Judy show! Load of—"

"You'd best be quiet, Eamus. Or security'll be after you."

The sun was setting and the light dimmed like old curtains in the quarters. Smith put the unfinished drawing to one side, and began to pack. Eamus drifted back to his cot near the altar.

Later, Smith went to the NAAFI-commandeered inn, and, loner, sat transfusing whisky and ale, sought in the drinks the essence of sunlight, in barley and in hops.

The Battalion mustered, scuffling, yawning and whispering, in the cold drizzle of dawn. For a parade-ground, a bulldozer had bullied down ancient yews, graves and walls, and the men stood chomping the rubble-mud with their boots.

In orderly lines, pew-standing for the address, they stood and waited for a long time in the chill rain, all flat jokes and wet berets, until they heard, far off, a shuffling-walking noise.

Nearer it came, and louder, a parody of the Regiment's

crisp and measured march. Into sight, past a row of slumped cottages, came a column of men.

Wearing the Regiment's uniform, they shambled along as if in a grotesque conga, each man gripping the soldier in front by one shoulder.

The column was endless. In single file, hundreds of men shuffled past.

And every one was blind.

"Martyred Mother of God," Eamus breathed. "The zurrs' done that."

Each trooper in the column was a healthy, fit and whole man. Except for that one detail. Each man's retina had been seared away in one vital second of unbearable light.

The Battalion stood in the rain and watched two thousand blind men shuffled off towards Cheltenham, to be demobilised and rehabilitated, compensated for the sentence of life's sightlessness.

The Battalion stood in the rain, and scuffed their feet and averted their eyes. The men, the non-coms, and the officers, in a spontaneous eyes-right, —up, or —down ; just —away.

Somewhere, a major took a decision, and with marshall-ing voice the Battalion slipped into step and brooded in time to the rhythmic crunch of boots.

The Theobald Stone and onward, through Toddington and the tarmac forest-twisting in green tipped woods of spring.

Marching steadily in the soft rain, the remnants of the 3rd Battalion, the Manchester Regiment, moved on Stow. They met no seepee forces, although there were ordure-like signs of their passing. Cartland tracks rutted and pocked from heavy lorries ; trees black-seared by solzurr beams, and the occasional roadside house grenade-blasted in high-spirited vandalism.

With the steady motion of a sluggish river, the Battalion marched on into the middle morning, pausing once for regimental micturition, in communal ditch-hissing action.

Some few miles south-east of Stow, the Battalion halted. The officers were called together and briefed in text-book tones. A section—Sergeant Trelawney's—was detailed for action.



"It's a farmhouse," he told the men. "We think the occupants have gone over to the Reds."

In the final drops of the morning rain, the section scurried like voles across the field. The house, white-walled, glowed in the weak first sunlight.

In the house, a radio was on. Sergeant Trelawney halted the section to listen. Rogers' cockney Oxford voice was unmistakable.

"We of the British Liberation Front . . ."

The broadcast was coming from Shepherd's Bush or one of the other big rebel stations. Case proved.

The section burst into the house like stormtroopers, fanning out and filling the warm, farm-house room.

The farmer stood rapidly, little boy agony at being caught out. His wife and rape-aged daughter sat nearby.

The radio clicked off. Rogers, frenetic, faded in mid-sentence.

"Good morning, Sergeant," said the farmer, in a ploughed voice. "Is there anything we can do for you and your men?"

Sergeant Trelawney spoke, nazi-harsh cropped words.

"You were listening to a communist broadcast. Under the Defence of the Realm Act, that is illegal."

"It's the only one you can get around here, Sergeant. It's from the three-kilowatt at Bicester, y'see. You know how these things. . . ."

Trelawney unholstered his pistol, bullet, not laser.

The farmer stood still and silent, backing away a little.

"Look, Sergeant. Take that radio, if that's enough. We're all loyal citizens of Britain—I'm a member of the Free Enterprise Party myself. Hang on, I'll show you my papers. . . ."

Dogs bark ; guns don't. The pistol cracked once, acrid, and the farmer screamed, choking off quickly. He clutched his belly.

Coughing quietly, he sank to his knees, and salaambowed slowly forward.

No hysterics from widowed woman and orphaned girl. They stood slowly, powder-faced and quivering.

Trelawney ushered the section out of the room, locking the door. Out in the farmyard, he lobbed a grenade tinkling through the small window. A few seconds later, the

windows and door blew out, leaving the house blind and toothless.

And lifeless, too.

In the fields, marching back to the road and the Battalion, one of the men bitched.

"You might've let us have a bit of fun with the bint, Sarge. Serve her, like."

No reply.

The men trudged on.

## t w o

MARCHING IS CATHARTIC. The hypnotic rhythms drown the weariness.

Along the Oxford road, Smith marched and thought in fugues of sunlight.

Smith had no interest in the war ; didn't care if Birmingham went over to the seepees as the other men did and discussed at each meal break.

He tried to translate pure war into art, to make people realize what war was and what they were doing. But paint and pictures were no good ; you couldn't make people feel war on paper. They had to feel it and suffer it themselves. The war meant nothing, but people never realized that until it affected them, with the finality of death and maiming, and then it was just too late anyway. Then you could sit in your wheelchair, perhaps, and write letters to the newspapers and novels, and paint the horror of it all, but while you did there were platoons and battalions of less-fortunate soldiers—and civilians too—being shot at and blown up and blinded by the zurrs in their futile hundreds.

It was the blindness that really scared Smith. He could accept death, with its maybe and its wonder, but the sightlessness and long life darkness of the blind was beyond—above—him.

And Smith marched towards Oxford with the remnants of his battalion, and the lensed gas-state laser chinked and rubbed on his shoulder, patted his back as he paced.

Smith paced and pissed and ate to order, and dreamt of sunlight, and the British Army marched on Oxford.

The entry into the city was easier than had been anxiously anticipated. The dreaming spires had been deci-



mated—along with the population—by a totally unexpected napalm and high-explosive raid by the R.A.F.

Time St. John Smith, zurr in hand, looked at the charred bodies of buildings and objectives, people and persons. God alone knew where they had got the planes from.

The war in the air had been won on the ground, many sad years before. The aim of each side primarily being to stop the enemy getting planes into the air, aerodromes and factories had been bombed with pointed regularity until there were simply no more planes, on either side. The Russians or the Europeans or the Americans could have supplied them to their chosen sides, but there seemed no point. It was a war that would be won on the ground, yard by yard—if at all.

There was sporadic rifle fire from dispirited disloyalists as the Battalion padded on through the gaunt Victorian debris. Bullets rattled over the roofs and concrete, spattering and chipping.

Sniping back like pigeon shooters, the Battalion pushed on into the centre.

A detachment of the 1st Gloucesters had already quelled the Carfax and the shopping centre. High Street and Broad Street dreamed of their past, looking deserted but normal, apart from the occasional blasted building and the blitz-seared trees.

Bivouacking down along the front of Brasenose, the battalion officers posted guards and distributed duties.

Trelawney, mindless of mutterings, volunteered his men to accompany the search for an Oxford traitor, the leader of the forlorn town's defence against the seepee forces; the man who had, on the town's behalf, capitulated.

The leader, fat and foreign-named, was soon found, betrayed by braying citizens, hiding in a deserted department store. He fled from the sales floors as Trelawney and his men entered, dodging from counter to counter, panting and pattering over the carpeted floors. As the searching section spread out to cover the whole floor, the hunted man escaped into the large display windows.

A futile flight followed, with the leader, sobbing tears and gasps, crashing through the gaunt window-dummies, tearing through drapes of crêpe-paper and curtains, stumbling on one window ahead of his pursuers.

Smith, on guard outside the store, saw the chase through the series of windows. He watched as grinning Trelawney finally cornered the man in the last window, amidst lingerie and undergarments.

They took the man, festooned in lace and elastic, and hanged him from a nearby lamp post. He jerked and jangled and broke his finger-nails on the rough rope until even Trelawney's amusement grew weary, and weeping Smith was ordered to tug on the traitor's feet.

When the man was quite dead, Trelawney allowed his section to return to the bivouacs.

Later, Smith tried sketching in the dusk, but the sun had set and his mind kept picturing a shy, white farmhouse, glowing and glistening with tears of rain; and a nightmare glass maze that stretched and stretched and stretched.

He tore the sketch into snowflake shreds and headed out of the tent into the night.

Trelawney and Eamus, and other members of Smith's section, were already ensconced, supping like navvies, at the bar.

"Here's Leonardo," a trooper chirped. "Buy him a drink, someone."

Tongue-rolling golden foam of bitterness, the drink.

Ah, the beer. God save us from wet knees.

Smith drank slowly, gripping the handle in its strangeness.

The soldiers sang, propaganda songs, scatological, scurrilous and somehow pathetic, about Rogers and Malinski.

"Come on, lads," Charles the Arse said, slip-slurring. "To the flop!" Cheers chimed from the soldiers, trekking out behind Trelawney.

"IN! IN! IN! IN!!" they chanted.

"I'm going to—"

"Luck be a lady tonight," two Brummies sang, bodies clasped in buddy arms.

They piled out of the NAAFI like paratroopers from a plane.

Eamus remained, frowning ponderably.

Smith sat and sipped ale in silence, foamward staring, thinking foam.

Eamus said, "Y'know, Smith. War's a filthy business."



Smith smiled. "Is it, Eamus? I really hadn't noticed," and slipped silently out into the night, toward the cathouse.

Smith went into the redlight like an importuner into a public convenience; head shame bent, hands pocketed, loinstomach churning.

The redlight was a large single hall—an old schoolroom—with forlorn white lines limiting the floor, memories of days when other games were played there. Chipboard shutters maze-like cut off cubicles of seduction, with dream-light lamps dimgleaming and Pan-Asian joss burning to keep out the smells of death and war, mask the stench of stale sweat, gangrene, last week's lust.

Duty called, not need.

(Hoh, be one of the boys, Tim. If it kills you, Tim.)

Smith pulled aside the stiff old curtains, gnarled with filth, until he found an unoccupied woman.

The whores were seepees. Captured living with the Reds, they were drugwashed, doped into senseless nymphomania and shunted into redlight service.

The woman—girl—in the cubicle had been pretty. Now she had the wan-dead look of the junkie; hooded red eyes in a face like sour putty, body shaking and shivering in the hot-cold torment.

Her body, thin now, was wisped up in yellowed nylon, blue-ish flesh welling through fist-size rips like tears. She strained towards him in empty hungering.

Smith undressed without romance, a ritual preparing for the sole formalized act of creation.

The coming together was cold as her bone-stretched flesh.

Lasers boomed silently in his mind. Their cold fire bathed his limbs, ice inferno. The slaves of sex patrolled his body, bayonet-jabbing in groin and midriff. Oh God, God, God. Bathing, diving, dropping. Into seas of ice-hot molten blades and swimming oh, oh, oh, and it's near don't stop oh, oh, the peak the snow on the golden waves and sunlight on the silver beach, oh, crashing, crushing petals, roses, thorns and . . . oh. . . .

Smith withdrew, shuddering, dressed hurriedly and left the premises.

Later, Smith lay in his tent, alone, as, above, planes

droned and dreamed and bombed the city. The ground shook and heaved with the noise, and the canvas of his tent flickered with light, vibrated in the man-made thunder-storm.

About an hour after the raid began, when the sky was lit by fires, the planes faded at last into the confused noises of flames, cries and running feet.

The R.A.F. returned from its mission, unaware that they had been bombing their own men.

The soldiers of the 3rd Battalion, the Manchester Regiment, trembled as they slept, and dreamed giant curses for the seepee air force.

The day dawned, with Smith salvorsan-sick in his bag of sleep. He dressed and ate reluctantly at the bivouacs, another day of leave. Orders, like rain slow trickling its way through the earth, delayed in transit.

Smith, in the sunlight, collected easel and paints and brushes and hiked off through the blasted centre of Oxford, heading for The Plain.

They had bombed Magdalen College, and melancholy it looked, scattered as boulders on its own lawns.

The stones of the college, age-weathered and mellow, looked like cheese, like square golden apples, solid geometric lumps of sunlight.

The broken walls of the building, fresh crumbled and rubble, were new, like the inside of sandstone. Wisps of smoke still rose, drifting and shimmering in the air.

Smith set up his Martian-striding easel, and began to paint the ruins, sitting in spring sunlight by the Cherwell.

Water colours washed onto the paper, yellow and gold. The pencilled outline was picked out carefully with golds and reds, shaded with grey and shadow-black. The lawns, pocked with rubble and craters, green and brown like the knees of a cricketer's trousers.

Smith sat in the sun and painted.

Yellow, golden—sun.

Mist-wan, like yellowed nylon.

With tear-blue flesh welling. . . . The brothel images crowded in, weeping and gibbering like clouds on the face of the sun.

Smith painted on. The yellow lustreless paints.



Lasers booming.

Paint on!

And seas of molten blades.

Smith stood, trembling. He took the board and its painting and walked to the bank of the river.

Napalm had landed in the water, and now it was prism-sheened with oil. Beneath, in the green coolness, glinted new metal, like the dead fishes. The lilies were gone, shrivelled, and, washed into an eddy near Smith's feet, were the bodies of three black-charred swans.

Smith casually threw the board into the water, splashing and skimming, like bread for the day's-dead swans.

He walked away and left the easel standing, stretching in the sun, its shadow like a giant "A" on the sun-green grass.

The awaited Battalion Orders arrived, down the stretched long lines of communication like dew down a spider's web.

To march.

Heading for High Wycombe down the London road. One strong summer's push, and the British Army could be in the streets of London once more. While the seepees lay and waited, waiting for the snow and subversion, and the war in the people, the real battle-ground.

The Battalion marched off into the dawn, nailed boots sparking like little heel-sized lasers. Old Oxford slid by, and the auto-worshipping rows of semi-detacheds followed.

Hup right, left right; marching.

At Headington, an old village-suburb, the Battalion met entrenched seepee forces. Approaching a wide expanse of fields, mortars opened fire and machine guns rattled bullets like free-sample sized angels of death.

Men died in mind-jabbering panic and the bullets and bombs whistled down meaningless death.

The field was mazed with trenches, some occupied and some not, criss-cutting and crossing as on a building site. The Battalion, in an orderly flight, sought refuge in the trenches. Smith and Trelawney dived in and the bullets whispered and shouted overhead.

*Die, boy.*

*Die, man.*

*Die, Smith.*

Earnus stood, wuthering, and caught a half-centimetre bullet in his mouth like a thirteenth-rate magician. He toppled, with blood in his beard, bubbling about death and eternity.

The day long, they sniped and shot and mortared, blasting men and earth impartially. Smith huddled, praying half-heartedly, in the trench, muddy knees to muddy chin.

Dusk came.

The lasers, their use more effective psychologically at night, began to trace across the fields, like inspissated searchlights.

Smith, zurr in hand, crouched, listening as the beams buzzed softly in the night like masturbating bees. With Trelawney, he half-lay half-stood against the low parapet, eyes below the rim, holding zurs above their heads and methodically spraying the field.

There was a scuffling of feet in no man's land.

"They're attacking!" Trelawney whispered.

Smith rose to look, and, slow to recognize the wire-recorder amplifiers—

aaaaAAAH! The colours!

Light! Appleplum sallow flame; iridescent khaki, citron gleaming light, DAZZLE! Flaring sable; steel-scintillate, emerald extinguish; saffron beam SEAR! Light! Lurid verdigris tan; bright crimson rubies, bronzed, flashing YELLOW! Ebony snow, brindled sepia leaves of olive, jet white blaze! Glittering pearly blood; brown amethysts; incandescent rust grass GLARE! Scarlet-barred lemons, lilac ravens, soot-misted burning zebras of lights, coruscating and coryban dancing in and, oh God, rice-swirling walls and down

Down

Down                    swim                    sun

Down                    into pools of sun

         down swim into                    sunlight

Down, down swim into pools of sunlight

Mud grey and sun bright merging.

They came, and they led him away.

Blind.



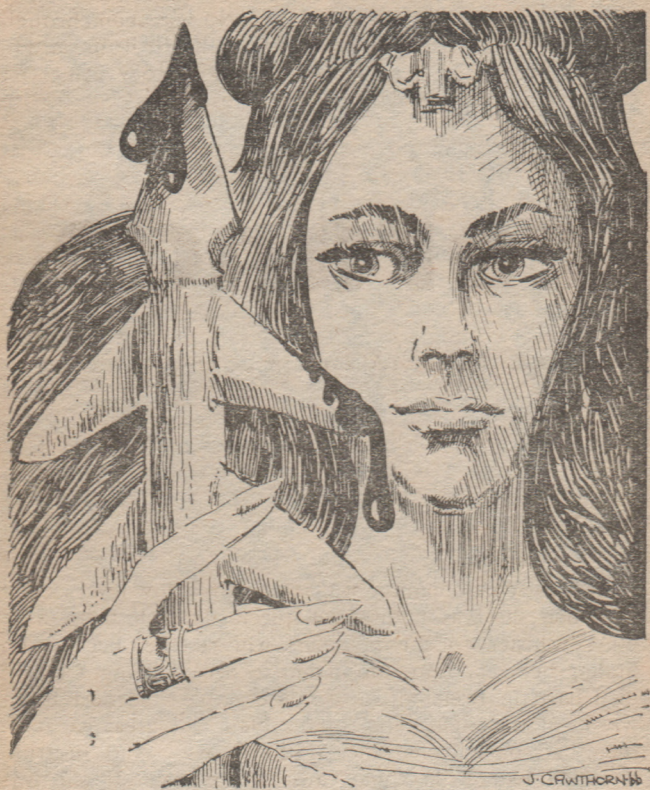
The serial which ran in our companion magazine recently (*The Ice Schooner* by Michael Moorcock) was seen through its various stages by Managing Editor Keith Roberts. He became struck on the idea of writing a story using the background of the novel. The result is

# **coranda**

## **by keith roberts**

THERE WAS A woman in the great cleft-city of Brershill who was passing fair.

At least so ran opinion in that segment of low-level society of which she was undisputed queen. Though there were others, oldsters for the most part, who resented her beauty, finding her very fame an affront to decent living. Custom died hard in Brershill, most conservative—or most backward—of the Eight Cities of the Plain, the great ice steep men had once called the Matto Grosso. And in truth Coranda had given some cause for offence. If she was beautiful she was also vain and cold, cold as the ice plains that girdled the world: in her vanity she had denied even that sacrifice most beloved of great Ice Mother, the first-blood that belonged to the goddess alone. Long past the time of puberty she was, and the ceremonies of womanhood; and still the Mother waited for her due. In the blizzards that scourged the cleft, in the long winds of winter, her complaint might be heard, chilling the blood with threats and promises. All men knew they lived by the Mother's mercy alone; that one day, very soon now, the world would end, mantled for eternity in her sparkling



cloth. *Coranda*, ran the whisper. *Coranda*, holding their lives in the hollow of her hand. *Coranda* heard, and laughed; she was just twenty, slim and black haired and tall.

She lay on a couch of white fur, toying with a winecup, mocking the young men of the cities as they paid her court. To Arand, son of the richest merchant of Brershill, she confided her belief that she herself was of the Mother's Chosen



and thus above the pettiness of sacrifice. "For," she said, smoothing her long hair, "is not the Mother justly famed for beauty, for the perfection of skin that matches the fresh-laid snow? The darkness of her eyes, all-seeing, the slenderness of the hands that guard us all? And have I not"—she tossed her head—"have I not, among your good selves at least, some claim to prettiness? Though Eternal Mother forbid"—blushing, and modestly lowering her eyes—"that I should fall into the sin of pride." Arand, more than a little drunk, straightway burred her divinity, speaking heresy with the ease of long practice or stupidity till she swept from him indignantly, angry that he should speak lightly of the deity in her presence. "Will not the Mother's rage," she asked Maitran of Friesgalt appealingly, "descend alike on his head and mine? Will you protect me from the lightnings that fly in storms, lightnings such words may bring?"

That was a cunning touch, worthy of Coranda; for the animosity with which most Friesgaltians regarded the folk of Brershill was well known. Maitran's knifeblade gleamed instantly, and would no doubt have brought the Mother a pleasing offering had not Brershillian stalwarts pinned and disarmed the combatants. Some blood was shed certainly, from thumped noses and mouths, while Coranda regarded the wriggling heap with interest. "Now," she said, "I think I must call my father's men, to punish; for do I mean so little to you all that you come here to my house and brawl?" She ran to the gong placed beside the door of the chamber, and would certainly have summoned an irate guard had not earnest entreaty prevailed.

"Well," she said, tossing her head again in disgust. "It seems you all have too much spirit, and certainly too much energy, for my comfort and your own safety. I think we must devise a small occupation, something that will absorb your wildness and will no doubt bring a suitable reward."

There was a quietness at that; for she had hinted before that marriage to some rich and worthy boy might at long last assuage the Mother's need. She brooded, suddenly thoughtful, stroked hands across her gown so the fabric showed momentarily the convexities of belly and thighs. Lowered her eyes, glided swaying to the couch. They made way for her, wary and puzzled. Rich they all were, cer-

tainly, or they would none of them have passed her father's iron-bound doors ; but worthy? Who could be worthy of Coranda, whose beauty was surely Ice Mother's own?

She clapped her hands ; at the gesture a house-servant, blue liveried, laid beside her a box. It was made from wood, rarest of substances, inlaid with strips of ivory and bone. She opened it, languidly ; inside, resting on a quilting of white nylon, was a slim harpoon. She lifted it, toying with the haft, fingers stroking the razor edges of the barbs. "Who will prove himself?" she asked, seemingly to the air. "Who will take the Mother's due, when Coranda of Brers-hill comes to marriage?"

Instantly, a babble of voices ; Karl Stromberg and Mard Lipsill of Abersgalt shouted willingness, Frey Skalter the Keltshillian, half-barbaric in his jewelled furs, attempted to kiss her foot. She withdrew it smartly, equally sharply kicked him in the throat. Skalter overbalanced, swearing, spilling wine across the pale floor. There was laughter ; she silenced it sharply, lifting the little harpoon again, watching them all from long lashed, kohl-painted eyes. She relaxed, still holding the weapon, staring at the ceiling in the fast blue flicker of the lamps. "Once," she said, "long ago, in the far south of our land, a whaler was blown off course by storms. When the Ice Mother's anger was spent, and she sent sunlight again and birds, none could make out where her breath had driven them. There was ice, a great smooth plain, and mountains ; some of them smoked, so they said, throwing cinders and hot winds into the air. A very queer place it was indeed, with furry barbarians and animals from a child's book of fancies, stranger than men could believe. There they hunted, spilling and killing till their holds were full and they turned north to their home. Then they came on the strangest wonder of all."

In the quiet the buzzing of the eternal fluorescent tubes sounded loud. Skalter poured himself more wine, carefully, eyes on the girl's face. Arand and Maitran stopped their glaring ; Stromberg thoughtfully wiped an errant red trickle from his nose.

"In the dark of dawn," said Coranda dreamily, "in the grey time when men and ships are nothing but shadows without weight and substance, they met the Fate sent by Ice Mother to punish them their crimes. It surrounded



them, flickering and leaping, soundless as snow, weird as Death itself. All across the plain, round their boat as they sailed, were animals. They ran and moved, playing ; whole herds and droves of them, bulls and calves and cows. Their bodies were grey they said, and sinuous as seals ; their eyes were beautiful, and looked wisely at the ship. But without doubt they were spirits from the Mother's court, sent to warn and destroy ; for as they turned and leaped they saw each had but one horn, long and spiralling, that caught and threw back the light."

She waited, seeming indifferent to her audience. At length Lipsill broke the silence. "Coranda . . . what of the boat?"

She shrugged delicately, still playing with the barbed tip of the spear. "Two men returned, burned by the Mother's breath till their faces were black and marbled and their hands turned to scorched hooks. They lived long enough to tell the tale."

They waited.

"A man who loved me," she said, "who wanted to feel me in his bed and know himself worthy, would go to that land of shadows on the rim of the world. He would bring me a present to mark his voyage."

Abruptly her eyes flicked wide, scorning at them. "A head," she said softly. "The head of the unicorn. . . ."

Another pause ; and then a wild shouting. "Ice Mother hear me," bellowed Skalter. "I'll fetch your toy for you. . . ."

"And me. . . ."

"And me. . . ."

They clamoured for attention.

She beckoned Skalter. He came forward, dropping to one knee, leaning his craggy face over hers. She took his hand and raised it, closed the fingers gently round the tip of the harpoon. Stared at him, fixing him with her great eyes. "You would go?" she said. "Then there must be no softness, Frey Skalter, no fainting of the spirit. Hard as the ice you will be, and as merciless ; for my sake alone." She laid her hand over his, stroking the fingers, smiling her cat-smile. "You will go for me?"

He nodded, not speaking ; and she squeezed slowly, still smiling. He stiffened, breath hissing between his teeth ; and blood ran back down his arm, splashed bright and sudden

on the weapon's shaft. "By this token," she said, "you are my man. So shall you all be; and Ice Mother, in her charity, will decide."

Early day burned over the icefields. To the east the sun, rising across the white plain, threw red beams and the mile-long shadows of boats and men. Above, dawn still fought with darkness; the red flush faded to violet-grey, the grey to luminous blue. Across the blue ran high ripplings of cloud; the zenith gleamed like the skin of a turquoise fish. In the distance, dark-etched against the horizon, rose the spar-forest of the Brershill dock, where the schooners and merchantmen lay clustered in the lee of long moles built of blocks of ice. In the foreground, ragged against the glowing sky, were the yachts; Arand's *Chaser*, Maitran's sleek catamaran, Lipsill's big *Ice Ghost*. Karl Stromberg's *Snow Princess* snubbed at a mooring rope as the wind caught her curved side. Beyond her were two dour vessels from Djohabn; and a Fyorsgeppian, iron-beaked, that bore the blackly humorous name *Bloodbringer*. Beyond again was Skalter's *Easy Girl*, wild and splendid, decorated all over with hair-tufts and scalps and ragged scraps of pelt. Her twin masts were bound with intricate strappings of nylon cord; on her gunnels skulls of animals gleamed, eyesockets threaded with bright and moving silks. Even her runners were carved, the long-runes that told, cryptically, the story of Ice Mother's meeting with Sky Father and the birth and death of the Son, he whose Name could not be mentioned. The Mother's grief had spawned the icefields; her anger would not finally be appeased till Earth ran cold and quiet for ever. Three times she had approached, three times the Fire Giants fought her back from their caverns under the ice; but she would not be denied. Soon now, all would be whiteness and peace; then the Son would rise, in rumblings and glory, and judge the souls of men.

The priest moved, shivering in a patterned shawl, touching the boats and blessing, smearing the bow of each with a little blood and milk. The wind soughed in the riggings, plucked at the robes of the muffled woman who stood staring, hair flicking round her throat. The handlamps swung on their poles, glowing against the patched hulls, throwing



the priest's shadow vague and fleeting as the shadow of a bird. The yachts tugged at their lines, flapping their pennants, creaking their bone runners, full of the half-life of mechanical things. All preparations were made, provisions stored, blood and seed given in expiation to the ice. The hunters grunted and stamped, swinging their arms in the keen air, impatient and unsure ; and to each it seemed the eyes of Coranda promised love, the body of Coranda blessings.

The ceremony ended, finally. The priest withdrew to his tasselled nylon tent, the polebearers lifted their burden and trudged back across the ice. The boats were turned, levered by muffled men with crows till the sharp bows pointed, questing, to the south. A shout ; and Lipsill's craft first blossomed sail, the painted fabric flying and cracking round the mast. Then the catamaran, Skalter's deceptively clumsy squarerigger ; quick thud of a mallet parting the sternline and Lipsill was away, runners crisping, throwing a thin white double plume from the snow that had drifted across the ice. Stromberg followed, swinging from the far end of the line, crossing his scored wake as Skalter surged across *Princess's* bows. A bellowing ; and the Keltshillian crabbed away, narrowly missing disaster, raising a threatening fist. Karl laughed, fur glove muffling the universal gesture of derision ; the boats faded in the dawn light, swerving and tacking as they jockeyed for the lead. If the display moved Coranda she gave no sign of it ; she stood smiling, coldly amused at the outcome of a jest, till the hulls were veiled in the frost-smoke of the horizon and the shouts lost beneath the wind.

The yachts moved steadily through the day, heading due south under the bright, high sun, their shadows pacing them across the white smoothness of the Plain. With the wind astern the squarerigger made ground fast ; by evening she was hull down, her sails a bright spark on the horizon. Stromberg crowded *Snow Princess*, racing in her wake ; behind him, spread out now, came the others, lateens bulging, runners hissing on the ice. The cold was bracing and intense ; snow crystals, blowing on the wind, stung his cheeks to a glow, beaded the heavy collar of his jerkin. Lipsill forged alongside, *Ice Ghost* surging and bucking. Karl raised a hand, laughing at his friend ; and instantly

came the chilling thought that one day, for Coranda, he might kill Lipsill, or Lipsill him.

They camped together, by common consent; all but Skalter, still miles ahead. Here, away from the eternal warmth of the cleft-cities, they must husband their reserves of fuel; they huddled round the redly-glowing brazier, the reflection lighting their faces, glinting out across the ice. The worn hulls of the yachts, moored in a crescent, protected them from the worst of the wind. Outside, beyond the circle of light, a wolf howled high and quavering; within the camp was cheerfulness, songs and stories passing round the group till one by one they took a last swig from their spirit flasks, checked their lines and grapples and turned in. They were up early next dawn, again by unspoken agreement, hoping maybe to steal a march on *Easy Girl*; but keen as they were, Skalter was ahead of them. They passed his camp, an hour's sail away. *Ice Ghost* crushed the remains of the brazier fire, the turned-out remnants still smouldering on the ice; one runner spurned the embers, sent a long banner of ash trailing down the wind. They glimpsed his sails once before the wind, rising again, blocked visibility with a swirling curtain of snow.

They were now nearing the wide cleft of Fyorsgep, southernmost of the Cities of the Plain. The smooth ice was crossed by the tracks of many ships; they shortened sail cautiously, shouting each to the next along the line. Hung lanterns in the rigging, pushed on again by compass and torchlight, unwilling to moor and give away advantage. *Snow Princess* and *Ice Ghost* moved side by side, a bare length separating them.

It was Stromberg who first heard the faint booming from astern. He listened, cocking his head and frowning; then waved, pointing behind him with a bulky arm. The noise came again, a dull and ominous ringing; Lipsill laughed, edging his boat even closer. Karl stared back as behind them an apparition loomed, impossibly tall in the gloom and whirling flakes. He saw the heavy thrusting of bowsprit and jibboom, the cavernous eyes of the landwhale skulls that graced the vessel's stem. They held course defiantly as she closed, hearing now mixed with the fog gongs the long-drawn roar of her runners over the ice. Stromberg made out the carved characters on her bow; the *Sweet*



*Lady*, whaler, out of Friesgalt, bound no doubt for the Southern Moorings and a night's carouse.

The jibboom was between the boats, thrusting at their rigging, before they were seen. An agonised howl from above, movement of lanterns and dark figures at the vessel's rail; she rumbled between the yachts as they parted at the last instant, the long shares of her ice anchors nearly scraping their booms. They saw the torchlit deck, fires burning in crow's-nest and rigging; and the curious feature of an iceboat, the long slots in the bilges in which moved the linkages of the paired anchors. Dull light gleamed through her as she passed, giving to her hull the appearance of a half-flensed whale; a last bellow reached them as she faded into the greyness ahead.

*"Abersgaltian bastards. . . ."*

The skipper then had seen the big insignia at the mast-heads. This *Lady* was anything but sweet.

The night's camp brought near-disaster. Maitran came in late and evil tempered, a runner stay cracked on the catamaran, bound with a jury-lashing of nylon rope. Some chance remark from Arand and he was on his feet, knife-blade glinting. He held the weapon tip-uppermost, circling and taunting his enemy. Arand rose white-faced, swathing a bearskin round one forearm. A quick feint and thrust, a leaping back; and Lipsill spoke easily, still seated by the fire.

"The prize, Friesgaltian, comes with the head of the unicorn. Our friend would doubtless look well enough, grinning from Coranda's wall; but your energy would be expended to no purpose."

Maitran hissed between his teeth, not deigning to glance round.

"You risk in any case the anger of the Ice Mother," the Abersgaltian went on, reaching behind him to his pack. "For if our *Lady* is in fact her servant then this hunting is clearly her design, and should bring her glory. All else is vanity, an affront to her majesty."

Hansan, the Fyorsgeppian, dark-faced and black-browed, nodded sombrely. "This is true," he said. "Bloodspilling, if it be against the Mother's will, brings no honour."

Maitran half turned at that, uncertainly; and Lipsill's arm flailed up and back. The harpoon head, flung with

unerring force, opened his cheek ; he went down in a flurry of legs and arms and Stromberg was on him instantly, pinning him. Lipsill turned to Arand, his own knife in his hand. "Now, now, Brershillian," he said gently ; for the other, roused, would no doubt have thrown himself on his prostrate enemy and extracted vengeance. "No more, or you will answer to us all. . . ."

Arand sheathed his dagger, shakily, eyes not leaving the stained face of the Friesgaltian. Maitran was allowed to rise ; and Lipsill faced him squarely. "This was evil," he said. "Our fight is with the wind and wide ice, not each other. Take your boat, and stay apart from us."

In Stromberg's mind rose the first stirring of a doubt.

They moved fast again next morning, hoping for some sign of Skalter's yacht ; but the wind that had raged all night had cleaned his tracks, filling them with fresh snow. The ice lay scoured, white and gleaming to the horizon.

They were now past the farthest limit of civilisation, on the great South Ice where the whale herds and their hunters roamed. Here and there were warm ponds, choked with brown and green weed ; they saw animals, wolf and otter, once a herd of the shaggy white bison of the Plains ; but no sign of the ghostly things they sought. The catamaran reached ahead of the rest, the Friesgaltian reckless and angry, crowding sail till the slim paired hulls were nearly obscured beneath a cloud of pale nylon. Stromberg, remembering the split strut, sent up a brief and silent prayer.

Maitran's luck held till midday ; then the stay parted, suddenly and without warning. They all saw the boat surge off course, one keel dropping to glissade along the ice. For a moment it seemed she would come to rest without further harm ; then the ivory braces between the hulls, overstressed, broke in their turn. She split into halves ; one hull bounded end over end, shedding fragments and splinters of bone, the other spun, encumbered by the falling weight of mast and sail, flicked Maitran in a sharp arc across the ice. He was up instantly, seemingly unhurt, running and waving to head them off.

In Arand's slow brain hatred still burned. He knew, as they had all known, that in a fight he was no match for the Friesgaltian. Maitran would have bled him, cutting and opening till he lay down and gasped his life out on the ice.



They had saved him, the night before, but he had lost his honour. Now the rage took him, guiding his hands till they seemed possessed of a life of their own. They swung the tiller, viciously; *Chaser* swerved, heading in toward the wreck. Maitran shouted as the yacht crisped toward him; at the last moment it seemed he realized she would not turn. He tried to run; a foot slipped and he went down on the ice. A thud, a bright spattering across the bows of *Chaser* and she was past the wreck, yawing as she dragged the body from one sharp ski. Fifty yards on it twirled clear. She limped to a halt, sails fluttering. From her runner led a faint and wavering trail; her deck was marked with the pink blood of the Friesgaltian.

They gathered round the thing on the ice, Stromberg and the Djobhabnians stunned, Arand pale and mumbling. There was no life; the great wound in the head, the oozing of blood and brain-matter, showed there was nothing to be done. They made the sign of the Ice Mother, silently; turned away, anxious to leave the sight, left the body for her servants, the birds.

They were cheered later that day by the gleam of Skalter's sail far to the south; but the camp was still a sombre affair. They moored apart, sat brooding each over his own fire. To Stromberg it seemed all his past life now counted for nothing; they were governed by the Rule of the Ice, the code that let men kill or be killed with equal indifference. He remembered his years of friendship with Lipsill, a friendship that seemed now to be ended. After what he had seen that morning he would not dare trust even Mard again. At night he tried, unavailingly, to summon the image of Coranda's warm body; pray though he might, the succubus would not visit him. Instead he fell into a fitful sleep, dreamed he saw the very caverns of the Fire Giants deep under the ice. But there were no gleaming gods and demons; only machines, black and vast, that hummed and sang of power. The vision disturbed him; he cut his arm, in the dull dawn light, left blood to appease the Mother. It seemed even she turned her back on him; the morning was grey and cold, comfortless. He drank to restore circulation to his limbs, tidied his ship, left sullenly in the wake of Lipsill as he led them on again across the Plain.

As they moved, the character of the land round them once more changed. The warm ponds were more numerous; over them now hung frequent banks of fog. Often *Snow Princess* slushed her way through water, runners raising glittering swathes to either side. At breakfast the Djobhabnians had seemed remote, standing apart and muttering; now their identical craft began to edge away, widening the gap between them and the rest till they were hull down, grey shadows on the ice. By early evening they were out of sight.

The four boats raced steadily through a curling sea of vapour. Long leads of clear water opened threatening to either side; they tacked and swerved, missing disaster time and again by the width of a runner. Stromberg lay to the right of the line, next to him the Fyorsegeppian. Then Lipsill; beyond *Ice Ghost* was the blighted vessel of Arand, half-seen now through the moving mist. None of the boats would give way, none fall back; Karl clung to the tiller, feeling the fast throb of the runners transmitted through the bone shaft, full of a hollow sense of impending doom.

As dusk fell a long runnel of open water showed ahead. He altered course, following it where it stretched diagonally across his bows. A movement to his left made him turn. *Bloodbringer* had fallen back; her dark hull no longer blocked his vision. Mard still held course; and still *Chaser* ran abreast of him, drawing nearer and nearer the edge of the break. Stromberg at last understood Lipsill's purpose; he yelled, saw Arand turn despairingly. It was too late; behind him, a length away, jutted the Fyorsegeppian's iron ram. Boxed, the yacht spun on her heel in a last attempt to leap the obstacle. A grating of runners and spars, a frozen moment as she poised above the gulf, then she struck the water with a thunderous splash. She sank almost instantly, hull split by the concussion; for a moment her bilge showed rounded and pale then she was gone. In her place was a disturbed swirl, a bobbing of debris. Arand surfaced once, waving a desperate arm, before he too vanished.

The sun sank over the rim of the ice, flung shadows of the boats miles long like the predatory shapes of birds.

In the brief twilight they came up with *Easy Girl*. Skalter



hung in her rigging, leisurely reeving a halliard, waving and jeering at them as they passed.

All three vessels turned, Stromberg and Lipsill tightly, Hansan in a wider circle that took him skimming across the plain to halt, sails flapping, a hundred yards away. Grapples went down; they lashed and furled stoically, dropped to the ice and walked over to the Keltshillian.

He greeted them cheerfully, swinging down from the high mast of the boat. "Well, you keen sailors; where are our friends?"

"Fraskall and Ulsenn turned back," said Lipsill shortly. "Maitran and Arand are dead. Maitran at Arand's hands, Arand in an icebreak." He stared at Stromberg challengingly. "It was the Mother's will, Karl. She could have buoyed him to the land. She did not choose to."

Stromberg didn't answer.

"Well," said Skalter easily, "the Mother was ever firm with her followers. Let it be so." He made the sign of benediction, carelessly, circling with his hands, drawing with one palm the flat emptiness of the ice. He ran his fingers through his wild blond hair and laughed. "Tonight you will share my fire, Abersgaltians; and you too, Hansan of Fyorsgep. Tomorrow, who can tell? We reach the Mother's court perhaps, and sail in fairyland."

They grouped round the fire, quietly, each occupied with his own thoughts. Skalter methodically honed the barbs of a harpoon, turning the weapon, testing the cutting edges against his thumb, his scarred face intent in the red light. He looked up finally, half frowning, half quizzical; his earrings swung and glinted as he moved his head. "It seems to me," he said, "the Mother makes her choice known, in her special way. Arand and Maitran were both fools of a type, certainly unfitted for the bed of the Lady we serve, and the Djobhabnians fainthearted. Now we are four; who among us, one wonders, will win the bright prize?"

Stromberg made a noise, half smothered by his glove; Skalter regarded him keenly.

"You spoke, Abersgaltian?"

"He feels," said Lipsill gruffly, "we murdered Arand. After he in his turn killed Maitran."

The Keltshillian laughed, high and wild. "Since when,"

he said, "did pity figure in the scheme of things? Pity, or blame? Friends, we are bound to the Ice Eternal; to the cold that will increase and conquer, lay us all in our bones. Is not human effort vain, all life doomed to cease? I tell you, Coranda's blood, that mighty prize, and all her secret sweetness, this is a flake of snow in an eternal wind. I am the Mother's servant; through me she speaks. We'll have no more talk of guilt and softness, it turns my stomach to hear it." The harpoon darted, sudden and savage, stood quivering between them in the ice. "The ice is real," shouted Skalter, rising. "Ice, and blood. All else is delusion, toys for weak men and fools."

He stamped away, earrings jangling, into the dark. The others separated soon afterward to their boats; and Stromberg for one lay tossing and uneasy till dawn shot pearly streamers above the Plain and the birds called, winging to the south.

On its southern rim the Great Plateau sloped gently. The yachts travelled fast, creaming over untold depths of translucent ice, runners hissing, sails filling in the breeze that still blew from nearly astern. There would be weary days of tacking ahead for those that returned. If any returned; Stromberg found himself increasingly beginning to doubt. It seemed a madness had gripped them all, drawing them deeper and deeper into the uncharted land. The place of warm ponds was left behind; ahead, under the pale sun, shadows grew against the sky. There were mountains, topped with fire as the story had foretold; strange crevasses and plateaux, jumbled and distant, glinting like crystal in the hard white light. Still Skalter led them, mastbells clanking, barbaric sails shaking and swelling. They held course stubbornly, shadows pacing them as they raced to the south.

At the foot of the vast slope they parted company with the Fyorsgeppian. He had reached ahead, favoured by some trick of the terrain, till *Bloodbringer* was a hundred yards or more in front of the rest. They saw the hull of the boat jar and leap. The smooth slope ended, split by a series of yard-high ridges; Hansan's runners, hitting the first of them, were sheared completely from the hull. There was something tragically comic about the accident. The gunwhales split, the mast jarring loose to revolve against



the sky like an oversized harpoon ; the Fyorsgeppian, held by a shoulder harness, kept his place while the boat came apart round him like a child's toy. The remnants planed, spinning at great speed, jolted to a stop in a quick shower of ice. The survivors swerved, avoiding the broken ground, whispering by Hansan as he sat shaking his head, still half stunned. The wreckage dwindled to a speck that vanished, lost against the grey-green scarp of ice. There were provisions in the hull ; the Fyorsgeppian would live or die, as the Mother willed.

For the first time that night the skyline round their camp was broken by valleys and hills. Still icebound, the land had begun to roll ; there were gullies, hidden cliffs, ravines from which came the splash and tinkle of water. It was an eerie country, dangerous and beautiful. They had seen strange animals ; but no sign or spoor of barbarians, or the things they sought.

Stromberg spoke to Skalter again at dawn, while Lipsill fussed with the rigging of his boat. He seemed impelled by a sense of urgency ; all things, mountains and sky, conspired to warn his blood. "It has come to me," he said quietly, "that we should return."

The Keltshillian stood thoughtfully, warming his hands at the brazier, casting glances at the low sky, sniffing the wind. He gave a short, coughing laugh but didn't turn.

Stromberg touched a skull on the high side of *Easy Girl*, stroking the wind-smoothed eyesockets, unsure how to go on. "Last night I dreamed," he said. "It seemed as it has seemed before that the Giants were not gods but men, and we their children. That we are deceived, the Great Mother is dead. Such heresy must be a warning."

Skalter laughed again and spat accurately at the coals, rubbed arms banded with wide copper torques. "You dreamed of love," he said. "Wetting your furs with hot thoughts of Coranda. It's you who are deceived, Lipsaltian. Counsel your fancies."

"Skalter," said Karl uncertainly, "the price is high. Too high, for a woman."

The other turned to face him for the first time, pale eyes brooding in the keen face.

Stromberg rushed on. "All my life," he said, "it seemed to me that you were not as other men. Now I say, there is

death here. Maybe for us all. Go back, Frey ; the prize is beneath your worth."

The other turned to look up at the hulking shape of the boat, stroking her gunwhale with a calloused hand, feeling the smoothness of the ivory. "The price of birth is death," he said broodingly. "That too is a heavy sum to pay."

"What drives you, Skalter?" asked Stromberg softly. "If the woman means so little? Why do you strive, if life is purposeless?"

"I do what is given," said Skalter shortly. He flexed his hands on the side of the boat and sprang ; the runners of *Easy Girl* creaked as he swung himself aboard. "Rage drives me," he said, looking down. "Know this, Karl Stromberg of Abersgalt ; that Skalter of Keltshill lusts for death. In dying, death dies with him." He slapped the halliards against the after mast, bringing down a white shower of ice. "I also dreamed," he said. "My dream was of life, sweet and rich. I follow the Mother ; in her, I shall find my reward." He would say no more but stalked forward, bent to recoil the long ropes on the deck.

That morning they sighted their prey.

At first Stromberg could not believe ; he was forced, finally, to accept the evidence of his eyes. The unicorns played and danced, sunlight flashing from their sides, horns gleaming, seeming to throw off sparks of brightness. He might have followed all day, watching and bemused ; but Skalter's high yell recalled him, the change of course as *Easy Girl* sped for the mutated narwhal. Already the Keltshillian was brandishing his long harpoon, shaking out the coils of line as the yacht, tiller locked, flew toward the herd.

It was as the story had told ; the creatures surrounded the boats, running and leaping, watching with their beautiful calm eyes. On Karl's left Lipsill too seemed to be dazed. Skalter braced his feet on the deck, flexed muscles to drive the shaft hissing into the air. His aim was good ; the harpoon struck a great grey bull, barbs sinking deep through the wrinkled pelt. Instantly all was confusion. The wounded beast reared and plunged, snorting ; *Easy Girl* was spun off course by the violence, the Keltshillian hauling desperately at the line. Boat and animal collided in a flurry of snow. The narwhal leaped away again, towing



the yacht ; Karl saw bright plumes fly as her anchors fell, tips biting at the ice.

The herd had panicked, jerking and humping into the distance ; *Snow Princess*, still moving fast, all but fouled the harpoon line as Stromberg clawed clear. He had a brief glimpse of Skalter on the ice, the flash of a cutlass as the creature plunged, thrusting at its tormentor with its one great horn. He swung the tiller again, hard across ; *Princess* circled, runners squealing, fetched up fifty yards from the fight. *Ice Ghost* was already stopped, Lipsill running cutlass in hand ; Karl heard Skalter scream, in triumph or in pain. He dropped his anchors, grabbing for his own sword. Ran across the ice toward *Easy Girl*, hearing now the enraged trumpeting of the bull.

The great beast had the Keltshillian pinned against the side of the boat. He saw the blunt head lunging, driving the horn through his flesh ; the yacht rocked with the violence of the blows. The panting of the narwhal sounded loud ; then the creature with a last convulsion had torn itself away, snorting and hooting after the vanished herd.

There was much blood, on the ice and the pale side of the boat. Skalter sat puffing, face suffused, hands gripped over his stomach. More blood pulsed between his fingers, ruby-bright in the sun ; cords stood out in his thick neck ; his white teeth grinned as he rolled his head in pain.

Lipsill reached him at the same instant. They tried, pointlessly, to draw the hands away ; Skalter resisted them, eyes shut, breath hissing between his clenched teeth. "I told you I dreamed," he said. The words jerked out thick and agonised. "I saw the Mother. She came in the night, cajoling ; her limbs were white as snow, and hot as fire. It was an omen ; but I couldn't read. . . ." His head dropped ; he raised himself again, gasping with effort. They took his hands then, soapy with blood, squeezed, feeling the dying vice-grip, seeing the eyes roll white under their lids. Convulsions shook him ; they thought he was dead, but he spoke again. "Blood, and ice," he said faintly. "These are real. These are the words of the Mother. When the world is dark, then she will come to me. . . ." The body arced, straining ; and Lipsill gripped the yellow hair, twisting it in his fingers. "The Mother takes you, Skalter," he said. "She rewards her servant."

They waited ; but there was nothing more.

They moored their boats, silently, walked back to the place of killing. The blood had frozen, sparkling in pink crystals under the levelling sun. "He was a great prince," said Lipsill finally. "The rest is smallness ; it should not come between us." Stromberg nodded, not answering with words ; and they began to work. They broke *Easy Girl*, smashing bulwarks and runners, hacking at her bone and ivory spars, letting her spirit free to join the great spirit of Skalter that already roamed the Ice Eternal. Two days they laboured, raising a mound of ice above the wreck ; Skalter they laid on the deck, feet to the north and the domain of the Mother. He would rise now, on that last cold dawn, spring up facing her, a worthy servant and warrior. When they had finished, and the wind skirled over the glistening *how*, they rested ; on the third morning they drove south again.

There were no words now between them. They sailed apart, bitterly, watching the white horizon, the endless swirl and flurry of the snow. Two days later they resighted their quarry.

The two boats separated further, bearing down ; and again the strange creatures watched with their soft eyes. The shafts flew, glinting ; Lipsill's tinkled on the ice, Stromberg's struck wide of its mark. It missed the bull at which it was aimed, plunged instead into the silver flank of a calf. The animal howled, convulsed in a flurry of pain. As before, the herd bolted ; *Snow Princess* slewed, hauled round by the tethered weight, fled across the plain as the terrified creature bucked and plunged.

Less than half the size of the adults, the calf was still nearly as long as the boat ; Stromberg clung to the tiller as *Princess* jolted and veered, determined not to make Skalter's mistake of jumping to the ice. A mile away the harpoon pulled clear but the animal was blown ; a second shaft transfixed it as it stood head down and panting, started fresh and giant paroxysms that spattered the yacht with blood. *Princess* flew again, anchor blades ripping at the ice, drawing the thing gradually to a halt. It rolled then and screeched, trying with its half-flippers to scrape the torment from its back. Its efforts wound the line in round its body ; it stood finally close to the boat, staring with a



filmed, uncomprehending eye. Close enough for Stromberg to reach across, work the shaft into its torn side till the tip probed its life. A thin wailing, a nearly human noise of pain; and the thing collapsed, belching thunderously, coughing up masses of blood and weed. Sticky tears squeezed from its eyes, ran slow across the great round face; and Karl, standing shaking and panting, knew there was no need of the sword.

The anchors of *Ice Ghost* raised a high screaming. She ploughed across the ice, throwing a white hail of chips to either side, speed barely diminished. She had speared a huge bull; animal and boat careered by the stalled *Princess*. Stromberg cut his line, heavily, left the carcass with the bright harpoon-silks still blowing above it. Steered in pursuit.

Sometimes in the half hour that followed it seemed he might overrun Lipsill; but always the other boat drew ahead. The narwhal left a thick trail of blood, but its energy seemed unabated. The line twanged thunderously, snagging on the racing ice. Ahead now the terrain was split and broken; fissures yawned, sunlight sparking from their deep green sides. *Princess* bucked heavily, runners crashing as she swerved between the hazards. The chase veered to the east, in a great half-circle; the wind, at first abeam, reached farther and farther ahead. Close-hauled, Stromberg fell behind; a half mile separated the boats as they entered a wide, bowl-shaped valley, a mile or more across, guarded on each side by needle-shaped towers of ice.

Ahead, the glittering floor veered to a rounded lip; the horizon line was sharp-cut against the sky. *Ice Ghost*, still towed by her catch, took the slope with barely a slackening of pace. Stromberg howled his alarm, uselessly; Lipsill, frozen it seemed to the tiller, made no attempt to cut his line. The boat crested the rise, hung a moment silhouetted against brightness; and vanished, abrupt as a conjuring trick.

*Princess's* anchors threw snow plumes high as her mast-head. She skated sickeningly, surged to a halt twenty yards below the lip of ice. Stromberg walked forward, carefully. As he topped the ridge the sight beyond took his breath.

He stood on the edge of the biggest crevasse he had ever seen. It curved back to right and left, horseshoe-shaped,

enclosing the valley like a white tongue. A hundred yards away the opposing side glowed with sunlight; across it lay the ragged shadow of the nearer wall. He craned forward. Below him the ice-walls stretched sheer to vanish in a blue-green gloom. There was mist down there, and water-noise; he heard booming, long-drawn threads of echo, last sounds maybe of the fall of the whale. Far below, impaled on a black spike of ice, was the wreck of Lipsill's boat; Mard, still held by his harness, sprawled across the stern, face bright with blood. He moved slightly as Stromberg stared, seeming to raise himself, lift a hand. Karl turned away sickened.

Realizing he had won.

He walked back to *Snow Princess*, head down, feet scraping on the ice. Swung himself aboard and opened the bow locker, dumping piles of junk and provisions on the deck. There were ropes, spare downhauls and mooring lines. He selected the best and thickest, knotting methodically, tied off to the stern of the boat and walked back to the gulf. The line, lowered carefully, swayed a yard from Lipsill's head.

He returned to *Princess*. She was stopped at an angle, tilted sideways on the curling lip of the crevasse. There were crowbars in the locker; he pulled one clear and worked cautiously, prising at the starboard runner, inching the yacht round till her bow pointed back down the long slope. The wind, gusting and capricious, blew from the gulf. The slope would help her gather way; but would it be enough?

He brailed the sails up as far as he dared, stood back frowning and biting his lip. At each gust now the anchors groaned, threatening to tear free, send the boat skittering back down the incline. He scrabbled in the locker again, grabbing up more line. Another line, a light line that must also reach the wreck. . . .

There was just barely enough. He tied the last knot, dropped the second coil down. Working feverishly now, he transferred the heavy line from the stern to a cleat halfway along the port gunwhale and locked the tiller to starboard. The anchors were raised by pulleys set just above the deck; he carried lines from them to the little bow windlass, slipped the ratchet, turned the barrel till they were tight. The



handle, fitted in its bone socket, stood upright, pointing slightly forward over the stem of the boat. He tied the light line off to the tip, tested the lashing on the improvised brake. It seemed secure ; he backed toward the cliff edge, paying both ropes through his hands. Mard seemed now to understand what he was doing. He called croakingly, tried to move. The wreck groaned, slipped another foot toward the crevasse. Stromberg passed the heavy line between his thighs, round one calf, gripped it between sole and instep. Let himself down into the gulf.

The descent was eerie. As he moved the wind pressure seemed to increase, setting him swaying pendulum-fashion, banging his body at the ice. The sunlit edge above receded ; he glanced below him and instantly the crevasse seemed to spin. The ice walls, sloping together, vanished in a blackish gloom ; the wind called deep and baying, its icy breath chilled his cheek. He hung sweating till the dizziness passed, forced himself to move again. Minutes later his feet reached the last knot, groped below it into emptiness. He lowered himself by his arms, felt his heels touch the deck of the boat. He dropped, as lightly as he could, lunging forward to catch at the tangle of rigging. A sickening time while the wreck surged and creaked ; he felt sweat drop from him again as he willed the movement to stop. The deck steadied, with a final groan ; he edged sideways cautiously, cutting more rope lengths, fashioning a bridle that he slipped under Lipsill's arms. The other helped as best he could, raising his body weakly ; Stromberg tested the knots, lashed the harness to the line. Another minute's work and he too was secure. He took a shuddering breath, groping for the second rope. They were not clear yet ; if *Ice Ghost* moved she could still take them with her, scrape them into the gulf. He gripped the line and pulled.

Nothing.

He jerked again, feeling the fresh rise of panic. If the trick failed he knew he lacked the strength ever to climb. A waiting ; then a vibration, sensed through the rope. Another pause ; and he was being drawn smoothly up the cliff, swinging against the rock-hard ice as the pace increased. The sides of the cleft seemed to rush toward him ; a last concussion, a bruising shock and he was being towed over level ice, sawing desperately at the line. He saw fibres

parting ; then he was lying still, blessedly motionless, Lipsill beside him bleeding into the snow. While *Princess*, freed of her one-sided burden, skated in a wide half-circle, came into irons, and stopped.

The crevasse of Brershill lay grey and silent in the early morning. Torches, flaring at intervals along the glassy sides, lit Level after Level with a wavering glare, gleamed on the walkways with their new powdering of snow. Stromberg trudged steadily, sometimes hauling his burden, sometimes skidding behind it as he eased the sledge down the sloping paths. A watchman called sleepily ; he ignored him. On the Level above Coranda's home he stopped, levered the great thing from the sledge and across to the edge of the path. He straightened up, wiping his face, and yelled ; his voice ran thin and shaking, echoing between the half-seen walls.

"*Maitran. . . .*"

A bird flew squawking from the depths. The word flung itself back at him, Ice Mother answering with a thousand voices.

"*Arand. . . .*"

Again the mocking choir, confusions of sound reflecting faint and mad from the cleft.

"*Hansan. . . .*"

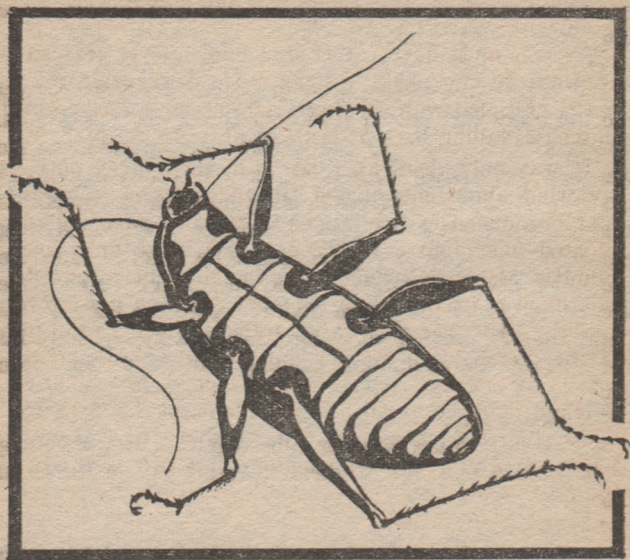
"*Skalter. . . .*"

Names of the dead, and lost ; a fierce benediction, an answer to the ice.

He bent to the thing on the path. A final heave, a falling, a fleshy thud ; the head of the unicorn bounced on the Level below, splashed a great star of blood across Coranda's door. He straightened, panting, half-hearing from somewhere the echo of a scream. Stood and stared a moment longer before starting to climb.

Giving thanks to Ice Mother, who had given him back his soul.





# SISOHPROMATEM

**BY KIT REED**

I, JOSEPH BUG, awoke one morning to find that I had become an enormous human. I lay under the washbasin in the furnished room which heretofore had been my kingdom, an unbounded world, and saw first that the bottom of the washbasin dripped only a few inches above my face and that from where I lay I could see all four walls of the room.

Then I realized that I was lying on my back. At first I thought I would die there unless someone came and nudged me over, and then, as I began kicking my legs, I discovered that the forelegs clung to the edge of the washbasin and

with a certain amount of manipulation I would be able to regain my belly. Even then I hoped that once turned, so, I would be able to crawl away and lose myself in the woodwork which I loved.

As you must have gathered, I had not yet grasped the enormity of my plight. So eager was I to regain my legs that I grappled with the basin, scrambling and then losing purchase, falling back at last to rest.

It was only then, as I lay with these new, pink legs sprawled about me, that I understood how repulsive I had become. The new appendages were huge and pink, bloated like night crawlers, and they were only four in number. My back, which pressed against the rotting floorboards, was uncommonly tender. Gone was my crowning beauty; gone was the brave carapace which had glittered in the dim light, protecting me from the thousand perils which threaten a young roach. Gone were my brilliant antennae and the excellent legs which supported me at my waist. In place of a body which moved like quicksilver I was left with a series of huge mounds and excrescences; my quick form had been replaced by an untidy, ungainly, hideous mound of flesh.

I would have despaired then, had it not been for the instinct stronger than reason, which told me that I must struggle to regain my belly, for only then would the world look right to me.

Gathering all my strength, I grappled with the washbasin again, thinking longingly of the slime which once I had gloried in, knowing that never again would I frolic in those pipes. Once again I was reminded of our revels, the races in the cracks around the bottom of the toilet, our gallant disregard for the pellets put down by the room's human occupant, the pride one felt in escaping a clumsy human foot. And because I was, after all, an insect, I drew myself together and attempted to regain my feet. Using my strange forelegs I embraced the washbasin, pulling myself up until my upper half rested upon it, inadvertently standing as I now remembered that humans did, coming abreast of a reflecting surface, and so inadvertently looking into what I would take to be my face.

I screamed for a full minute, so overcome by tremors that I fell to what I know must have been my knees, press-



ing my new face against the cold porcelain. Trembling, I crumpled, noticing in transit that I bent now in several directions, most notably at the waist. Instinct guided me so that I fell in a series of stages, bending and folding and coming to rest at last on my belly, and the simple fact of lying as the gods intended gave me some small cheer.

Still I might have died then, of simple horror, if a new hope had not presented itself. As I lay with my head under the washbasin I was aware of a small progress going on in the baseboard near my head.

Even though my ears had been sadly dulled I could hear them coming—bold Hugo and grumbling Arnold, with Sarah and Steve and Gloria chittering behind. They must have been drawn by my cries—surely they were coming to rescue me.

Arnold came first, looking brightly from the murk beneath the baseboard. Because I could not interpret his expression I lay silent, waiting to see what would come. Hugo pushed up beside him, studying my left elbow, and the others came out, rank on rank, looking at me and talking among themselves. They looked so familiar, all those beloved faces, so concerned that I was sure they had come to help me and so, speaking softly so as not to flatten them with my huge voice, I said:

“Hugo, Arnold. Thank heaven you have come.”

But they didn't answer. Instead they bowed their heads together, antennae intertwining, and although I could not make out what they were saying I was sure they were talking about me as they would never talk in my presence if I were myself again.

Pained by this, I turned at last to Gloria, who had been close to me in the way of a cockroach with another cockroach, and because she was not chattering with the rest but instead looked at me with a certain concentrated expression, I whispered, full of longing:

“Gloria, surely *you* will. . . .”

Gloria laid an egg.

Before I could help myself, I had begun to weep. Now this itself was a new experience, and so fascinated was I by the sensation, by the interesting taste of the liquid I excreted, that I forgot for a minute about the little delegation along the baseboard.

In the next moment, they attacked. Uttering cries of hatred and revulsion, taking advantage of me in my weakened state, they marched on me, crawling along my foreleg, heading toward my vulnerable face. They may even have thought to feed upon my eyes.

I cannot explain what happened next. Perhaps it was my pain and resentment toward these, my former brethren, perhaps it was only a sign of my metamorphosis ; I only know that my pale flesh began to crawl and I rose, cracking my skull on the washbasin, nevertheless striking out, flailing, trying to scrape them off.

Landing in a cluster about my knees, they regrouped, and in the pause I tried to explain, to apologize, to beg them to recognize and accept me, but in the next second they attacked again. And so, goaded, I did what one cockroach has never done to another ; I lashed out, first at Gloria, sending her flying against the baseboard ; I could tell she was injured, but I was too angry to care. Then I squashed Sarah with my fist.

The others fled then, leaving me alone next to the basin, and as they left a strange new feeling overtook me. I had for the first time power, and as I thought on the injuries the others had done me, this new power tasted sweet. Almost without effort I rose once more, coming quite naturally to my feet. Then, because it seemed the reasonable thing to do, I struck the faucet until water came and washed what was left of Sarah off what I now knew to be my hands.

In the next few hours I discovered my kingdom anew. The room which I had always assumed to be the world was in fact rather small, bounded on four sides by walls and filled with appurtenances which I gradually identified according to their functions. Experimenting with my joints, I applied part of myself to a chair. In time, remembering what I knew of humans, I took up some of the rags laid over the back of the chair and put them on my person, working my head and arms into a large, stretchy garment designed for that purpose, and grandly tying another garment about my waist.

Garbed so, I went about the room again and again, finding at last an object with pictures on bits of paper bound together, understanding from the pictures that I had



done something wrong and then re-garbing myself according to what I saw.

From time to time I would go back to the basin and if I saw so much as a sign of one of my fellows, I would poke at the crevices with my shoe.

I was occupied thus when there was a sound on the other side of the door and before I could gather myself to hide, the door opened and another human—a female—let herself into the room.

She spoke, and so complete was my transformation that I understood her: "Where's Richard?"

Because I was afraid to try my voice, I answered her with a shrug.

"You must be one of his thousand cousins."

I nodded. I was somehow comforted by her phrase; I had always taken humans to be isolated, and it made me feel somehow secure to know that their families were as big as ours.

"Well, when is he coming back?"

I shrugged again, but this time it did not satisfy her. She came closer, apparently studying me, and she said, finally, "What's your name?"

"J-Joseph." Even I was pleased with the way it came out.

"Well, Joseph, perhaps we can go out for a bite and when we get back maybe Richard will be here."

I didn't know why, but I knew I wasn't ready. "I—I can't do that."

"Oh, you want to wait for him. Well, that's your business." She looked at me through a fall of red hair and for the first time I found hair attractive. She was soft all over, and, inexplicably, that was attractive too.

"But I am—hungry." I had not had anything since morning, when I found something behind the toilet bowl.

"I'll bring you a hamburger," she said. "If Richard comes while I'm gone bring him down to Hatton's." She studied me for a moment. "You know, you're not bad looking. But why on earth do you have your shirt buttoned that way?"

I will never forget what happened next. She stepped forward and fumbled with my upper garment, yanking it this way and that, patting it into place, and when she was

satisfied she stepped back and said, "Not bad. Not bad at all." In the next second she had, miraculously, touched my face and in the next second, too fast for me but not for my heart, which followed her, she was gone.

How I exulted then! I whirled around the room like a spider, rejoicing in my many joints, knowing for the first time a certain pride in all my agile parts and the soft flesh which covered them, thinking that I would have the best of both worlds. I had been the largest and finest in the insect kingdom; now I would be the handsomest in the human world: a prince among cockroaches, a king among men. I spun and danced and celebrated my new body and then, in an orgy of release, I went back to the corner by the washbasin and with one of Richard's shoes I battered all the antennae which came at me from that miserable little crack.

"You, Ralph. Hugo. Now I understand. The lesser will always hate the great."

I was talking thus when a strange weakness overcame me, so that I had to stand suddenly because my beautiful joints had betrayed me and would not bend. Instead I stayed on my feet next to the room's one window, looking out on the world below and thinking that once I had eaten my strength would return and I would go out into it, a man among men.

And I would take the female with me. Now that she had seen me she would have no more use for this shabby Richard, who lived in this tiny, wretched room. She and I would find a nest of our own, and then. . . . The thought dizzied me and I backed into a soft place set on four legs and because I could no longer remain upright without a tremendous effort I settled back in the softness, lying with a certain degree of discomfort on my back.

I was lying, so, noticing a certain strangeness about my mandibles, when a male, probably Richard, opened the door and came in the room.

In the next second he saw me lying in what I assume is his bed and some new transformation must have overtaken me for the face of which I was so proud did not please him at all, nor did my shape, lying among his bed-covers, nor did the limbs which I waved, calling out for him to stop screaming and wait.



I can hear his voice downstairs now, screaming and screaming, and I hear a female bellowing the alarm and I hear the voices of many men and know that they are armed. They are on the stairs now with chains and clubs and in my fear I find that large as I am I can move again, half this, half that, and I make my way to the basin and try to fit beneath it, and I cry out, pleading with my brethren to let me join them.

"Hugo, Arnold, let me come back."

I am trying desperately to make myself small against the baseboard but part of me still protrudes from beneath the basin—I can feel the air against my exposed, hardening back. They have broken down the door now, they are upon me.

Hugo, Arnold. It's me.

# the silver needle

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george macbeth

A strip cartoon for Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833—1898)

(The story: *Attila, robot-knight of the Psychiatric Society, is again invited to unravel a knot in the star-system of inner space. This time it is the imperialism of a drug-ring, Hallucinogenics Unlimited, he is briefed to combat. Their cult of primitivism and ritual pity, inspired by the virgin queen, Medulla, is out of line with the normal sex-worship orientation of the Planet 4 group and its ruling clique, the Tablemen. Attila is called by them, and flies to work. Now read on.*)

## I. The Call of Attila

From weeks of in-trays  
he seethed to the lift. So  
rose

through four orgasms  
in the new Janssen feelie, flicked





the in-switch for a re-fill, swallowed  
his testerosones and was out,

a fine blaze of Nuremberg  
in his gas-suit, at ease

before the Table-men. A million eggs  
on a flat glass disc  
reflecting

eyed him. *You are called, Attila,*

the scent whispered, undulant  
from the green orifice  
below the glitter. Tickled,  
scintillant, in a whirl  
of Semen Number 5 (those  
thigh-borne odours!)

his nerves grovelled  
for the job. *Lord, I am thine:*  
*O.K., boss: Mein Fuhrer*

brimmed through his lips  
until the voice-pointer  
answered the gyroscope  
and he was back in the televator  
conditioned, ready  
for a new grail

to be wrenched  
out of the misery of the pitied.

## 2. Attila and the Grey Sisters

Years later, in the burned egg, the  
man-womb of elaborate alloys  
Planet 4 had long since riveted  
to his watch-bone

and made contractible for a  
vitamin pill (b c g and z)  
or expandable to a space-ship  
with a range of nine star-systems,

Attila took stock. Happy  
to be again on a voyage, playing  
time-charades, eating  
engine-oil and imagining  
flexible metal Brunnhildas,

there was lots to do. And apt,  
four-fifths sexual fantasy as it was,  
to the job in hand. So flowed  
the long days, clouds arcing  
past the glass on the phone-screen, a



sense of sea, clouds, islands  
infusing all that was. It was good  
to be a robot, alone,  
and like a man again. Except that outside  
(and Attila knew it)  
the piercing rays of the Table-men,  
assuming form, like the grey sisters,  
ever circled,  
swooping and following,  
waiting for the mission to be accomplished  
or the next hero to be substituted  
that the great work not falter  
but go on.

### 3. The Finding of Medulla

The whole  
strangled beach was alive  
with subjected catatonics  
when Attila tuned in. They  
were celebrating  
something he'd heard of—Christomide—  
a white child without arms  
lifted out of the mud  
to a blazing Orion 3. It was holding  
a sugar-cube in its teeth and  
bit hard when the hero  
immolated it  
with his anode-gun. So much  
for the gospel of love, he thought, but  
heresy  
has got to be hurt. So Attila  
over-leaping her prone vassals,  
approaching Medulla, our Lady  
of LSD,  
locked on her oil throne  
in acid light, unutterable green

beyond the hand of man. And on her skin,  
against her right side, the  
silver needle shone.

#### 4. The Rock of Doom

To receive, point-blank  
from nothing, urges of intuition  
along the space-orb, with a rare chance  
of the big O  
approaching, is a fierce irritant  
to the sloth's testicles, magnetic mines,  
of a space-man. So Attila,  
between the legs of Destiny, the goddess  
Medulla,  
fussed by the onset of rigor sexualis mortis,  
destroyed precious machinery  
(P ration, box three)  
for seven aeons  
before he could trust his hands  
to clap on the nose-phones  
and inhale the message.

*Androyeda needs you, the  
scent breathed. She is chained  
to a rock.*

Waves lap, the granite  
penis rears: the bared girl  
rattles her chains below the varnish and,  
slipping off his helmet, the  
hero is down with a clank  
of reassuring metal. *Hold tight, sister,*  
he snaps and is up  
and chopping her off before  
the small town in the background  
wakes up. Reeling  
it back in the 4D  
screen in his head  
Attila wonders



just what he's missing. He flicks  
his switches: yes,  
the monster.

## 5. The Doom Fulfilled

The monster. Pervasive  
as an echo, stronger  
than kettledrums, magnetic  
to the nerve-ends of heroic metal, it  
coils, spitting  
a strange gas in his eyes. Attila  
feels its thongs in his groin as  
he hacks, helmeted,  
breast-plated. Behind him  
the greedy buttocks  
of Androyeda turn  
towards the cameras. She is open  
to man or beast. Despite the  
circling Furies, the  
whole bleak glass  
in the Planetarium of nothingness,  
Attila has finished. The  
thing is dead. Filing its  
biological structure  
in the back pocket of his  
archive-wallet, he  
lapses, under the eager toes  
of the nymphomaniac Androyeda,  
into a dream.  
Attila dreams.

## 6. The Baleful Head

And in his dream Attila  
flew back  
to complete his earlier mission. The  
dark head was there on the beach  
where the screwed bones waited, the

bowed blind heads of the watchers  
and the thing all needed  
though none had the wit  
to lift it clear.

Attila was walking  
over the pebbles, hearing  
the space-mind  
(or was it the wind?) keening.

Attila was lifting  
(drawing back the snake-hair)  
the silver needle,  
that pure beam of endless light.

Raising the totem  
towards the star  
Attila knew what the catatonics meant  
by reviving Christomide.

The wind shrilled  
with the cries of a million  
dissolved in history.

And Attila bent  
to replace it  
for a single split-second  
before the grey sisters  
dived

and the silver needle blazed again  
into the desperate circle of the damned  
always in power  
over the automata of the will-less.



# ECHO ROUND HIS BONES

thomas m. disch

conclusion

n i n e

Panofsky

"YOU'LL HAVE TO admit," Bridie said, "that he's smart."

"Smart, smart, what is smart?" asked Panofsky. "A rat that runs a maze is smart. I'm smart. President Madigan is smart."

"And that he's polite and respectful," Jet added.

"At the moment, that is only a part of being smart," snapped the other Panofsky. "You might as well say that because he's good-looking—"

"He does have an honest face," said Bridget firmly.

"Because he doesn't often smile," said the first Panofsky.

"He was humorous enough with *me*, love," Jet argued. "You forget at times how much you throw most people off balance. Captain Hansard didn't know what to make of you last night."

"Goulash or shish-kebab, eh?"

"That's being perfectly unfair," Bridget objected in her

loftiest tone. "You heard everything the good captain said at Howard Johnson's over Jet's little transmitter. Not only is he not a *cannibal*—he's also the last of the Puritans, by the looks of it." The other two Bridgettas nodded their heads in glum confirmation.

"But there's no need to write him off *yet*," Jet said, rallying. "He just needs to get his strength back."

"I think you're missing Bridget's point," Bridie said. "In her gentle way she was suggesting that you went after him too quickly. Why the poor man must suppose that he's escaped from a den of cannibals into a nest of vampires."

"Girls, girls," said both Panofskys together. Then the one who wore the knitted skull cap (possession of which gave its wearer priority at such times) continued: "I have no desire to engage in a debate on the merits of different strategies of seduction. I only wish to counsel you not to set your hearts too much on keeping him. Remember, he is in the Army, and while you're admiring the uniform watch out for the iron heel. Perhaps Bridie is right about going slow with him. He's survived this long only by having a too-rigid character. If it cracks, there's no telling what will come out from the old shell. But I'm certain I'd rather not find out. Do you agree with me, Bernard?"

"Entirely, Bernard."

"Then to your posts—and may the best woman win."

"Did you sleep well, Captain?"

"Very well, thank you." Hansard sat up from the mattress on which he had spent the night. "How do you do it?"

"The mattress, you mean? Bernie has to take all the credit for provisioning us. In fact, you have Bernie to thank for this too. It's his breakfast, but he thought you'd appreciate it more." Bridget held out the tray she was carrying. It held a plate of three fried eggs, other plates of bacon and toast, a pint glass of orange juice, a silver scallop-dish of jam, and an antique coffee server from the Plaza Hotel. Steam rose from the spout of the server. "After you've eaten, I'll have some water ready for you to shave with. Unless you'd rather let your beard grow out."

"Amazing," said Hansard, oblivious for the first few moments of anything but the breakfast. After one egg, however, he looked up. "You're a different colour today,"



he observed. For this Bridgetta's hair was not red but flaxen-blond and braided into a tight crown about her head, Irish-peasant-style.

"I'm a different girl altogether. It was Jet who rescued you yesterday. She's the beauty of the family. I'm Bridget—I take care of household things. And you've still to meet Bridie, the intellectual one."

"But aren't you all the same person? I mean, you speak as though the others were your older sisters."

"In a sense they are. It's important, if only for our self-concept, that we should be able to tell each other apart. So we try, by division of labour, to split the old single Bridgetta-identity into three. The youngest always has to be Bridget, because obviously that's the least fun."

"The youngest?"

"The one to have come out of the manmitter most recently is the youngest. You understand how it works, don't you. It's sort of like an echo. Well, the echo that's me has only been here a week. Jet, who was Bridget before I came, has been here four months now. And Bridie has been around from the very start, two years ago. You can always tell which of us is which because I'm blonde and wear an apron, Jet is a redhead and dresses *à la mode*, and Bridie is a sort of ashy brunette and has a mouldy old lab coat. It's remarkable how easily clothes can dictate one's behaviour."

"And your husband—are there more than one of him?"

"Two, but we thought we'd only confront you with one of each of us last night to keep things simple. Bernard is always just Bernard. He doesn't bother to differentiate between his two selves the way we do. In any case, there's very little that could threaten *his* self-concept. Tell me, Captain, do you like me better as a blonde or as a redhead?"

Hansard shook his head, as though to clear away cobwebs. "For a moment there you really did have me believing you were a different person than the girl I met last night, but when you said that I knew better."

"Excuse me, Captain—it's not always easy to remember to keep in character as a drudge. Even Cinderella has moments, when her sisters are away. . . . You ate all that so fast! Do you want more?"

"Not now."

"Then if you please, come with me. Bernard wants to have a word with you." It was like following a teacher to the principal's office. Hansard wondered what he could possibly have done wrong already.

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate your hospitality, Doctor Pan—"

"Then don't make the attempt, Mr. Hansard. You will excuse me if I do not employ your proper title, but for me it would be a pejorative form. My experiences with the American military—and before that with the military establishments of East Germany and the Third Reich—have been on the whole unhappy experiences. You may use the same informality in addressing me. In America I have always felt that that 'Doctor' of yours also has a pejorative sense when it refers to someone outside the medical profession. Dr. Strangelove, for instance—or Dr. Frankenstein."

"I'll try and remember that, sir. I certainly didn't intend any disrespect."

"How old are you, Mr. Hansard?"

"Thirty-eight."

"Married?"

"Divorced."

"So much the better. You are just the right age for my Bridgetta. She is twenty-seven."

"Just the right age for your Bridgetta for *what*, sir?"

"For what!" The two Panofskys laughed in chorus. Then, pointing at his double, the Panofsky wearing the skull cap said: "Do you not see those wispy grey hairs? That shrunken chest? Do you not realize that that old man is paralysed from the waist down?"

"Nonsense, Bernard!" said the double.

"Please to remember, Bernard," said Panofsky, laying his hand on the skull cap, "that I have the floor. And allow me a little poetic licence in stating my case. Where was I? From the waist down, yes. Do you not see me here before you in a wheelchair? And you ask 'For what?' Are you naïve, my good Captain?"

"It's not that exactly," Hansard mumbled, shifting his gaze uneasily from one Panofsky to the other.

"Or perhaps, though you're willing enough to go out



and kill people or to push the button that will destroy the world, you have too fine a moral sense to think of a little hanky-panky."

"It may surprise you to learn that some of us military men *do* have a moral sense—*Doctor*."

"Ah, he's got you there, Bernard," said the Panofsky without the cap. "Dead to rights."

"If you have an objection, Mr. Hansard, please to state it."

"Much as I admire the fine qualities of your wife—"

"My wives, rather. There are presently three women meriting the distinction."

"Lovely as all three are, they *are* your wives, sir. And I don't believe in, uh, promiscuity. Not with another man's wedded wife."

"Really, Captain?" Both old gentlemen leaned forward in their wheelchairs. "Excuse me, but is that your *sincere* objection?"

"I might have others, but I wouldn't know of them yet, since the one I stated is sufficient in itself to serve as a basis of decision. Why should you question my sincerity?"

"Ask him if he's a Catholic, Bernard," said the Panofsky without the cap.

"Bernard, if you want to take over this discussion, I will give you my cap. As it happens, I was about to ask him just that question. Well, Captain?"

"No, sir. I was raised a Methodist, but it's been a few years since I've been in any kind of church at all."

Both Panofskys sighed. "The reason we asked," the first explained, "is that it's so unusual to find a young man today of your convictions. Even within the church. We are both Catholics, you see, though that becomes a problematical statement at the present time. Are we in fact *two*? But that's all theology, and I won't go into that now. As for these scruples of yours, I think they can be cleared up easily. You see, our marriage is of a rather fictitious quality. Bridgetta is my wife in—what is that nice euphemism, Bernard?"

"In name alone."

"Ah yes! My wife in name alone. Further, we were wed in a civil ceremony instead of before a priest. We married each other with the clear understanding that there were to

be no children. Even had we had such an intention, it is highly doubtful, considering my age, that it could have been accomplished. In the eyes of Holy Mother Church such a marriage is no marriage at all. If we had access to the machinery of canon law an annulment could be obtained with ease. But an annulment, after all, is only a formality, a statement that says what does not exist has never happened. Consider, if you prefer, that Bridgetta is my daughter rather than my wife. That is more usual in these cases, isn't it—that the wise old scientist, or the evil old scientist, as the case may be, should have a lovely daughter to give the hero? And I've never heard it to happen that the hero refuses her."

"What was the point in having married her at all, if what you say is so?"

"My civil marriage to Bridgetta, whom, you must understand, I dearly love, is a *mariage de convenance*. I need an heir, someone who can inherit from me, for I have earned, from the Government and through patent contracts, a fantabulous amount of money—"

"Fantabulous—how vulgar!" observed the double quietly.

"Yes, but how *American*! And so I married Bridgetta, who had been my laboratory assistant, so that she might inherit from me. Otherwise it would go to the Government, for whom I have no great love. Then, too, someone must carry on my legal battles in the courts after I'm dead—"

"Against the Emergency Allocations Act, you know."

"I'm telling this, Bernard. And finally I need someone to talk to in this gloomy prison beside the Secret Service guards and brainwashed lab technicians they assign to me. I'm not allowed to hold private conversations with my colleagues from the University any more, because they're afraid I'll leak their secret weapon. Which I invented! In just such a manner as this was Prometheus dealt with for giving man the gift of fire."

"Now, Bernard, don't over-excite yourself. Better give me the cap for a while now, and I'll straighten out matters with the captain. I think we can come to an understanding that will satisfy everyone—"

But before this happy accord could be reached, they were



interrupted by Bridgetta—a fourth version, with black hair—who entered at the door at the farther end of the room. Bridget, Jet, and Bridie followed closely after.

“She’s going through,” Bridie announced. And indeed it was so, for the new, black-haired Bridgetta walked on relentlessly toward and then through her husband, who seemed not at all perplexed by the experience.

“That was Bridgetta-Sub-One, of course,” his double explained to Hansard. “Otherwise, you know, she wouldn’t go around the house opening doors instead of, like any proper ghost, walking through them. Bridgetta-Sub-One is leaving for Paris. *Candide* is at the Opéra Comique. It was in expectation of her departure that I wanted to speak to you down *here* instead of in my usual room upstairs, for that—on the other side of the second door Bridgetta opened—that is our manmitter-in-residence.”

Bridgetta-Sub-One closed the door of what had seemed to Hansard no more than a closet behind her. The six people watched the closed door in perfect, unbreathing silence, and in a moment a hand appeared through the oak panel. One could sense in the startled gestures of that hand all the wonderment that must have been on the woman’s face. Panofsky purred forward in his chair and lifted his own hand up to catch hold of hers, and how much relief and happiness there was in the answering clasp of her hand.

Now the woman who had lately been Bridgetta-Sub-One stepped through the door, smiling but with her eyes tight shut, an inescapable reaction to walking through one’s first door.

She opened her eyes. “Why then it’s true! You were right, Bernie!”

The two Panofskys chuckled indulgently, as though to say, “Aren’t I always right?” but forebore to be more explicit. It was her birthday party, not his.

The new Bridgetta-Sub-Two regarded her three doubles with an amused and slightly fearful smile, then for the first time lifted her eyes to see the figure standing behind them. The smile disappeared, or if it did not quite disappear, it changed into a much more serious kind of smile.

“Who is he?” she whispered.

Hansard wasn’t able to answer, and no one else seemed

about to rescue him from his difficulty. Hansard and Bridgetta stood so, regarding each other in silence, smiling and not quite smiling, for a long time.

In the following days it became a matter of dispute between them (but the very gentlest of disputes) whether what had happened could be legitimately said to be—in Hansard's case, at least—love at first sight.

After the curry dinner that Panofsky had prepared to welcome the new Bridgetta, after the last magnum of champagne had been emptied and the glasses tossed out through the closed windows, the two Panofskys took Hansard into a spacious library in one corner of which a third Panofsky (Sub-One) was leafing through a handsome folio volume of neo-Mondrian equations.

"Oh, don't mind *him*," Panofsky reassured Hansard. "He's really the easiest person in the world to live with. We ignore him, and he ignores us. I took you aside so that we might continue our discussion of this afternoon. You see, Mr. Hansard—may I call you Nathan?—we are living here under most precarious circumstances. Despite our sometime luxuriousness, we have no resources but those which the Panofsky and Bridgetta of the Real World—a nice phrase that, Nathan, I shall adopt it, with your permission, for my own—can think to send us. We have a certain store of canned foods and smoked ham and such set aside for emergencies, but that is not a firm basis for faith in the future, is it? Have you much considered the future? Have you wondered what you'll do a year from now? Ten years? Because, as the book says, you can't go home again. The process by which we came into being here is as irreversible as entropy. In fact, in the largest sense, it is only another manifestation of the Second Law. In short, we're stuck here, Nathan."

"I suppose, in a case like that, sir, it's best not to think too much about the future. Just try and get along from day to day."

"Good concentration-camp philosophy, Nathan. Yes, we must try and endure. But I think at the same time you must admit that certain of the old rules of the game don't apply. You're *not* in the Army now."

"If you mean that matter about my scruples, sir, I've



thought of a way my objection might be overcome. As a captain I have authority to perform marriages in some circumstances. It seems to me that I should have the authority to grant a divorce as well."

"A pity you had to go into the Army, Nathan. The Jesuits could have used a casuist like you."

"However I must point out now that a divorce is no guarantee that a romance follows immediately after. Though it may."

"You mean you'd like me to leave off match-making? You Americans always resent that kind of assistance, don't you? Very well, you're on your own, Nathan. Now, hop to it."

"And I also want it understood that I'm not promiscuous. Those four women out there may all have been one woman at one time, but now there's *four* of them. And one of me."

"Your dilemma puts me in mind of a delightful story in Boccaccio. However, I shall let you settle that matter with the lady, or ladies, themselves."

At that moment three of the ladies in question entered the room. "We thought you'd want to know, Bernie," said Jet, "that Bridget is dead."

"What!" said Hansard.

"Nothing to become excited about, Nathan," Panofsky said soothingly. "These things have to happen."

"She committed suicide, you see," the new Bridgetta explained to Hansard, who had not seemed to be much comforted by Panofsky's bland assurance.

"But *why*?" he asked.

"It's all in Malthus," said Bridie. "A limited food supply ; an expanding population—something's got to give."

"You mean that whenever . . . whenever a new person comes out of the transmitter, you just *shoot* somebody?"

"Goodness no!" said Jet. "They take poison and don't feel a thing. We drew lots for it, you see. Everyone but Bridie, because her experience makes her too valuable. Tonight Bridget got the short straw."

"I can't believe you. Don't you value your own life?"

"Of course, but, don't you see?—" Bridgetta laid her hands on the shoulders of her two doubles. "—I have more

than one life. I can afford to throw away a few as long as I know there's still some of me left."

"It's immoral. It's just as immoral as joining those cannibals."

"Now, Nathan," Panofsky said soothingly, "don't start talking about morality until you know the *facts*. Remember what we said about the old rules of the game? Do you think *I* am an atheist that I would commit suicide just like that, one-two-three? Do you think I would so easily damn my immortal soul? No. But before we can talk about right and wrong, we must learn about true and false. I hope you will excuse me from making such expositions, however. I have never enjoyed the simplifications of popular science. Perhaps you would care to instruct the good captain in some first principles, of, my dear Bridie, and at the same time you could instruct Bridgetta in her new duties."

Bridie bowed her head in a slightly mocking gesture of submission.

"Yes, please," said Hansard. "Explain, explain, explain. From the beginning. In short, easy-to-understand words."

"Well," Bridie began, "it's like this."

t e n

Mars

*I should never have joined the Justice-for-Eichmann Committee, he thought. That was my big mistake. If I hadn't joined the Committee I could have been Chief-of-Staff today.*

But was it, after all, such a terrible loss? Wasn't he happier here? Often as he might denigrate the barren landscape, he could not deny, to himself, that he gloried in these sharp rock spines, the chiaroscuro, the dust dunes of the crater floors, the bleeding sunsets. *It is all so . . . what? What was the word he wanted?*

It was all so dead.

Rock and dust, dust and rocks. The sifted, straining sunlight. The quiet. The strange, doubly-mooned heaven. Days and nights that bore no relation to the days and nights measured off by the Earth-synchronized clocks within



the station ; consequently, there was a feeling of disjunction from the ordinary flow of time, a slight sense of floating. Though that might be due to the lower gravity.

Five weeks left. He hoped . . . but he did not name his hope. It was a game he played with himself—to come as near to the idea as he dared and then to scurry away, as a child on the beach scurries away from the frothing rib-bone of the mounting tide.

He returned down the olive-drab corridors from the observatory to his office. He unlocked the drawers of his desk and removed a slim volume. He smiled—for if his membership on the ill-fated Committee had cost him a promotion, what would happen if it became known that he, Major-General Gamaliel Pittmann, was the American translator of the controversial German poet Kaspar Maas? That the same hand that was now, in a manner of speaking, poised above the doomsday button had also written the famous invocation that opens Maas' *Carbon 14*:

Let us drop our bombs on Rome  
and cloud the fusing sun,  
at noon, with radium . . . ?

Who was it had said that the soul of modern man, Maas Man, was so reduced in size and scope that its dry dust could be wetted only by the greatest art? Spengler? No, somebody after Spengler. All the other emotions were dead, along with God. It was true, at least, of his own soul. It had rotted through like a bad tooth, and he had filled the hollow shell with a little aesthetic silver and lead.

But it wasn't enough. Because the best art—that is to say, the art to which he found himself most susceptible and which his rotting soul could endorse—only brought him a little closer, and then a little closer, to the awareness of what it was that underlaid the nightingale's sweet tremolos, brought him nearer to naming his unnamed hope.

*The fancy cannot cheat so well as she is famed to do.*

Yet what was there else? Outside of the silver filling was only the hollow shell, his life of empty forms and clock-work motions. He was generally supposed to be a happily married man—that is to say, he had never had the energy to get divorced. He was the father of three daughters, each of whom had made a good marriage in the same manner. Success? Quite a lot of success. And by acting occasionally

as a consultant for certain corporations he had so supplemented his Army income that he had no cause to fear for the future. Because he could make agreeable conversation he moved in the best circles of Washington society. He was personally acquainted with President Madigan and had gone on hunting trips with him in his native Colorado. He had done valuable volunteer work for The Cancer Fund. His article, "The Folly of Appeasement," had appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* and been commended by no less a personage than ex-Secretary-of-State Rusk. His pseudonymous translations of Maas and others of the Munich "Götterdämmerung school!" had been widely praised for their finesse, if not always for content. What else was there? He did not know.

He knew, he knew.

He dialled 49 on the phone, the number of Hansard's room. *I'll play a game of pingpong*, he thought. Pittmann was an extremely good pingpong player. Indeed, he excelled in almost any contest of wits or agility. He was a good horseman and a passing-fair duellist. In his youth he had represented the United States and the Army in the Olympics Pentathlon.

Hansard was not in his room. Damn Hansard.

Pittman went back out into the corridor. He looked into the library and gamesroom, but it was empty. For some reason he had grown short of breath.

*Darkling, I listen.*

Ex-Sergeant Worsaw was outside the door of the control room. He came to attention and saluted smartly. Pittmann paid no attention to him. When he was alone inside the room he had to sit down. His legs trembled, and his chest rose and fell sharply. He let his mouth hang open.

*As though of hemlock I had drunk*, he thought.

He had never come into the control room like this, never quite so causelessly. Even now, he realized, there was time to turn back.

The control room was unlighted, except for the red ember of the stand-by lamp above the board, which was already set up for Plan B. Pittmann leaned forward and flicked on the television screen. A greatly-magnified colour image of the Earth, three-quarters dark, appeared.



*Love never dies. It is a mistake to suppose that love can die. It only changes. But the pain is still the same.*

He looked at the button set immediately beneath the stand-by light.

Five weeks: was it possible? Would this be the time? No, no, surely the countermand would come. And yet. . . .

Tears welled to Pittmann's grey eyes, and at last he named his hope: "Oh, I want to, I want to. I want to push it *now*."

Hansard had seldom disliked his work so intensely. If it could be called work. For aside from the mock run-throughs of Plan B and the daily barracks inspections, "A" Company had been idle. How are you to keep twenty-five men busy in a small, sealed space that is so fully automated it performs its own maintenance? With isometrics? Pittmann was right: boredom was the great problem on Mars.

Strange, that they didn't rotate the men on shorter schedules. There was no reason they couldn't come here through the manmitter on eight-hour shifts. Apparently the brass who decided such questions were still living in a pre-transmitter era, in which Mars was fifty million miles from Earth, a distance that one does not, obviously, commute every day.

Hansard had tried to take Pittmann's advice and looked through the library for a long, dull, famous book. He had settled on *Dombey and Son*, though he knew nothing about it and had never before read anything by Dickens. Though he found the cold, proud figure of Dombey somewhat disquieting, Hansard became more and more engrossed with the story, but when a quarter of the way through the book, Paul Dombey, the 'Son' of the title, died, he was unable to continue reading the book. He realized then that it was just that irony in the title, the implied continuity of generations from father to son, that had drawn him to the book. With that promise betrayed, he found himself as bereft as the elder Dombey.

A week had passed, and the order to bomb the nameless enemy had yet to be countermanded. It was too soon to worry, Pittmann had said, yet how could one not worry? Here on Mars the Earth was only the brightest star in the heavens, but that flicker in the void was the home of

his wife and son. His ex-wife. Living in Washington, they would surely be among the first to die. Perhaps, for that very reason, they would be among the luckiest. The countermand would certainly be given, there was no need to worry, and yet, what if it were not? Would not Hansard then be, in some small degree, guilty of their deaths, the deaths of Nathan Junior and Marion? Or would he be, somehow, defending them?

It was of course misleading to consider two lives among the many millions affected. Strategy was global; the policy of optimum benefit was collected, a computer in possession of all the facts.

Guilt? A man may murder another man, or three or four, and be culpable, but who could assume the guilt of megadeaths? Ordinarily the answer would have been simply—the enemy. But the enemy was so far away and his guilt so engrained in the confusions of history—camouflaged, so to speak—that sometimes Hansard doubted that the answer was so simple and so convenient for his own conscience.

Unwholesome, purposeless speculations. What had Pittmann said? "Conscience is a luxury for civilians."

Hansard ate his dinner alone, then went to his room and tried to listen to music, but tonight everything sounded like German beerhall polkas. At last he took a mild barbiturate, standard issue for the men of the Mars Command Posts.

He was walking with Nathan Junior through a field of sere grass. The air was drowsy with the buzzing of flies. They were hunting deer. Nathan Junior carried the shotgun just as his father had shown him to. Hansard carried the lunchpail. Something terrible was going to happen. The colour of the grass changed from yellow to brown, from brown to black. There was a loud buzzing in Hansard's ears.

He picked up the receiver of the phone. "Yes?"

"Ah, there you are, Nathan!"

"General Pittmann."

"I thought you might enjoy a game of pingpong."

"When?" Hansard asked.

"Right now?"

"That sounds like a good idea," said Hansard. And it did.



## The Nature of the World

"YOU HAVE TO be very quick," said Bridie, "or it might happen that two objects will occupy the same place at the same time. A highly undesirable condition. That's why we're so careful always to be here from two to three in the afternoon, when transmissions are made."

Hansard snatched away the can of *pâté de foie gras* that the small transmitter had just produced as an echo. The lab technician reached into the right-hand receiver and placed the can<sub>1</sub> that he had just transmitted there into the right-hand transmitter. He pressed a button, transmitting the can<sub>1</sub> to the left-hand receiver and at the same time producing a can<sub>2</sub>, which Hansard immediately removed from the transmitter. The pile of cans<sub>2</sub> that had been thus produced that afternoon filled a large basket at Hansard's feet.

"It seems to me," said Hansard judiciously, not interrupting his stock-piling, "that all this contradicts the laws of conservation. Where do these cans come from? How does a single can in the Real World produce a gross of cans here?"

"If you want an answer to your question, Nathan, we'll have to start with first principles. Otherwise it would be like explaining a nuclear reactor to someone who believes in the indivisibility of the atom. In a sense though, your question isn't far afield from what it was that gave Bernard the whole idea of sub-species of reality. He'd already built the first experimental model of the machine and the Press hadn't decided whether to treat him like God or like a maniac, when he realized that he'd overlooked the notorious fact that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. But there seemed to be no reaction corresponding to the action of transmission—nothing that could be measured. Of course it *was* there in the mathematics, and Bernard busied himself with that. Are you familiar with topological transformations? No? But you *do* know that there are non-Euclidean geometries, and that these have the same validity as the common-sense varieties? Well, matter transmission is essentially a topological transforma-

nion from our world of common sense spaces to . . . somewhere else, and then back again. It is just at the moment that the transmitted body reaches that somewhere-else that the reaction takes place that forms the 'echo.'

"Which tells you very little, I fear, that you haven't already figured out for yourself, but have patience, I will get to your question. The consequence, you see, of Bernard's *ex post facto* reasoning was an entirely new physics, a physics in which our universe is just a special case—indeed, a trivial case, as a point is a trivial case of the circle. There are, in this physics, progressive levels of reality, and matter can exist at each level. Now at the same time that there can be radical changes in the nature of the material world there need not be corresponding changes in *energetic* relationships."

"That is to say?" Hansard asked.

"That is to say that sub-two reality enjoys the same light of common day as sub-one reality, though that light issues from a sun composed of sub-one atoms. A fortunate consequence of the double nature of light, which seems to be both wave and particle—and highly beneficial for us."

"Highly necessary, too—I can see that for myself. But how much energy spillover is there? Sound, for instance, doesn't carry over from the sub-one to the sub-two world."

"Because it is produced by the collision of sub-one particles and carried in a medium of sub-one gases. Similarly, we can receive *radiant* heat from the sub-one universe, but not heat produced by conduction or convection. Magnetism and gravity still act upon sublimated bodies, but Bernard has proven experimentally that the gravitational attraction isn't mutual. But we'd best not go into that. It's an embarrassing notion for someone, like me, who wants to go on living in a comfortable old-fashioned Newtonian universe."

"And you receive radio and television broadcasts from the Real World. I've learned that much."

"Yes—if we possess a sub-two receiver."

"But in that case, why don't you communicate with the Real World by broadcasting to them? Tell them about your situation on short-wave radio."

"Have you ever tried shining a flashlight in the eyes of somebody in the Real World? No? Well, it's the same



principle: we can see by *their* sunlight, but they're oblivious to light issuing from a light source constituted of secondary matter. The same would hold true of any radio broadcasts we might make. The Real World always remains real for we secondary creatures—all *too* real—but for primary beings our secondary world might as well not exist, for all the difference it makes to them. No, there is no communication backwards. As Bernard pointed out, the sublimation of matter that the transmitter causes is irreversible—another case of entropy, of the universal backsliding of all things. So, no matter how much *pâté* we can pile up here, we must remain permanently second-class citizens."

"But in that case I don't understand why Panofsky—Panofsky-Sub-One, that is, back there in the Real World—keeps providing for you."

"Faith," said the new Bridgetta, who was helping Hansard to stack the cans in such a way that they did not become too heavy to keep on top of the floor, "it's all done on faith. We must be thankful that Bernard is a Catholic and has lots of experience believing unlikely things. Oh, I'm sorry," she said, glancing at Bridie. "It's *your* story."

"You needn't practise being Bridget yet, darling. Not until you've been able to dye your hair. Besides, as it's been two years since I was in the Real World, you're the better qualified to tell about that."

"Once Bernard had figured out the theory behind it," Bridgetta began, "he tried to extrapolate the problems that a sublimated being would have to face in an unsublimated world. None of the necessities would be available naturally to him: no food, no water, not even air. But he would definitely exist and be alive—for as long as one *can* stay alive under such conditions. The first problem was to provide a supply of sublimated air, and fortunately such a supply was at hand in the pumping station that was to be built to supply the Command Posts. Bernard invented all kinds of specious reasons for having that transmitter built here under the D.C. dome, instead of, as first planned, by Lake Superior. After only a month of transmitting, the dome would have been filled, and as long as the pumps keep pumping, the supply is more than adequate to compensate for what is lost through the traffic locks. Unfor-

tunately, the locations of the general cargo transmitters were specified in the rider to the Emergency Allocation Act, so we couldn't look forward to having all the initial advantages of Robinson Crusoe."

"Though you do have cannibals," Hansard observed.

"That was something else Bernard could do nothing about. He wanted to have the Camp Jackson manmitter built outside the dome, which would have solved our problem neatly."

"And mine too."

"Excuse me, that was a rather careless statement. But he was right: those men do pose a threat. The best we can hope for is that they don't discover us. Fortunately, one doesn't leave footprints here."

"There'd be no problem at all, if you just told the government about this. Then those men could be supplied with the food—and officers—that they need."

"Bernard looks on the government in a different light than you do, Captain," Bridie said, rather coldly. "You forget that his relations with the government have not usually been of an agreeable nature. When it has not directly hindered his work, it expropriates and perverts it. No, don't try to argue about that with me—I'm only trying to explain Bernard's attitude. Furthermore, the government's scientists would not have understood the refinements of his theory, for they are still debating the validity of the mathematics on which the transmitter itself was based. Then, if the scientists could be convinced, try to imagine how you would go about explaining to an Army general that there are people just like you and me who are invisible, who can walk through walls, to whom we must send food, though it is probable that we will never be able to demonstrate, in any tangible way, that they exist."

"When you put it like that, I don't see how he's convinced *himself*."

"Faith," Bridgetta said again earnestly.

"Faith and reason," Bridie corrected. "Don't forget that Bernard has spent his life as a mathematician. A balanced equation is tangible proof for *him*. Though our existence is abstract at best, he can believe in us just as readily as in the Pythagorean theorem."

"And out of that kernel of belief has come . . . all this?"



Hansard waved his hand at the goods lining the shelves of the room. "What possible reason does he give this lab assistant for carrying on this idiot work? It certainly can make no sense to him, if he's unaware that he's producing groceries for us."

"In the case of food, Bernard tells them that he's concerned about possible nutritional losses that might be caused by excessive and repeated transmissions. Preposterous of course, but you must remember that the very idea of the machine is preposterous to most people. Remember, too, that the government will do all it can to humour Bernard so long as he remains tame. The mattress, for instance: have you heard the story of the mattress?"

Hansard shook his head.

"For a while," Bridgetta said, taking her cue from Bridie, "whenever I was transmitted anywhere, Bernard insisted that I wrap myself in a mattress. To keep myself from being *bumped*, he explained to the Secret Service guards. Of course, it was really to give *us* something besides a floor to sleep on. But it did make a spectacular entrance at the Paris Embassy. Madame Viandot thought it was a new fashion from New York and ordered three mattresses for herself the next day."

"And no one ever suspects? The things you transmit are so evidently survival items."

"No one has any reason to suspect, however, that survival is a problem for us. The lab assistants, of course, are constantly complaining about the meaningless tasks that Bernard sets for them, and once Bazeley of NASA came around to ask what Bernard was up to, but he only has to hint that he's doing research on a receiverless transmitter and they fall over themselves to be obliging. For all they know, Bernard's still good for another golden egg."

"Well, does that explain everything, Captain?" Bridie asked.

"Yes, thank you very much. I appreciate your giving me so much time."

Bridie smiled acidly. "But you've forgotten, you know, the biggest problem of all. You haven't learned how it is that you can walk."

"Christ, I've gone all this time without realizing it was

a problem! How is it that I'm able to walk across the same floor I can swim through?"

"Don't feel dumb, Captain," said Bridgetta. "It's only natural to take for granted that things that you've always been able to do are possible. For Bernard, however, lacking any direct experience, this was the chief theoretical difficulty standing in the way of survival. He could never be certain that as soon as we arrive here we just don't start sinking into the ground. That's why *I* was so relieved when I arrived this morning—because I found myself on *terra firma*. Firm enough, at least, if I don't wear heels."

"But *how* does it work? What keeps me from just sinking down, if gravity is acting on me, as you say?"

"Call it surface tension," said Bridie. "Though actually it is a form of potential energy that is inherent in all matter at whatever level of reality. Like static electricity, it forms an equipotential surface over all objects—a sort of 'skin' of energy. What keeps sublimated objects above the ground—the cans on the shelves, for instance, or your feet—is the small repellent force generated by the two surfaces, a force that decreases in proportion to the distance between the two realities. Thus, a sub-four and perhaps a sub-three can *would* sink through a sub-one shelf, but in two adjacent fields of reality the repellent force is quite sufficient for most purposes, though not so great that it cannot be overcome by an opposing force. And therefore second-degree matter can interpenetrate first-degree matter and you can swim through the floor. All this we've learned here. Panofsky-Sub-One has never been able to be sure, and so he keeps providing us with things we really don't need—boards and linoleum rugs. When we try to spread the rugs, they just curl up into the floor. Still, we can be grateful that he errs on the side of caution."

"I am afraid that I *am* sinking deeper and deeper now, though. Sub-three and sub-four cans. I'd never even considered the possibility."

"Imagine what would happen if one of us were transmitted. A sub-two person going through a transmitter would leave behind a sub-three echo of himself. Surely you've been in caves and heard the echo of an echo. As a matter of fact, you've already described such a case. When that unpleasant sergeant donated his head to Mars, the



transmission would have produced a sub-three head. Though God only knows what's become of it. Sub-one water, as you may have found out, won't support sub-two bodies. A convenient rule-of-thumb is this: after sublimation, the solids of the unsublimated world appear to have the properties of liquids; liquids, the properties of gas and gas, the properties of that unfashionable commodity, an aether."

"But to return a moment to what became of Worsaw-Sub-Two: his head was taken off by a sub-one transmitter. How is that?"

"As I said earlier, energetic relationships don't change as one descends the scale of reality. A sub-two transmitter, for instance, could not transmit a sub-one object, but a sub-two object, such as Worsaw's head, *will* be transmitted by a sub-one transmitter."

"Well, all this has convinced me of one thing."

"And that?" Bridgetta asked.

"I'm never going to be transmitted again."

"I don't understand," said Bridie.

"If I've been having a hell of a time surviving here, think what it would be like for Hansard-Sub-Three."

"Oh, you don't have to worry on that score. After all, if he didn't immediately begin to sink into the earth, he would very soon die of suffocation, since he would lack a supply of sub-three air. No, at *this* point, Hansard-Sub-Three—or Bridgetta-Sub-Three, for that matter—is not a viable form."

Panofsky entered the room then, driving his wheelchair through the wall. "Have you justified our little euthanasia programme, my love?" he asked cheerily.

"I was just getting to that," Bridie said.

"It won't really be necessary now," Hansard said. "I can appreciate the need for some sort of measure, so long as you keep being transmitted regularly. It seems to me that you keep the population at a lower level than need be, but no doubt there are reasons for that."

"There are," Panofsky assured him. "And the reason that we must keep going through the transmitter and replicating ourselves is that back *there* I can't be sure that the population is *large* enough. Not all our losses are volun-

tary, you know. On more than one occasion I've driven this chair and myself into the ground and drowned. Not I, strictly speaking, but the equivalent, me. So then, Nathan, you understand everything, eh?"

"There's only one thing I still don't understand, sir."

"And that?"

"You."

"Oh, but that is always the great mystery. Even Bridgetta cannot penetrate to the essential Panofsky, but keeps peeling off layers like an onion. Not my metaphor, of course—Ibsen's. But what, particularly, puzzles you?"

"That you should try to do this all on your own. I'm sure if you spoke to someone in the government, though they might be sceptical at first, they would eventually believe you and aid you."

"I'm just as sure of that, Nathan, and so I have said nothing. One of the few consolations of being here is that I am, for the first time in my life, a free man. I have at last found a way of escaping successfully. The government's first act of assistance would no doubt be to send a crew of men through the transmitters who could supervise me here."

"If your luck turned and Worsaw were to discover you, you'd be thankful for such supervision."

"That's the chance I take."

Hansard shook his head disapprovingly, but by the set of his jaw it was evident that he had decided not to pursue the argument.

"Consider, Nathan, what I have already suffered at the government's hands, and then think if I could gladly invite them *here*. They have taken my invention—which could have made the world a paradise—and turned it into a weapon—as though the world wants for new weapons. I should despair if I thought it were possible for my achievement to be suppressed forever. Happily, as Norbert Wiener observes, the greatest guarantee that a thing will be done is simply the knowledge that it is possible. So that in the long run, unless they prefer annihilation—and they may, they may—my work will not have been for nothing."

There was a long pause during which Hansard considered how most tactfully to protest against Panofsky's apolitical attitude. Didn't the man see the moral necessity



of the war? Was he not himself a refugee from the tyranny of East Germany? But before he could formulate these objections clearly, Panofsky had resumed speaking, in a rather more wistful tone.

"Imagine what it might be like. Think what a source of power the transmitter represents. The mind staggers. Even *my* mind staggers."

"Of power?" Hansard asked.

"Instead of moving something laterally, suppose one were to transmit it upwards. Water, for instance. A circular waterfall could be created, which could power a dynamo, and only the smallest fraction of the dynamo's power would be needed to operate the transmitter itself. In effect, a perpetual motion machine."

"Then it *does* violate the laws of conservation!"

"At our level of reality, yes. But within the larger system, no. In other words, another universe somewhere is shortly going to experience a considerable power drain. Let us hope they have no means of plugging the hole, eh?"

"My God," said Hansard, who was still envisioning the circular waterfall, "It *would* change everything."

"Everything," Panofsky agreed. "And it will change our view of the universe as well. Not too long ago, in 1600, I regret to say that the Catholic Church burned Giordano Bruno as a heretic. The church will have to change its position now. The universe is infinite, after all, but there is no need for God to be embarrassed on that account. God can simply be *more* infinite. The bigger the universe, the vaster must be God's might. There are, just as Bruno envisioned them, worlds no telescope will ever see, worlds beyond those worlds, worlds still beyond, infinities of worlds. Imagine, Nathan, if the Earth itself were to be transmitted, and if Earth-sub-Two were transmitted afterwards, then Earth-Sub-Three. . . . And not just once, but each a dozen, a hundred, numberless times, each transmission producing its own echo."

"Is it possible?"

"Much more is possible, though perhaps not just now. The solar system itself could be transported. We could take our sun with us as we journey about the galaxies. Is it possible? With a transmitter such as this, anything is possible. And what do *you* use it for? What is the only use

the military mind can find for such a marvel? To dispense bombs with it!"

"Does the president know about that waterfall-machine you spoke of?"

"Of course he does. It was immediately evident to every scientist in the country that such a thing is possible now."

"Then why isn't it being built? Why, with a source of unlimited power, there never need be a war again. Or hunger, or poverty."

"You'll have to answer that question, Captain, for you represent the government, not I."

"You know," said Hansard, unhappily, "perhaps I don't."

## t w e l v e

### The Nature of the Soul

"THEN YOU STILL don't want to tell him about it?" Bridie asked.

"To what end?" Panofsky said. "Why call him back from vacation, when there's nothing he can do to alter the situation?"

"He might gather his roses a little more quickly if he knew," Jet said.

"I think we might best consult the tastes of the lady most directly concerned," said Panofsky, turning to regard Bridgetta, who was now a blonde and no longer, in fact, Bridgetta, but merely Bridget. Her smile spoke for her: *she* was satisfied.

"Any more objections?" Panofsky asked.

"It's best so, of course," said Jet. "It was only selfishness that made me want to share my fear with him. But it becomes harder and harder, as the time advances, to pretend to be lighthearted."

"The effort will be good for both of us," Bridie said. "Pretending makes it so."

"Furthermore," said Panofsky, "we have every reason to suppose it will be called off. The day is fully a month away."

"Not quite that long," corrected his double.

"Well, very nearly a month. After all, it's not as though



this were being decided by merely human wit. The best computers in the world are blowing fuses this very minute to do something about it. It's all game theory and bluffing. I, for one, am not worried about it. Not in the least." But when Panofsky's eyes looked across the room and met the eyes of his double, his gaze faltered and his assurance failed.

"Well," said the double sombrely, "I, for another, *am*."

Toward the end of Hansard's second week at Elba, and five days after the preceding conversation had taken place, our hero found himself doing something he had promised himself never to do again—arguing with his host. Panofsky had made another passing reference to his "little euthanasia programme," and Hansard had furrowed his brow just enough to show that he considered it a little murder programme—but he refused steadfastly to discuss it.

"It's hardly fair, Nathan, for you to sit in judgement—and Minos himself could not more prominently sit in judgement than you—your face crinkles up like Saran Wrap—and never to allow the poor sinner a chance to justify himself, if he can."

"I'll allow that something of the sort has to be done, but . . ."

"But? But? Now, it really isn't fair to stop at that *but*, is it?"

"I was going to say it seems a perfectly reasonable attitude, from the scientific point-of-view, but it seems strange in a Catholic."

"What a picture you must have of science, Nathan! You pronounce the word as though it were a euphemism for something unspeakable, as if science were the antithesis of the ethical—as, since the bomb, it has in part become."

"I have nothing against the bomb," Hansard protested hastily.

Panofsky allowed this to pass with scarcely the raising of an eyebrow. "But it is curious that you should imagine an opposition between science and Catholicism, which I am sure you regard as wholly irrational. No? Yes. A dismal prospect, if evil can only be opposed by unreason."

"Honestly, Dr. Panofsky, I don't follow you when you go off on figure-eights like that. What I had in mind was simply this: Catholics are supposed to believe in immortal

souls and that sort of thing. In fact, you've already said that you do. But suicide is—I don't know the technical term for it."

"A mortal sin. And so it is, but fortunately I cannot commit that sin at this level of reality. Only Panofsky-Sub-One can commit suicide, in the sense that it's a sin."

"Well, if you take poison and die from it, what else are you going to call it?"

"First, Nathan, I must explain to you the nature of the soul. At conception, when the soul is created, it is unique, only one, indivisible. God made it so. Do you think *I* can create souls? Of course not. No more can the transmitter, which I invented, create souls. So that the apparent multiplicity of my selves means nothing in God's eyes. I would not go so far as to maintain that I am a mere *illusion*. Rather let us say that I am an epiphenomenon."

"But physically your existence on this plane of reality is just as . . . as existent as it ever was. You breathe. You eat. You *think*."

"Ah, but thinking is not a *soul*. Machines can think."

"Then you're no longer bound by any moral laws whatever?"

"On the contrary, natural law—the law derived from reason as opposed to that which is revealed to us divinely—has as binding a force here as in the Real World, just as the laws of physics work here. But natural law has always condoned suicide in certain circumstances: consider all those noble Romans throwing themselves on their swords. It is only in these Years of Grace that suicide has become an evil, since it is in contradiction to the second supernatural virtue, hope. It is not allowed for a Christian to despair."

"Then you've ceased to be a Christian?"

"I am a Christian perhaps, but not a man. That is to say, the fact that I no longer possess a soul does not prevent me from believing as I always have. I am the same Panofsky as ever—so far as you or I can see, for we are not given to see the soul. When Hoffmann sold his soul, he lost his shadow—or was it the other way around? In any case, it was a visible sign. But how much sadder to lose something which one cannot even be sure afterwards that one ever possessed. Happily, I am prepared for this para-



dox by being a modern. Camus, you know, was troubled by a similar disparity between the strict atheism which he felt reason required and his feeling that it was wrong to do evil. But *why* was it wrong? For no reason at all. But still one must have some basis for action, for choosing. So one just tries to do the best one can, from day to day, without examining the ethical dilemma too closely. Which is more concentration-camp philosophy. I'm sorry I have nothing better to offer you."

"But if it's all meaningless—and isn't that what a soul is all about, meaningfulness?—then why does Panofsky-Sub-One keep providing for you. Why should he care?"

"That is a question that I hope he will never chance to ask himself. Happily, he has devoted all his attention up till now to our physical rather than our spiritual condition. If he were to convince himself that we are soulless, he might very well stop sending us supplies."

"I just can't believe that, Doctor."

"Only because you're not a Catholic."

"Look—if what you said that day in the transmitting room were to happen—if the whole damn world were to be transmitted, what then? With all the people on it, the Pope and everyone."

"Nathan, what a splendid question! I'd never thought of that. Of course the basic situation remains unaltered, but the *magnitude* of it! A whole *world* without shadows! Yes, and for a final paradox, what if such a transmission were to take place not tomorrow but two thousand years ago, and Christ Himself. . . . Nathan, you *do* have an instinct for these things. You may have changed my mind, which is an almost unheard-of thing at my age. I will certainly have to give a good deal of thought to the question. But now that I've shown you my soul, such as it is or isn't—would you like to show me yours?"

Hansard's brow furrowed more deeply this time. "I don't understand."

"Why is it, Nathan, that you wake up screaming in the middle of the night?"

And—yet another week later:

"I'm sorry," Hansard said, "for flying off the handle with you like that."

"Not with me, I'm afraid," said Panofsky. "Though Bernard did tell me about that incident. As a matter of fact, Nathan, I scolded him on your behalf. Your dreams are nobody's business but your own. I think Bernard's let himself become something of a snoop since he left the Real World. That happens to all of us to some degree, but he could confine his eavesdropping to that world and leave *us* alone."

Hansard laughed uneasily. "It's funny you should say that, because I'd just come to tell you—to tell *him*—that he was right. Or perhaps not exactly right, but . . ."

"But you were going to answer his question anyhow? Confession does ease the soul, as they say. Especially, I've always observed, the souls of Protestants, in which category I would include those of your stamp. It's because they're so severe with themselves that the fact of mercy overwhelms them."

"I'm not looking for mercy," Hansard said dourly.

"Precisely my point: you'll be all the more surprised to find it. Tell me, Nathan, did you fight in Viet Nam back in the Sixties?"

Hansard turned pale. "I was just about to tell you about that. How did you know?"

"It's nothing telepathic—just a simple inference. If you're thirty-eight now, you would have come of age for the draft at the height of the whole mess. Some very nasty things happened in that war. We civilians with our heads in the sand probably got little idea of what went on, and even so the newspapers were full of stories almost every day. Women and children?"

Hansard nodded. "It was a child—a little boy—he couldn't have been much older than five."

"You had to shoot him in self-defence?"

"I incinerated him in self-defence."

They were silent together a long while, though it was not, on Panofsky's part, an unsympathetic silence.

Then Hansard said, reaching for a tone of ordinariness: "But you knew it all before I even told you. You anticipated everything I had to tell you."

"We sinners are never as unique as we suppose ourselves to be. When a boy of thirteen goes into the confessional with his nails bitten to the quick, the priest will not



be surprised to learn that he has committed sins of impurity. When a grown man, an Army captain, who usually evidences the most straight-laced moral code, wakes up screaming in the night, one looks for a cause commensurable to the pain. Also Nathan, your case is not unique. There have been a dozen novels written about that war by other men who woke up screaming. But why is it, after all this time, you wanted to speak about it?"

"I haven't been able to tell Bridgetta. I tried to and I couldn't. I thought perhaps I'd be able to, if I told you about it first."

"And why were you anxious to tell her?"

"I've always thought that one of the reasons my first marriage never worked was because I didn't tell Marion about that boy. She wouldn't let me, the one time I tried. This time I won't make that mistake."

"This is news! You're marrying the girl then?"

"In another week. There's going to be a big society wedding at Grace Episcopal, and we thought we'd just sneak in and make it a double wedding. I hope you'll be able to be there to give the bride away."

But before Panofsky could commit himself, Bridie came into the room unannounced and wearing a look of grave concern. "You'd better come and see this, Bernard. We have them on the screen now, and it's just as we feared."

Hansard followed Bridie and Panofsky into the sitting-room adjoining Bridgetta's bedchamber. There Bridgetta-Sub-One, in a terrycloth bathrobe and her hair wound up in a towel, was standing a few feet back from the 12-inch screen of the videophone. The Sub-Two residents of Elba were crowded close about another receiver, apparently on an extension line from the first. The image on the screen that Bridgetta-Sub-One was watching was of Panofsky, but on the other screen there were *two* Panofskys, the second of them with what appeared to be a cloud of cellophane wreathing his head. With the two Panofskys crowded before the screen and the others pictured on it, there were a total of four functioning Panofskys visible to Hansard in a single glance. It was too much, by at least one.

"What in hell is—" he began, but Bridie silenced him with a peremptory gesture.

No sound came from either videophone, but this did not seem to dampen the interest of the spectators. While he waited for this strange charade to end, Hansard reasoned. He reasoned that (1) the videophone that Bridgetta-Sub-One was watching belonged to the Real World (which was confirmable by sticking a finger into it), that (2) the Panofsky pictured upon it must therefore be Panofsky-Sub-One (and hadn't there been talk lately of his having gone off for the Bolshoi's spring season?), and that (3) the *second* Panofsky, visible on the screen of the other videophone (which *was* tangible to Hansard's touch), must be a sublimated Panofsky.

When the call was concluded and the image had shrunk to a small dot of light, Panofsky congratulated Hansard on his reasoning. "One of our knottiest problems," the old man went on, "was establishing communications with the others of us around the world. You see, I've made as much provision as I can for the Sub-Two Panofskys produced by the transmissions from Paris or Moscow back to Washington. There is a gas mask and oxygen supply stored beneath the seat of my wheelchair at all times. It gives me—or him, whichever way you choose to regard it—twenty-four hours more or less—time enough for one last night at the Bolshoi and sometimes a visit to the Kremlin. But of what use is it to be a perfect spy, if one can't communicate what one has unearthed. The method that had to be employed was soon obvious to *us*, but we had to wait for Panofsky-Sub-One to think of it, and that man can be almost military in his thinking sometimes. But at last the solution occurred to him. What we do now is this: at a predetermined time to be indicated on my desk calendar, Bridgetta-Sub-One receives a call here at Elba from Panofsky-Sub-One who is in another city. Today it was Moscow. Once the connection has been established, it is a simple matter for the Panofsky-Sub-Two then in Moscow to be on hand and give his report at the same time. It requires a bit of hithering and thithering on Panofsky-Sub-One's part. Usually he goes from Moscow after the curtain falls at the Bolshoi, jumps to Paris for supper, and returns to Moscow next day for another performance—and to make the phone call. The sublimated Panofsky does not, of course, appear on the screen of Bridgetta's receiver, but on



this one, which has itself been sublimated, he does appear. There is no sound, for the Panofsky-Sub-One on the other end has only the air he has brought with him. But we have learned to lip-read, so that is hunky-dory."

"Hunky-dory!" Jet whispered, with a shudder. "Not hunky-dory!"

While the first Panofsky sat back to savour his Americanism, the other sighed: "I wish there were some simpler way. This method is so wasteful of lives. There are none of the resources in those other cities that we have here at Elba. It is hard to bring everything one requires for even a short visit. The breathing equipment is bulky, and the Secret Service guards think it strange that Panofsky Sub-One should always insist on bringing it along."

"Fortunately," the first Panofsky interrupted (they were neither wearing the skull cap at the moment), "he has a reputation for eccentricity. He has invented a delightfully paranoid theory concerning foreign germs."

The two Panofskys smiled in ironic appreciation of this theory.

"But there are compensations," said the second.

"Oh yes, there is usually time to see one last performance, and from a vantage better even than the conductors. Since being sublimated, I have seen nothing, less than nothing. Here we are in one of the chief cities of the world, the capital of the most affluent culture on Earth, and have you ever seen what is called ballet here? It is vomit! I protest against it vehemently. But in Moscow . . . ah! Tonight, for instance, we were told that Malinova was extraordinary in the second act of *Giselle*."

The second Panofsky sighed more deeply. "Now more than ever does it seem rich to die. For *him*, that is."

"Exactly. *We* shall both be dead inside of two weeks. And *we* will never have seen that *Giselle*. I'd willingly give two weeks of my life to see that."

"Two weeks?" Hansard asked.

"Oh, Bernard!" Bridgetta cried out. "You promised not to say anything."

"My dear, excuse me. It just slipped out."

"Why should you be dead in two weeks. There's something you've been keeping back from me. I've felt it in the air ever since I came here."

"May I tell him?" Panofsky inquired of Bridgetta.

"What choice is there now? Nathan, don't look like that. I didn't want you to know, because . . . because we were so happy."

"In two weeks, Captain Hansard, all hell breaks loose. To be precise, on the first of June. My double in Moscow just informed us that the Kremlin is being as foolishly resolute and resolutely foolish as Washington."

"I find that hard to believe," said Hansard.

"Nevertheless it is so. Bridgetta, may I show him the letter?"

"Try to understand, Mr. Hansard," Bridie said (for Bridgetta, in tears now, was able to do no more than nod her head yes), "that when Bridget followed you that day and took this out of its hiding place in the Monument, she was only concerned to find out who you were. We had no way to know if we could trust you. We weren't expecting anything of this sort."

"You mean to say you opened that attaché case? But it was Priority-A!"

Panofsky removed a folded paper from his coat pocket and handed it to Hansard. "The case contained only this letter, Nathan. And since this letter was signed, a month ago, nothing has altered."

After he had digested the President's written order, after he had convinced himself of its authenticity, Hansard said: "But the diplomats. . . . Or the U.N. . . ."

"No," said Jet dismally. "I've been watching them here in Washington every day. The President, the Secretary of Defence, the Russian Ambassador: none of them will unbend. Because CASS-9 won't. They've become the slaves of that computer. And now the President and the cabinet and all the important officers of the Pentagon have gone into hiding. They've been away a week. It bodes no good."

"I simply can't believe that if nobody *wants* the war—"

"Has anybody *ever* wanted the war? But it was bound to happen, you know. The whole effectiveness of our arsenal as a deterrent force was based on the possibility of their being used. Now that possibility will be realized."

"But there's been no aggression, no provocation. . . ."

"CASS-9, apparently, does not need to be provoked. I'll confess that with respect to game theory I am naïve."



The second Panofsky, who had been listening intently the while, hit the arm of his wheelchair with his fist and swore.

"He is so especially distressed," his double explained, "because he knows he could stop it, if only there were a way for him to speak to Panofsky-Sub-One."

"If all that you say is true, though," Hansard said, deliberately, "it seems to be too late for the explanations of men of good will."

"You mistake my meaning, Nathan. He, Bernard Panofsky, single-handed, could stop the war—snap! like that. It is all written out on vellum, a splendid, magnificent, preposterous plan. But it cannot be carried through by any of us, only by someone of the Real World. And so it is all no good, a failure. . . ."

"Single-handed?" Hansard asked, with a note of professional incredulity.

"Alas, yes," said both Panofskys in chorus.

Then one of them removed the skull cap from his pocket and put it on his head. "If you please, Bernard—I will tell him how."

## t h i r t e e n

### Mars

HERE THERE WERE no usual measures of time. The Camp lived on a twenty-four hour Earth-day, but a complete rotation of Mars took thirty-six minutes longer, so that only once in forty days was the high noon of the sun in perfect agreement with the high noon dictated by the clocks on the wall. Five weeks of anxious waiting had slipped by in a twinkling, five weeks in a limbo of inactivity and the ritual gesturing of the run-throughs and inspections, five weeks going up and down the olive-drab corridors, eating tinfoil dinners, swilling the hot coffee, thinking the same well-worn thoughts, which through repetition (just as the food seemed to lose its flavour day by day) grew wearisome and were set aside. Like a spring brook in the dry season of the year, conversation subsided to a trickle. The enlisted men passed the long hours with endless games of poker. General Pittmann kept more and more to himself, and so, perforce, did Captain Hansard.

A strange condition, a condition difficult to describe except in negatives. Life was reduced to a minimum of automatic processes—waking, sleeping, eating, walking here and there, watching the time slip by, listening to silences. The Camp's narrow world of rooms and corridors came to seem somehow . . . unreal.

Or was it himself that seemed so? He had read a story once, or seen a movie, of a man who sold his shadow, or perhaps his reflection in a mirror. Hansard felt like that now—as though at the moment of the Mars jump, five weeks before, he had lost some essential, if intangible, part of himself. A soul perhaps, though he didn't exactly believe he had one.

He wished that the countermand to the President's order would come, but he wished even more that he might be called back to the fuller reality of Earth. Yet these were neither very strong wishes, for the reservoirs of all desire were drying up within him. He wished mainly for an ending, any ending, an event to accent this drear, uninflected, trickling time.

So perhaps there had been a sort of wisdom behind the decision to keep the men at the Mars Command Posts two months at a stretch, despite that there was no technical necessity for it, the same wisdom that is at the root of all the compulsory dullness of military life. For boredom makes a soldier that much more able and that much more willing to perform the task that it is especially given a soldier to perform.

Ex-Sergeant John Worsaw sat in the guard bay before the door to the control room reading a tattered personalized novel. Because of his reading habits, Worsaw had a reputation around Camp Jackson/Mars as an intellectual. This was an exaggeration, of course, but, as he liked to point out in his more ponderous moments (after about two beers), you couldn't get anywhere in the year 1990 without brains, and brains wouldn't do you much good either without an education. (Worsaw had earned a College Equivalent diploma in Technics.) Take Wolf Smith, for example—the Army Chief of Staff: that was a man who had more facts at his command than a CASS-9 computer. For a man like Smith, facts were like ammunition.



Facts: Worsaw had nothing but contempt for people who couldn't face hard facts. Like that fairy Pittmann in the control room now, worrying about the bombs probably, and afraid of the button. No one had told Worsaw of the President's order, but he knew what was in the air by the looks on the two officers' faces. What were they scared about, as long as they were here on Mars? It was the sons-of-bitches back on Earth who had to worry.

Thinking something to this effect, though rather more hazily, Worsaw found that he had read down a quarter of a page of the novel without taking any of it in. With a more concentrated effort, he returned to the last passage he remembered:

Worsaw lobbed another grenade in the bunker entrance and threw himself flat, pressing his face into the jungle dirt. Thunder rent the air, and thick yellow smoke belched from the crumbling structure.

"That oughta do it, Snooky!" yelled the corporal, thumbing the safety off his M-14. "Let's mop up now." And Corporal O'Grady leapt to his feet.

"Look out, Lucky!" Even as Worsaw screamed it was too late—the sniper bullets had caught O'Grady in a vicious cross-fire, spinning him and flinging him mudward, a dead man.

"The yellow-belly sons-of-bitches," Worsaw muttered. "They'll pay for this."

A few feet away the blood of Lucky O'Grady seeped out into the jungle soil. The man who had been Worsaw's best friend had run out of luck at last.

Strangely moved by this last paragraph, Worsaw laid his book aside. He had heard someone coming down the corridor, and it was likely, at this hour of the day, with the men playing cards in their barracks, to be Hansard. The captain spent a lot of his time roaming about in the corridors.

"General Pittmann?"

"Yes, he's inside, sir."

Hansard went into the control room, closing the door after him. Worsaw cursed him softly, but there was in that quiet obscenity a trace of respect, even affection. Despite

the pressure to restore his rank that Worsaw had put on him through Ives (who owed Worsaw more than a few favours and could be counted on to pay his debt), Hansard wasn't backing down. Which showed guts. Worsaw admired guts.

But the deeper motive of Worsaw's admiration was simply that he knew Hansard to be a veteran of Viet Nam, the last of the big fighting-wars. Worsaw himself had been born four years too late to enlist for that war, and so he had never, to his chagrin, undergone a soldier's baptism of fire. He had never known, and perhaps now he never would, what it was like to look at a man through the sights of a loaded rifle, to squeeze the trigger and see that man fall dead. Life had cheated Worsaw of that supreme experience, and it had offered very little by way of compensation. Why else, after all, does a person go Army?

He fished the novel out of his back pocket and started to read again. He skipped ahead to the chapter he liked best, the burning of the village of Tam Chau. The anonymous author described it very well, with lots of convincing details. Worsaw liked a realistic-type novel that showed what life was like.

## **fourteen**

### **The Bride**

LOVE WILL INTRUDE itself into places where it simply has no business being—into lives or stories that are just too occupied with other matters to give it its due. But somehow it can always be squeezed in. Marriage is an exemplary institution for this purpose, since conjugal love can usually “go without saying,” whereas the more exotic forms of romance demand the stage all to themselves, scornful of the ordinary business of life. A married man can divide his life comfortably in half, into a private and a public sector, which need never, so long as both run smoothly along, impinge upon each other.

Thus, Hansard had fallen in love, paid court, proposed, been accepted, and now it is the very morning of the wedding—and all these things have already taken place, as it were, in the wings. We should not suppose, because of



this, that Hansard's was a milder sort of love than another man's or that the romance was so ordinary and undistinguished as to be without interest for us—or even, perhaps, for the principals involved. We need only point out the singular circumstance that the rivals of the beloved were, essentially, her exact doubles to dispel such a notion. No, if there were time, it would be most interesting to linger over their month-long idyll, to document the days and nights, to smile at the follies, to record the quicksilver weathers of their growing love. Notice, for instance, how Hansard's expression has relaxed. There is a sparkle in his eyes that we have not seen there before. Or is it, perhaps, that they seem deeper? He smiles more often—there can be no doubt of that—and even when he is not smiling there is something about his lips . . . what is it? Do they seem fuller now? See, too, how his jaw has relaxed, and when he turns his head, how the tendons are less prominent. Small changes, but taken as a whole they give his face an altogether different stamp. Surely it is a change for the better.

Already it is May 26, the morning of the wedding—how quickly a month can go by! And is there no time left to tell how splendid a month it has been, of what has been happening back there in the wings? By all means, let us take the time—while the bride and her three bridesmaids (for Bridgetta-Sub-One had gone through the transmitter once more, increasing the Sub-Two population by one. The newcomer immediately assumed the role of Bridget, for the bride would now be neither Bridie nor Jet nor yet Bridget—but Mrs. Hansard.), the two Panofskys, and Hansard are walking down the May-morning streets to the church.

The month had gone by as though they'd been playing a game all the while: there had been such *fun*. Sometimes Hansard spent the day alone with "his" Bridgetta; at other times one or more of her doubles would come out with them to swim in the municipal police station or in the Senate buildings. He and Bridgetta had made love in heaps of flowers in a florist's window. They had taken picnic lunches to diplomatic dinners, where, since there was no room for them around the table, they had sat on top and dangled their legs through the tablecloth. They'd played

tennis, singles and doubles, after spreading slices of the linoleum rugs about the court so that they wouldn't lose the tennis balls. The greatest lark, once Hansard got over his embarrassment at playing a children's game, had been Bridgetta's special version of hide-and-seek, which they played in the most crowded streets and offices of the city, while the sober workaday population milled about them. They'd sneaked into the most expensive theatres and left during the first act if they found the play not to their liking—left without any regret for the money wasted. (And more often than not, the plays were boring, since they had to be seen in dumb show.) At especially bad performances, Hansard and one or more Bridgetta would get up on the stage and ham it up themselves. Such fun, and much, much more, too—and gentler moments, which might be only a word, a caress, a glance, forgotten as quickly as it happened, but what, if not the sum of such moments, is love? A moment, a month—how quickly—and here they are already on the way to the church!

The bride was wearing a makeshift gown sewn together from damask tablecloths and synthetic lace plundered from various articles of lingerie, no one back in the Real World having had the forethought, or the occasion, to provide for such a contingency as this today. If only fashion were considered, the bridesmaids might have been thought a good deal better dressed than the bride—but the bride was wrapped in the glory of a myth that quite out-tops all that fashion can do. Both Panofskys were wearing formal clothes, since they had usually set off through the transmitters attired formally for the theatre. Hansard, however, had nothing better than his everyday uniform, for which the hat was still missing.

The church was crowded when they arrived, and there was no room for the invisible intruders except before the altar. Bridie put a tape of the *Tannhäuser* wedding march on the portable phonograph and let it play at medium volume. There was a stir in the waiting crowd, and heads turned to regard the bride advancing down the centre aisle, her train borne up by three children. "A pity we couldn't get orange blossoms for you, my dear," Panofsky whispered to the bride-to-be, who was holding a bouquet of yester-



day's wilted roses, the transmitters of Elba having provided nothing more appropriate for the day.

Bridgetta took three steps forward to stand behind the other bride, her feet planted squarely in the billowing train. The two grooms came out of the sacristy to take the hands of their betrothed. The minister began to speak the silent words of the ceremony, which Panofsky, reading his lips, repeated after him.

Hansard had to dodge out of the way when the groom reached around to receive the ring from his best man. Panofsky handed Hansard the ring that Bridie had made from a costume-jewellery ring of her own by removing the stone and filing away the setting until there was only a thin gold band. Hansard placed the gold circlet on Bridgetta's finger.

He leaned forward to kiss her. When his lips were almost touching hers, she whispered, "Say it again," and he said, "I do, I do." Then they kissed, man and wife now, till death should part them.

"I've written a small epithalamion for the occasion. Would anyone like to hear a small epithalamion?" Panofsky asked.

"Afterwards. Epithalamions come with the dinner," Jet said.

The sub-one bride and groom turned around and, stepping to an inaudible music, descended from the altar and went out of the church. Bridie ran the tape ahead to the sprightlier Mendelssohn theme. Hansard and Bridgetta stopped kissing.

"Stand back and let me look at you," he said, smiling broadly.

She stepped back, and then, when the shot rang out, stepped back again. Blood stained the makeshift bridal gown just beneath her heart. Her mouth dropped open, and the smile was vanished from her lips, from her eyes. He caught her in his arms. She was dead.

"That's *one*," shouted a half-familiar voice. Hansard turned to see Worsaw standing in the midst of the wedding guests crowding into the aisle. "And this is two." The rifle fired again, but he missed Bridie, who had been his second target.

"Get down, out of sight!" Hansard shouted, though he

did not think to take his own advice. Jet took hold of the wheelchair of one Panofsky and pushed him into the sacristy. Bridie and the new Bridget both dived into the floor. The other Panofsky had driven off under his own power, and Hansard could not see him, though indeed he could see very little beyond the widening circle of blood staining the damask of the bridal dress. Forgotten, the tape recorder continued to play the Mendelssohn march tune.

"Beast!" Panofsky's voice shouted. "Monstrous, loveless beast!" He was driving his wheelchair through the crush of people in the centre aisle. He aimed a revolver at Worsaw, but even from where he was Hansard could see the old man's aim was wide. A third and fourth shot rang out, the pistol and then the rifle, and Panofsky pitched forward in his chair. The wheels penetrated the surface of the floor, but the chair scarcely slowed in its headlong motion forward. Soon the wheelchair, bearing the crumpled body, had passed out of sight downward.

Hansard realized that the moment demanded action, but he was reluctant to let his bride's still-warm body sink to the floor.

Another rifle shot—and the tape recorder was silenced.

"That was dumb, Hansard," Worsaw called out. "Playing that music was plain dumb. I wouldn't have known you was in here without that."

Gently, Hansard lowered Bridgetta's body, keeping his eyes always on her murderer.

"Oh, you don't have to worry yourself yet, Captain, I won't touch *you* till I've wiped out your friends. I've got a score to settle with you. Remember?"

Hansard reached inside the jacket of his uniform for the pistol with which Panofsky had provided him. He did not move fast.

"Don't be stupid, Captain. How can you pull that out, when all I have to do is squeeze a trigger? Now, put your hands up in the air, and tell those women and that other old man to come out from where they're hiding. If they're good-looking enough, I might not have to kill them after all. How about that?"

Hansard did not obey these commands, nor did he, by any deliberate action, disobey them. Indeed, his mind was



too numb to produce the thoughts that would have led him to action.

Behind Worsaw a woman's voice let forth an incoherent cry; Worsaw spun to face the imagined danger, but it came not from behind him, as it first seemed, but from above. He had been standing at the back of the church, beneath the choir loft. When he turned, Panofsky's wheelchair dropped through the low-hanging ceiling on top of him. Hansard's wit thawed sufficiently for him to draw his pistol from its holster and empty it into Worsaw's back.

Jet dropped down from the choir loft and came running forward to Hansard. She spoke disjointedly—"I thought . . . are you hurt? . . . and then, around the outside of the church, and up the stairs to the choir . . . it was so heavy, and I could hear him. . . ." He allowed her to embrace him, but he did not return her embrace. His body was rigid, his jaw tense, his eyes glazed with inexpressiveness.

Once she'd released him, he walked forward and turned over Worsaw's bleeding body. "Three times," he said. "First, inside the manmitter. Then, at the pumping station. And now here. I seem to spend all my time killing this one man."

Bridie and the new Bridget came in at the main door, where the last of the wedding guests were filing out. "Bernard is dead," Bridie announced. "We found him in the cellar. But where's the other Bernard?"

"In the sacristy," said Jet. "Hiding in the minister's clothes closet. It was his idea that I use his chair as a projectile. He felt that I would probably have just as poor aim with a pistol as his double had."

"I seem to spend all my *life* killing people," Hansard said aloud, though he seemed to be talking only to himself.

"Nathan, it isn't like that," Jet insisted earnestly. "What happened today could have happened any time, without your ever being around. It was an accident, a grotesque accident."

"Go away, please, all of you. I'd rather not see . . . your faces . . . when hers. . . ." He turned away from the three women and walked back to the altar. There he took up the dead Bridgetta in his arms.

Jet would have protested again, but she was checked by Bridie. Instead she went with the empty wheelchair into the

sacristy. Bridie and the new Bridget dragged the body of Worsaw out of the church. In five minutes Jet returned to ask when they would see him again.

"I want to spend the night here," Hansard said, "with my bride."

Jet went away. The cleaning people came into the church and began to sweep it out and mop up, though they did not see the blood-flecked book lying in the centre aisle: *The Private War of Sergeant Worsaw*.

Afterwards, the electric lights were turned off. In the semi-darkness Hansard found himself able at last to cry. It had been many years since the tears had come from those eyes, and they did not, at first, flow freely.

Before the brute fact of death, nothing can be said. It would be best if, like the three women, we leave Hansard to himself now. His grief, like his love, cannot take a very large part of our story, which is not very far from ending.

## f i f t e e n

### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

AND YET—WHAT a curious, contradictory grief it was. For she who had died was not dead. She was alive; thrice over, she was alive. Though no one of the Bridgettas proposed this consolation in so many words, still the daily and unavoidable fact of their presence, of *her* presence, could not but have its effect on Hansard. In one sense it only made his loss more poignant by offering constant reminders of her whom he had lost. On the other hand, he could not very well pretend that his loss was irreplaceable.

The surviving Panofsky and three Bridgettas, for their part, accepted what had happened with great equanimity. They were, after all, accustomed to the idea of their own expendability.

Then too, there was the sobering consideration that in a week—in six days—in five days—they would *all* be dead, Bridgetta, Panofsky, Hansard, and the whole populace of the Real World. Even in the depths of his grief Hansard was aware of the minutes slipping by, of the dreaded day creeping up on them, like a fog bank rolling in from the river.



On the evening of the 27th, Panofsky called them all together. "The question arises, fellow citizens—how shall we pass the time? Bridgetta has a supply of LSD in our medicine cabinet, should anyone so desire."

Hansard shook his head.

"Nor do I. However, we may change our minds. If anyone starts to panic, it's a good thing to remember. I understand it's especially helpful for terminal cancer patients, and somehow I've always associated cancer and the bomb. There are also any number of bottles of good brandy and Scotch in the cellar, should the need arise. What I would suggest, most seriously, is what a defrocked priest advised in a clandestine religion class in the labour camp of my youth—that if one knows the Day of Judgement is at hand, one should just go about one's ordinary business. Any other course partakes of hypocrisy. For my own part, I intend to study the folio of equations that Bernard-Sub-One just sent me through the transmitter."

Though it was sensible advice, Hansard had difficulty following it. With Bridgetta dead, the ordinary fabric of his life had dissolved. He might still continue to mourn her, but as the time advanced, the magnitude of the impending catastrophe seemed to mock at the smallness of his own sorrow. Perhaps it was exactly this that goaded him to find a solution to the catastrophe—and thereby restore a measure of dignity to his own mourning.

Or perhaps it was just luck.

However that may be, he found himself more and more driven to listen to music. At first he gave his attention to the more fulsomely elegiac selections from Panofsky's library of tapes: *Das Lied von der Erde*, *Die Winterreise*, the *Missa Solemnis*. He listened to the music with an urgency more intense than he had known even at the depth of his adolescent *Sturm-und-Drang*, as though some part of him already knew that the key he sought was concealed behind those silvery shifting tone-fabrics, hidden in the pattern but a part of it. Gradually he found the Romantics, even Beethoven, too heavy for his taste. He would have liked to turn to Bach then, but Panofsky's library provided only the Sonatas for Unaccompanied Violin and the Well-Tempered Clavier. Here, too, though indistinctly still, he felt the presence moving just beyond the veil, yet when he

tried to touch it, to fix it firmly in apprehension, it eluded him, as when, reaching into a pool of water, the fish dart swiftly out of reach of the grasping hand. At last it was Mozart who gave it to him.

On the first play-through of the tape of *Don Giovanni*, he felt the veil tearing. It began during the trio of the three masquers at the end of the first act, and the rent widened steadily until the penultimate moment when Donna Elvira arrives to interrupt the Don at his carousal. He scorns her earnest warnings, she turns to go out of the door . . . and screams, the great D-minor chord thunders in the orchestra, and the Statue bursts into the hall to drag the unrepentant Don to hell.

Hansard stopped the tape, reversed the reel, and listened to the scene again from the moment of Donna Elvira's scream.

The veil parted.

"The chord," he said. "Of course, the chord."

He tore himself away from the music to seek out Panofsky, but he discovered the old man sitting only a few feet away, listening raptly to the opera.

"Doctor Panofsky, I—"

"Please, the music! And no more of that foolish 'Doctor'."

Hansard switched off the recorder during the height of the brief, electric scene between Don Giovanni and the Statue.

"I'm sorry, but I must tell you now. It concerns the music in a way—but more than that—I've thought of how it can be done, what you said could not be. How to communicate with the Real World! Perhaps, just perhaps."

"The most awesome moment in all music, and you—"

"I'll form a chord!"

"It is true," Panofsky replied, in a more moderate tone, "that Mozart can suggest to us a harmony embracing the world, but art is sadly not the same thing as reality. You are wrought up, Nathan. Calm yourself."

"No, no truly—*this is the way*. You *can* talk to Panofsky-Sub-One, by becoming part of him again, by restoring the unity that was disrupted. You'll mesh with his body—and with his mind. Probably when he's asleep."



A light began to glow in Panofsky's eyes. "I am a fool," he whispered, then paused, as though waiting for Hansard to contradict him—or perhaps for his other self to agree. He went on: "An idiot. A chord—yes, it is a fine analogy, though, mind you, nothing *more*. I can't be sure yet. There is a demonstrable relationship between a man of the Real World and his echo, a sort of proportion, but whether it is enough. . . . I cannot, in the time we have left, develop a mathematical model—"

"There's no need to. Just *do* it!"

"But what a lovely analogy." His eyes were closed, and his fingers moved in pantomime before him. "You sound middle C on the piano, and simultaneously the C an octave above. The ear can no longer sort out what it hears, and the overtones of the two notes resolve into a single chord."

"The fibres of the body would be the overtones," Hansard theorized eagerly. "The tone of the muscles, the memory-traces of the brain, the blood-type, the whole pattern of being. Place the two patterns together, and there'll be a sort of resonance between them, a knitting-together."

"Yes, a kind of understanding perhaps, a natural sympathy, a bond."

"A chord. And wouldn't communication be possible then?"

"Without evidence, Nathan, how can we know? But there's a chance, and I must try it. If it works, why then, Nathan, you and I may have saved the world at its last minute. You frown! What now, Nathan? Is it that you misdoubt my plan? Well, well, Napoleon had his sceptics too, and see how far he went. No, I'm perfectly confident that once I've been able to communicate with Panofsky-Sub-One, I can carry it off, grandiloquent as it must sound to you. But now I must find that gentleman out. And speak of the devil. . . ."

For another Panofsky had just entered the library through the open door. "You *might* have been waiting outside the transmitter if you'd been expecting me. It wasn't very cheery coming into an empty house. Why are the two of you looking at me as though I were a ghost? And for

that matter—" Turning to Hansard "—I don't believe we've been introduced."

"But you're not Panofsky-Sub-One," Hansard said.

"A sound induction. No, *he* just left for Moscow. Didn't you see where I'd noted it down on the memo calendar?"

"And Bridgetta?" his double asked.

"Went with him, of course."

"How long will they be gone?"

"Till June 2nd, when Malinova repeats her *Giselle*. Good heavens, Bernard, what's the matter? You look as though I'd just announced the end of the world."

But, a little later:

"You can't expect me to *build* it!" Hansard protested.

"Nonsense, Nathan—there's nothing to build. Just a trifle of re-wiring. Surely there is a stock of spare elements at the Mars base. With the equipment as it exists, it shouldn't take more than fifteen minutes work to convert those elements to what we'll need."

"But the elements for the Camp Jackson manmitter are so small!"

"Size is no consideration, Nathan. Nor is distance. And you'll have all the power you need in a dry cell. No, my chief worry is not in your assembling the transmitter, but in your getting the co-ordinates down pat. I think we can afford a day of practice. Have you ever put together your own hi-fi?"

"When I was a kid."

"Then you should have no trouble. A hi-fi is more complicated. Let me show you what you must do. In the laboratory. Now. Quickly, quickly."

At twilight of the 29th of May, Hansard and Bridie stood once again on Gove Street and watched the men of Camp Jackson walking in and out of the wall about the pumping station. Their number had been much reduced: Hansard counted fewer than ten. It was necessary to use these transmitters, which were in continuous operation, rather than the manmitters within the camp proper, since there were no jumps scheduled to Camp Jackson/Mars for two more weeks. Had Panofsky possessed the co-ordinates for the Mars Command Post, Hansard might have foregone this sort of hitch-hiking altogether.



Finally the last of the men that they had seen go in had come back out. They waited another half hour, then strolled down the street to the wall, and through, trundling an empty wheelchair before them. The door of the pumping house had been standing open during the day, and the great volume of sub-two water had spilled out, to run down the hill and form a shallow moat on the inside of the wall. There were only a few inches of water on the floor of the station, and the steady cascade pouring out of the transmitter, the echo of the water that had just been transmitted to Mars. A chilly breeze stirred their clothing, originating in the transmitting chamber of the air pump.

"Now," Bridie said briskly, "we shall just have to hope that we can discover to which of the Posts they're transmitting at any given moment. Follow the technicians about and see what they do. I'll look over the equipment meanwhile."

Within five minutes they had found the switch marked CJ that controlled air transmissions. They observed two full cycles of transmission, as the stream of air was routed to each of the Command Posts in turn. There was an interval between transmissions averaging five seconds. Only during this time would it be safe for Hansard to enter the transmitting chamber; a little earlier or a little later, and he would be transmitted piecemeal to Mars as Worsaw had been.

"It's not enough time," Bridie said unhappily.

"It's enough time," said Hansard.

They took turns blowing up the air mattress which was to serve as his cushion inside the transmission chamber. The cushion was not for the sake of comfort, but to prevent, as much as possible, any part of Hansard from projecting through the "floor" of the chamber and being left behind.

Hansard began to strap on the breathing equipment that had been stored on the underside of Panofsky's wheelchair. There would not be sub-two air on Mars, so he would have to bring his own supply. He pulled the flimsy-looking, clear plastic mask down over his head, sealed it about his neck, and opened the valve controlling oxygen input.

"Ready or not," he said, "here I come." Only after the words had left his lips did he realize that they had been an

unconscious echo of his games of hide-and-seek with Bridgetta.

Bridie said something, but with the mask sealed over his head he could not hear her. She stepped directly before him and repeated the words, with exaggerated movements of her lips and appropriate gestures: "We . . . loVe . . . You."

Hansard nodded his head curtly. "Ditto," he whispered.

Bridie stood on tiptoe so she might kiss him. Their lips pressed against each other's through the thin film of plastic.

"Be . . . LuckY . . . CoMe . . . Back."

He positioned himself before the transmitting chamber, and Bridie watched over the shoulder of the technician throwing switches. She nodded to Hansard, who carefully laid the rubber mattress on the bottom of the chamber, then sliding in through the thin metal wall spread himself out flat upon it in the darkness. In almost the same instant the mattress popped and the air rushed out. "Hell!" Hansard said aloud, but it was too late to turn back now. At almost any moment the switch would be thrown that would send him to Mars.

It was taking too long. He remembered the last time he had gone through a transmitter: the long wait, the hand coming through the door of the vault. . . .

Then he realized that he was there, that the mattress had popped at the moment of transmission. Some part of it had been pushed down through the floor of the chamber, outside the field of transmission. It was fortunate for Hansard that it had been the mattress that had thus inadvertently punctured and not his gas-mask.

He rose to his feet and walked forward in the darkness of the receiving chamber. He came to a wall and passed through it. There, not ten feet away, drinking coffee with General Pittmann, was Nathan Hansard, Captain in the United States Army. No man had ever seemed more strange to Hansard than he.

The mattress popped and the air rushed out. "Hell!" Hansard said aloud, but it was too late to turn back now. Then his sub-three flesh, too insubstantial to be supported by the "skin" of energy of the sub-one world (Mars, not Earth, since this transmitter, unlike the Camp Jackson



manmitter, transmitted continuously, re-echoing endlessly the echoes thrown back by transmission) began to sink slowly into the ground. Realizing the hopelessness of his situation, Hansard-Sub-Three turned off the oxygen input valve.

An infinite series of Nathan Hansards, echoes of echoes, made the same decision, and each died clinging to the same hope: "I hope he makes it."

## s i x t e e n

### The Chord

"YOU'RE NOT LOOKING well, Nathan. Small wonder. I don't suppose I look very thriving myself."

As a matter of fact, though, that was just how one would have described General Pittmann at that moment: thriving. While Hansard had seemed to age a decade in these last weeks, the General's features had assumed a strange and unbecoming youthfulness, an effect exaggerated by an unaccustomed looseness in his manner. His tie was knotted lopsidedly, and his collar unbuttoned. His hair needed trimming and his shoes were scuffed. There was a lightness in his step, a nervousness in his gestures, a quickness in his speech, that had not been customary to him these many years. Just so, the weather of an October afternoon can sometimes be mistaken for spring.

Hansard looked down at the rainbow-banded swirls of oil coating his coffee. With great effort he moved his lips to say, "No sir."

"Perhaps you're not getting enough vitamins. I notice that you've been missing meals. We should always take care of our health. Good health is our most precious possession."

Hansard couldn't decide if the General were taunting him with these banalities, or if he really did have so little sense of their inappropriateness.

"Now if I were Julius Caesar, I would be wary of someone with that 'lean and hungry look' of yours."

A joke seemed to be called for, so Hansard roused himself to make an attempt. "I'd lose that look fast enough,

if you could get us something to eat besides these everlasting frozen dinners."

Pittmann's laughter was out of proportion to the joke. He indulged himself in a short diatribe against Army food. It was quite funny. Despite himself Hansard had to smile. Since it had become evident, two weeks before, that the order were not going to be countermanded neither man had mentioned the bombs.

Hansard<sub>2</sub> regarded himself with something approaching horror. That wan smile, those furtive eyes returning ever and again to the coffee cup, the pallor and inertness of his flesh, and—overwhelmingly—his *falseness*. For though he could not understand what words Hansard<sub>1</sub> was speaking, he knew, beyond all doubting, that they were lies.

At 2130 hours Hansard<sub>1</sub> finished his coffee and went out into the corridor, Hansard<sub>2</sub> following, where he strolled idly and ill-at-ease. Hansard<sub>2</sub> experienced another moment of uncanniness when he passed, on his way out of the toilet, Worsaw, who, when he saw that Hansard<sub>1</sub> could no more see him, sneered and muttered a silent obscenity that one did not need to be a lipreader to interpret. How strange it seemed that this man, resenting him as deeply as he did, should yet be subservient to him here. How had society so been ordered that all mankind should accept the invisible restraints of custom—Hansard no less than Worsaw?

For it was evident that Hansard<sub>1</sub>, for no more compelling reason than because it was expected of him, was prepared to assist at the annihilation of humanity, in violation of everything he knew to be moral. It was a paltry consolation to realize that a million others could have been found as pliable as he.

Eventually Hansard<sub>1</sub> went into his own small room, which, despite some few shards of blond wood tentatively posing as furniture, seemed less a habitation than a branch of the corridor that came here to a dead end. Instead of preparing for sleep, Hansard<sub>1</sub> took a book from the wall locker and began reading.

It was the Bible. Hansard had not looked into a Bible since he'd prepared for Confirmation a quarter-century before. This nervous, morose stranger seemed to bear less



and less relationship with anyone Hansard<sub>2</sub> could recognize as himself.

It had seemed worth a try. Wasn't religion intended for just such times as this, when all reasonable hopes were daunted? Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and all that.

But it wasn't working. For one thing, there was just so much of it, and none that he had found—neither prophets nor apostles nor yet the faded image of Christ, who seemed to live for Hansard, in a landscape of calendar art—seemed quite to the purpose. Here on death's brink he found it as hard to believe in the Resurrection and the Life as he had at the age of fourteen, when, for his parents' sake (and had *they* really cared so much themselves?), he had been confirmed.

No, he had found no consolation here, but he did (as one will torment oneself by probing at a rotten tooth) take a kind of perverse pleasure in reading just those passages—in *Job*, in *Ecclesiastes*, in *Jeremiah*—that strengthened and confirmed his unbelief:

Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity.

For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.

Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me; for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

In sleep the complex melodies of conscious thought would be dampened; there would be only the simple C of Hansard<sub>1</sub>'s sleeping mind, and, an octave below, the C of Hansard<sub>2</sub>. Such, at least, had been his hope. But he was impatient.

Now, he thought, *it may be possible*. . . .

Carefully he lowered his frame into the seated body of Hansard<sub>1</sub>. A curious and not quite pleasant sensation to feel his two legs, real and ghostly, slipping into alignment, to feel his breath stop for a moment and then return, syn-

chronized with the breathing of Hansard<sub>1</sub>. His vision blurred, and then, when it was restored, he found his eyes moving over the printed page, not reading, only seeing the print skitter past.

He concentrated on the meaning of the text and tried to bend his mind to the emotional state that he supposed must be Hansard<sub>1</sub>'s. But thought he could feel his larynx vibrating with the same subvocalized sound-patterns, the two minds maintained their distinct identities. Sometimes he would feel a memory stirring with strange autonomy, or he would feel, fleetingly, the most inexpressible sadness, but it was with these moments, as with night-vision, that whenever he tried to concentrate upon them they would retire into the obscurity whence they had come.

Reluctantly he disengaged himself from Hansard<sub>1</sub>. It was no good. He would have to wait till he went to sleep.

Hansard could not sleep. Since he had made the Mars jump he had been taking heavier and heavier dosages of barbiturates. They no longer helped. He lay on his bunk in the darkness, remembering how, as a child, in another darkness, he had lain awake so, trying by sheer power of imagination to place himself outside his slum-suburban bedroom, far far off, on Mars perhaps; whispering—*If I pretend hard enough it will come true.*

And so it had, and so it had.

Now where? Now, what worlds could he wish himself way to? Madness perhaps—such a madness as seemed to have possessed Pittmann. Or sleep? But he remembered a tag from Shakespeare: To sleep, perchance to dream—aye, there's the rub.

He elbowed himself out of bed, smoothed the wrinkles out of his shirt, and went out into the corridor. Now where?

In the observatory he looked at the dead rocks of Mars. In his youth, he had been so sure that Mars had been teeming with life. Even when the first Mariner pictures had come back (he'd been thirteen) he refused to believe them. Nobody believes, at that age, that there can be such a thing as death.

Though the clocks inside the Command Post gave the time as only a bit after midnight, it was a bright, chiaro-



scuro morning outside. It hurt one's eyes to look too long upon it.

*Sleep, you bastard, sleep!* Hansard<sub>2</sub> thought angrily. He did not dare cease pacing the floor of the observatory, for he was himself so tired (having kept himself awake throughout the previous night just so that he would not be insomniac himself) as to be in danger of dropping off to sleep if he let himself sit down anywhere. Hansard<sub>1</sub>, meanwhile, sat staring at the Mars noonday. What in that barren waste absorbed him so?

At length Hansard<sub>1</sub> did return to his room and lay down again, without undressing. In the utter darkness Hansard<sub>2</sub> had no way to know if his double had fallen asleep except by entering his body.

This time Hansard<sub>1</sub>'s eyes were closed. His jaw relaxed, his mouth opened slightly, his lungs drew deeper breaths of air. His fist unclenched, and he accepted the case of ammunition that was handed to him. They were going hunting. "For what?" he asked, but the grown-ups went on chattering in their shrill buzzsaw voices, ignoring him. He walked through fields of sharp black rocks, stirring up swarms of buzzing flies with every step. The ammunition case was so heavy, and he was so little—it wasn't fair! It was surprising how few people there were on Mars. He supposed they must all be locked up underground or somewhere. Why couldn't he carry the gun instead? But he was. He was all alone with the gun, in that burnt-over landscape. The ashes got into his eyes so that he almost had to cry. He walked toward the flame that burned at the horizon, holding the rifle on the ready. The man was shooting fire from a plastic garden hose, burning the rice, and so he planted the butt of the rifle into the ground, because he was too little to shoot it any other way. He looked at the man with the garden hose, in his strange uniform. No man had ever seemed more hateful to Hansard than he. The man Hansard turned the flame thrower on the boy Hansard, and they woke, both of them, screaming a single scream.

"It wasn't right," he said, astonished that it had taken himself so long to learn what, as soon as it had been spoken, seemed so self-evident.

And then, from another and not quite familiar (as

though, waking, he continued to dream) part of his mind. "It *isn't* right."

He shook his head sadly. Right or wrong, there was nothing *he* could do about it.

"But there *is*," the dream-voice insisted. The voice was his own and not his own. He relaxed and let himself smile. It was such a relief to have gone mad. It would be interesting to see what he did now. "Listen," said the voice, his own and not his own, and he listened.

## seventeen

### The Cataclysm

"GOOD MORNING, NATHAN! You seem to have recovered your appetite."

"Yes, and then some. No matter how much I seem to eat this morning, my stomach still feels hollow as a drum. Can you beat that?"

"—and your good humour too. Welcome back to civilization. We've missed you."

"Just in the nick of time, eh?"

Pittmann regarded his subordinate uncertainly: had this been said in jest? He decided it had been, but limited his show of appreciation to the barest smile.

"And you already have the coffee perking."

"I'm afraid I made it a little strong."

General Pittmann poured himself a cupful from the electric percolator and sipped the hot coffee appraisingly. "Yes, just a bit." It was a choice between making do with this and waiting for another pot. He made do.

"I've been thinking . . ." Hansard said.

"We try to discourage thinking in the Army," Pittmann said placidly, as he pried apart two slices of frozen bread and put them into the toaster.

". . . about what you said the day I arrived here. I think you were right."

"I wouldn't be surprised." He grimaced over a second mouthful of the coffee. "But you'll have to refresh my memory, Nathan. I say so many right things."

"That it's genocidal to use the bombs."

"Did I say that? Surely only in the most hypothetical



way, if I did. For my own part, I have little but contempt for people who warm their consciences over such words—and over that word especially. You can't win a war, you know, without making omelettes." Pleased with his timing, Pittmann cracked two eggs neatly into the electric skillet. "So I hope you're not taking such talk *too* seriously. At your age it isn't becoming to be that deadly earnest."

"But if the word has any meaning at all—"

"Exactly, Nathan: it has none. It's a red flag to wave at liberals."

"There is the classic example."

"Yes?" General Pittmann looked up, inviting—or daring—Hansard to continue. An impish grin played at the corner of his lips. "The example of Germany, you mean? Why do you bring up a subject if you then refuse to talk about it? Auschwitz was ill-advised, certainly. A terrible waste of manpower. Not to mention the prejudice involved. That is what *I* find most offensive. But nowadays prejudice doesn't enter into it. The bomb is the most democratic weapon man has ever devised. It draws absolutely no distinctions. You make lousy coffee, Nathan."

"You make filthy jokes, General."

"That borders on impertinence, you know. But I'll overlook that for the sake of having you making conversation again."

"It will taste better if you put milk and sugar in it."

"A barbaric custom," Pittmann complained, but he followed Hansard's advice.

"Since when have you let considerations like that stand in your way?"

Pittmann laughed in good earnest. "Better, much better. You see, it's all in having a delicate touch. Would you like a piece of toast. Isn't life. . . ." He scarcely seemed to pay attention to the knife that slipped out of his fingers and clattered on the floor. ". . . a terrible waste of manpower?" He laughed weakly.

"Oh, put that gun away, Nathan! What do you think I'm going to do—attack you with a butter knife? I'm too weak to. . . ." He closed his eyes. ". . . to finish sentences. It won't do you any good, Nathan, this noble gesture of yours. If you'd waited till the last minute, perhaps you might have

prevented me—but then, this is only one post. What of the other? What of Russia? Foolish Nathan.”

“Why did you poison me?”

Hansard stared at the General coldly. Pittmann had very delicately balanced himself in the spindly tubular chair so that he could not fall out of it when he was unconscious.

“I always wondered, you know. . . . I always wondered what it would be like to die. I like it.” He fell asleep, smiling.

Hansard chuckled. He knew Pittmann would be mortified when he woke up next day. There had been nothing but Army-issue barbiturates in the coffee, which were guaranteed non-lethal in any quantity. Hansard left the Officers’ Mess, locking the door behind him.

He returned to his cabin to work on what Panofsky had promised would be “a trifle of rewiring.” The adjustments that had to be made in the standard transmitter elements that Hansard had rifled from storage taxed his manual abilities to the limit, but he had had the advantage of having performed the same task only hours before under Panofsky’s superintendence. It was exasperating just now, at the moment of highest crisis, to have to work electronic jigsaw puzzles, but it was possible. He needn’t even feel rushed. Indeed, with so much at stake, he did not dare to.

When all the assemblies were put together and they’d been checked and rechecked, Hansard fitted them into two overnight bags—all but the essential “fix.” This he hid in the observatory ventilation shaft.

As fate would have it, it was Worsaw whom he found on duty before the entrance to the manmitter.

“Private Worsaw, the General asked me to tell you to report to him on the double in the observatory.”

“Sir?” Worsaw looked doubtful. It was not likely Pittmann would be interested in seeing *him*.

“I shall stand duty for you here, of course. Better not keep him waiting. I suspect his request has something to do with those chevrons missing from your sleeves.” Hansard winked, a friendly conspirator’s wink.

Worsaw saluted briskly and took his leave. *Poor fool*, Hansard thought. *He too walks out of my life smiling*. He was happy that he had not been required once again—and



this time definitively—to kill Worsaw. He never wanted to kill anyone again.

Hansard entered the manmitter with the key he had taken from Pittmann. After taking out the first of the devices he would need, he depressed the button that operated the manmitter. The letters stencilled on the steel wall flickered from MARS to EARTH. He was home again, but there was no time to kiss the Terran ground. His arrival would not have been unannounced; neither would it be welcome.

He looked at his watch, 2.18 p.m. He had, he estimated, another three minutes. He had found that he could hold his breath no longer than that. He made the last connections in the receiverless transmitter just as the door of the receiver sprang open and the guards burst in.

They opened fire on the man who was no longer there.

“Receiverless transmitters?” Hansard had objected, when first Panofsky had outlined his plan. “But you’ve said yourself that such a thing isn’t possible. And it doesn’t make sense.”

“Sense!” Panofsky jeered. “What is sense? Does gravity make sense? Do wavicles? Does the Blessed Trinity? God glories in paradoxes more than in syllogisms. But I was quite sincere in what I told you: strictly speaking, a receiverless transmitter isn’t possible. The receiver has to be where you want your bundles transmitted. Why not send it along *with* them?”

“Yes, and why don’t I lift myself up by my bootstraps?” Hansard replied sourly.

“The heart of the matter,” Panofsky continued imperturbably, “lies in that word ‘instantaneous.’ If matter transmission is truly instantaneous, and not just very very fast, like light, then at the exact instant of transmission, where is the object we’re transmitting? Is it here, or is it there? And the answer, of course, is that it is both here and there. And thus—the receiverless transmitter, so-called. We just attach a set of three transmitters and three receivers to the object, posit the transmitters as being *here* and the receivers as being *there*, press the button, and *poof!* You see?”

Hansard shook his head glumly.

“But you’ve already seen it *work!* You travelled all over the house in it.”

"Oh, I know it happened. But the state I'm in now, you could as easily convince me that it's magic that makes it work as the laws of nature. That's what it is—even down to the magic number three."

"Numbers *are* magic, of course, and none more so than three. But there is also a reason for that number. Three points establish a plane. It is the hypothetical plane that those three receivers define by which we can place the transmitted object at exactly that point in space where we wish it to be."

"Even I can call your bluff on that one, Doctor. It takes four points to define an object's position in space. Three will determine a plane, but for a solid body you need four. That's simple Euclidean geometry."

"And you'll get a good grade in that subject. In fact, there does have to be a fourth transmitter-receiver for the whole thing to work at all. And the fourth one doesn't travel along with the others. It stays behind and serves as the point of reference. The 'here' posit of the transmitter and the 'there' posit of the receiver can be considered to form two immense pyramids sharing a common apex at the 'fix' point."

"And where will my fix be?"

"On Mars, of course. Where else could it be?"

Naturally enough, the first point for which Panofsky had been able to obtain exact information concerning longitude, latitude, and altitude had been his own residence, and it was there, in the library, that Hansard came first after leaving Camp Jackson/Virginia. Panofsky and Bridgetta being away in Moscow, Hansard was conveniently alone. He placed the first transmitter-receiver at the agreed upon location behind the uniform edition of Bulwer-Lytton. Then, taking up the two bags with the rest of the equipment, he set off once again, a comfortable thirty seconds ahead of schedule.

It had been more difficult to find sufficiently detailed information concerning two other locations. The data on the Great Pyramid of Egypt Panofsky had discovered in a back number of *The Journal of Theosophical Science*.

Hansard arrived at the apex of the Great Pyramid at night. He had never seen a desert from such a height under



moonlight before, and despite the urgency of his task, he had to pause to gaze down at the scene with awe. Someone—perhaps a tourist—glimpsed Hansard's silhouette against the moon and began shouting at him. The night wind carried his words off, and Hansard caught only scattered wisps of sound, not enough even to tell what language the man was speaking, much less his meaning. Hansard left the second of the transmitter-receivers atop the crumbling stone and moved on to the third, and last, point of the triangulation.

He found himself in the midst of a vast concrete expanse from which there projected, at wide intervals, the small knobs of the headstones. This was the eighty acres of the Viet Nam War-Dead Memorial erected outside Canberra by the new liberal government that had taken Australia out of the war. With a magnanimity unparalleled in history, the government had here commemorated the enemy's dead in equal number with its own.

Hansard set the last receiver-transmitter upon one of the headstones. Only one minute twenty-three seconds had passed since he'd made the first jump from Camp Jackson/Virginia. There was time, some few seconds, for reverence.

"It was wrong," Hansard said with great definiteness.

And, though he did not go on to say so, the wrong was irretrievable. The boy was dead for ever. This very headstone might mark his grave.

That was all the time he could allow for reverence. He pressed down the button of the third transmitter-receiver. A delayed-action mechanism provided him with fifteen seconds' grace. He unzipped the second of the two bags and took out the neutralizer. It had an effective range of six feet.

"You'd better go now," he said to himself. It was Hansard<sub>2</sub> who said this, but there was no reply from Hansard<sub>1</sub>.

Only then did Hansard<sub>2</sub> realize that he had been deceived all this while, that in an inviolable part of his mind Hansard<sub>1</sub> had formed his intention and kept it secret from his other self. It was too late to argue with him, for suddenly the ground under Hansard<sub>2</sub>'s feet became solid, and he knew that the Earth had just been turned upside-down on its axis and transmitted to the other side of the solar system.

"Impossible!" Hansard had said. "And if it *could* be done, it would be a madness worse than the bombs."

"Fudge, Nathan! Haven't you learned yet that I'm always right?"

"What will become of all the people in the Real World? You should think of their welfare before you consider ours."

"The chief immediate consequence for them will be that people in the Northern Hemisphere will suddenly see the constellations usual to southern skies. There will, in consequence, probably be more than a few shipwrecks on the night-side of Earth. A small enough price to pay, considering the alternative."

"But how is it that this is to prevent the bombs? They'll be coming from Mars to their receiver-satellites in any case."

"But the receiver satellites will lie outside the Earth's field of transmission. Earth-Sub-One will cross the solar system and leave the satellites behind."

"So they can drop their bombs on Earth-Sub-Two?"

"You forget that for anything constituted of primary matter, secondary matter seems not to exist. From the point of view of those bombs, Earth will seem to have disappeared. Moreover, they will cease to be satellites, since the echo of Earth remaining behind has no gravitational grip on them. They'll fly off tangent to their orbits and eventually be dragged down into the sun." Panofsky grinned. "Imagine, though, what your people on Mars will think when the Earth suddenly disappears from the sky! Will they blame it on the Russians?"

Hansard was not ready to make jokes on the subject. "But . . . the magnitude of it! The whole damn Earth!"

"Is that meant to be an objection? Great magnitudes often simplify an operation. Clock towers were built before wrist watches, and the solar system has often been called a celestial timepiece. Consider that in transmitting the Earth I waste none of its momentum. Placed properly and pointed in the right direction, it should proceed in its immemorial orbit about the sun without a hairsbreadth of wobble. I can't guarantee quite *that* exactitude, but my calculations show that nothing too terrible should result."

"And turning it upside-down?"



"To conserve the order of the seasons, which as you certainly should know are caused by the Earth's position along its orbit about the sun. In effect, I am advancing the Earth six months through time. Turning it topsy-turvy will compensate for that exactly."

There was no air for him to breathe.

*You fool!* Hansard<sub>2</sub> thought angrily. *Why did you stay inside the field of neutralization? Why?*

*What difference, now?* There was a sadness in the tone of the reply that Hansard<sub>2</sub> could not believe to be his own. The six weeks they had lived apart, had, after all, made them different men.

*Do you suppose you're even now? Do you think your lost life can make up for his? Fool!*

*Not for his sake, no.*

*Then why? Why? What of Bridgetta?*

Hansard<sub>1</sub> did not, or could not, reply. Perhaps, for him, there would not have been a Bridgetta. Reluctantly, Hansard<sub>2</sub> disengaged his body from its sheath of fibres. The discarded and soon lifeless body did not sink to the ground (which was not ground for it) but slowly, ever so slowly, lifted into the air and drifted above the vast concrete field like a helium balloon, withered, at the end of a long day. The gravitational pull of the newly-created Earth<sub>2</sub> had no effect upon the primary matter of that body, and it was being pulled inexorably toward the Real Moon, low in the West, hidden behind clouds.

The moon, in turn, had begun its slow plunge towards the sun. There was no longer any force to hold it in place.

A residue at the back of Hansard<sub>2</sub>'s mind told him why his sub-one self had gone willingly to his own death: he was ashamed of having, to his way of thinking, been guilty of that most heinous of crimes—mutiny.

Hansard<sub>2</sub> removed the breathing equipment he had been wearing since the night before. He did not need it, for now he had a world of air to breathe again, a world of ground to walk upon, and a world of men to give meaning to his own manhood. This, the echo of a world, was his Real World now.

And there would not be a war to destroy it.

## eighteen

### The Happy Ending

HANSARD'S TAXI CAME to a stop outside the New St. George, a hotel that in the ordinary scheme of things he would not have been able to afford. He asked the man at the desk the number of Panofsky's suite. It was, perhaps not wholly by chance, the same that Hansard had occupied invisibly forty days before. He found the two Panofskys alone.

"Nathan! How good to see you, Nathan!" They drove their wheelchairs towards him with one accord, braking just short of a collision.

"I was afraid," said the Panofsky in the skullcap, "that I would have to leave without seeing you."

"He's off to Rome, you know," the other Panofsky explained, "to see the Pope. For the time being, anyone who travels via transmitter is under Vatican interdict, so Bernard will fly. You flew yourself, didn't you, Nathan?" Hansard nodded. "But it took you such a long time!"

"The Egyptian emigration authorities were just a little upset to find me in their country. And then, when the moon began to disappear. . . ."

"Ooof, the moon! I am so stupid, I deserve not to live. A kick in the pants I deserve."

Hansard was sceptical. "You can't mean that you actually *overlooked* that this would happen? That you thought of everything but that?"

The two Panofskys exchanged a guilty look. "Such at least," the first said mildly, "we have given the government to believe."

"But let's not speak of it, for though the government is treating us a little more civilly now, this room is surely bugged. Tell me, Nathan—do you think the end justifies the means? Once in a while perhaps? It is true that without the moon there will be no tides, either here or on Earth-Sub-One, the ocean currents will become confused, there will be terrible disasters, yes—disorders, tragedies. But on the other hand, there has not been a war. Besides, I have a plan in readiness—it is being explained now to the Russians—for recovering the moon. But you had better explain it to Nathan, Bernard, for I'm late for my plane. Is there



anything I can do for you in Rome, Nathan? Arrange a wedding, perhaps, at St. John Lateran?"

"Off to His Holiness, busybody. You know the Captain dislikes to be nudged."

"The moon," he continued, when his double had departed, "is this moment populated by a number of very perplexed, not to say frantic, scientists, Russians, none of whom have an inkling of what is happening to the solar system. Similarly, on Earth-Sub-One, no one will have any notion of what's going on—no one but myself, Panofsky-Sub-One, and even he may be upset to think that someone else has, all unknown to him developed a receiverless transmitter and put it to such apocalyptic use. Here, meanwhile, I have been explaining—to the President, to committees of every kind, finally even to the Press—what has been done, and why, and though they are all very outraged I think they are secretly glad—like a matador waking in a hospital, amazed at still being alive after his excesses of courage. They have listened to me, and a few have understood. Those who didn't understand believed. So—this is what is being done—a number of our military and scientific personnel have been transmitted to Earth-Sub-One, and there they will try to do what you did—to reintegrate with their sub-one selves. When any one of them has accomplished this, he will use a receiverless transmitter to travel to the moon, dealing with that body as you dealt with the Earth. The moon-sub-one will be returned to its proper orbit, leaving behind a sub-two echo, which can then be returned to *its* proper orbit, leaving behind a sub-three moon, which sad to say will have to fall into the sun. Unless its sub-three inhabitants, still equipped with receiverless transmitters, decide to take it somewhere else. And why shouldn't they? While their stores last they can travel anywhere in the universe. Perhaps that moon will be the first interstellar voyageur. It is all very complicated, isn't it? If you'd like to take a bath, our suite has three *huge* bathtubs. I always find a bath helps when things become too complicated."

"Thank you, not a bath. But I had hoped . . .?"

"Of course, Nathan! Of course she is here. Enter! enter, Bridgetta!"

She rode in on ripples of laughter. He did not know

which Bridgetta she was, Bridie, Jet, Bridget, any other, it made no difference, they were but a single woman, whom he loved, and he embraced her, saying, "Darling," and they kissed, a kiss that was like laughing still.

"Professor Panofsky," said Hansard stiffly (though there was a kind of grace in his stiffness now that had not been there before), "I would like to ask for the hand of your wife Bridgetta in marriage."

"You have my blessings, both of you, but first you had better come to an understanding with your rivals."

"No," Hansard said, "this time it is for *her* to decide how she wants to dispose of *me*."

"Not Bridgetta's rivals, Nathan—yours." And with a flourish, of laughter, of music, the two Nathan Hansards who had been waiting in the adjoining room entered, arm-in-arm with two more Bridgettas. They arranged themselves before him with the modest symmetry of a Mozart finale. He had known they would be here, he had known it these many days (since, after all, he was not the final, the Australian Hansard, but the penultimate Hansard, who had remained behind after the transmission to Canberra, an echo, atop the Great Pyramid), and yet he had not till now believed it. He grasped each of their extended hands in his own, and they stood there so a little while, as though about to begin a children's ring-game.

And here *we* are, quite at the end of our story—or very close to the end. Our hero is to be rewarded for his labours, the world is saved from annihilation, even the moon has been recovered, and Panofsky, for the first time in his life, is free. Now is the loveliest of June weathers, though (it is true) one has to go outside the dome to appreciate the young summer in all its glory. Now is the perfect time to take a boat out on the river or just to go walking along country roads, though these (it is true) become harder and harder to find.

But perhaps for our hero it will not be hard at all. Love bathes all landscapes in a softening light. It is only ourselves, at our greater distance, with our cooler view, who may feel a little sad to think that the world's loveliness will not always and everywhere bear too close examination.

But even that is changing! Even the world will change now and become a better world, milder and mightier, and



more humane. There will be power, and power to spare, to do all the things that were so hard to do till now. There will be no more boundaries but instead everywhere freedom and unconstraint. There will be no more war. There will be room to move about in, places to go, destinies—all the universe, in fact. What a splendid world! and what grand fun it would be to live there!

But it is too late, for we are now quite at the end of *our* story. The rest belongs to them.

It had been a wedding in the grand manner—cascades of white laces, orange blossoms, organ music, a minister with the broadest, the stateliest, of *A's*—and now they stood, Hansard and Bridgetta and Hansard and Bridgetta and Hansard and Bridgetta, on the threshold of the transmitter. Each couple had chosen a different destination for their honeymoon—the first to Ceylon, the second a cruise up the Amazon, and the third—

“Are you ready?” Panofsky asked.

In reply Hansard lifted up his bride and carried her over the threshold. Panofsky pushed the button that would transmit them to the Vatican. Hansard had never before seen the Sistine Chapel. He gasped.

Hansard sighed. “It doesn’t seem to be working, does it?”

Bridgetta laughed softly, without stopping to nibble at his ear.

He carried her back across the threshold, through the closed door. Hansard and Bridgetta and Hansard and Bridgetta were waiting for them outside the transmitter. They pointed to Panofsky, who was writing on a notepad on the worktable. Panofsky finished the note, turned, smiled, though it could not be said he smiled quite at them, and left the room.

Unthinkingly, Hansard tried to pick the piece of paper off the table. The tertiary flesh of his hand passed through the secondary matter.

It was now as it had been: the pumps that had been pumping air to Mars were pumping still, though they pumped air of second-degree reality, which left behind the echo of an echo, and this air the six lovers, themselves the echoes of their echoes, could breathe.

"What does it say?" asked Bridgetta, though she could read the note as well as Hansard. But she wanted to hear him say the words:

"Happy Honeymoon."

THE END

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# OPEN DOES NOT (HAVE TO) EQUAL EMPTY

by Judith Merrill



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THE HUMAN NERVOUS system, and in particular the brain, does not operate in a manner analagous to the skeletal and muscular structures. There is no apparent good reason why the accretion of information should so often affect the mind exactly as accumulations of fat affect the body. Acquired knowledge—memory—does not restrict the thinking process, or modify the mass/energy ratio of the brain. Yet, for most minds, there seems to be a saturation point, beyond which the acquisition of information ceases to stimulate curiosity or ideation, and begins instead to limit the capacity for original thought and inquiry.

Unhappily, this point is generally far below the level at which a modern man can be considered well-informed: few thinking minds survive even the standard college or university education; far fewer make their way through such subsequent informational additions as are common to the academic and professional lives.

But there is joy in (at least my own) heaven, each time I come across one more mind with enough experience and observation stored away to be capable of evaluating further learning—and yet eager to learn more, with the full (or even amplified) power of thought intact. There *are some* open minds in well-filled heads, and I have just now found one more.

C. Maxwell Cade, according to the terse biographical data on the back jacket flap of *Other Worlds Than Ours* (Museum Press, 30s.), is a physicist and chartered engineer, as well as a Fellow of both the Royal Society of Medicine and the Royal Astronomical Society—and Technical

Applications Manager of an international medical equipment company, with 20 years of industrial experience behind him.

I approached his book, I must confess, with a touch of my own professional bigotry, prepared by the title to be either bored or irritated by yet-another (respectively) dull-competent or fast-flashy rehash of Walter Sullivan's 1964 account of the prospects for contact and communication with extra-terrestrial life. (*We Are Not Alone*). At best, I anticipated some minor updating, mostly based on the discoveries of lunar and planetary 'probe' rockets.

Approximately half of Cade's 200 pages of text *are* devoted to the same general territory covered by Sullivan—with some updating, and a great deal more side-tripping. As for the rest—I quote, selectively, and non-consecutively, from the author's Introduction:—

*Other Worlds Than Ours*, broadly interpreted, could cover a multitude of Utopias—and their inverse—without leaving the surface of our own Earth, nor even venturing beyond the shores of our own island. The two themes, other worlds in space, and other worlds in time, are to a certain extent interwoven. . . . I have endeavoured in this book to look at *Other Worlds Than Ours* from both viewpoints, although the main accent is upon the possibility of other worlds in space. From the viewpoint of other worlds in time, I have selected a few issues: the mechanization of man's body by prosthesis, and of his mind by computers; the possibility of a computer "take-over"; the possible significance of para-psychology as an evolutionary force. In connection with the above, I have not hesitated to draw upon data from some of the so-called pseudo-sciences, wherever they appear to have a reasonable probability of some scientific basis. . . .

. . . Often, I have given the names of authorities even for fully accepted "facts," because what is considered to be "fact" in science is an ever-changing flow, and some knowledge of the history of science is an essential preliminary step towards understanding the current body of knowledge. . . . The reader will accept the scientific "facts" and theories in this book, or reject them, as he pleases. But it is



his plain intellectual duty to reject the philosophic arguments, unless he has of his own experience found them to be true. . . .

Just as this book has two themes, it has two objects. The principal object is to survey the notion of *Other Worlds Than Ours* in the light of modern knowledge and—so far as I can manage it—without scientific or religious bigotry. The subsidiary object is to make a plea for less bigotry in science and religion. . . .

. . . surely, even the mumbo-jumbo of the table-rapping spiritualists cannot be more vague and insubstantial than the present state of particle physics, with its multiplicity of highly ephemeral “particles,” which in many respects behave more like waves, and which are often differentiated on the basis of left-handed or right-handed “spin,” although by “spin” we are told not to understand “spin,” but something that cannot otherwise be described? Again, we are told that the neutrino possesses neither charge nor mass, and that it can pass swiftly through solid matter as readily as through empty space. Yet the same physicists who devote their working lives to the study of these elusive objects would violently deny the existence of “parapsychological” phenomena, such as pre-cognition, telekinesis, and telepathy, for which a considerable body of evidence exists.

It is necessary to be extraordinarily objective when studying things which do not fit comfortably into the ready-labelled niches of academic knowledge. . . . All theories, concepts, and hypotheses (no matter if they are known as somebody’s “Law”) are only temporary tools until something better comes along. . . . We have no grounds for saying: “Flying saucers cannot exist, their alleged performance far exceeds engineering possibilities—therefore I do not believe in them,” any more than we have grounds for saying: “There are Unidentified Flying Objects, therefore there must be extraterrestrial visitors.”

What Cade himself believes, and why, makes excellent, and sometimes startling, reading. What he does not necessarily believe, but proposes for consideration and speculation, is perhaps even more surprising and refreshing.

Although the chapters on Evolution of Intelligence, Folklore and Flying Saucers, and The Coming of the Robots, constitute the unique sections of the book, Cadian treasures are scattered through the comparatively standard sections (Life Within the Solar System, Birth and Death of Stars and Planets, etc.); his variety of sources, and wealth of odd-item detail, provide a sort of latter-day Fortean feast. For instance:—

The U.S. Health Service is undertaking a major research project on the use of fingerprints and palmistry for early detection of neurological defects in babies. . . . French children were playing with working toy helicopters 500 years ago. . . . The Central Artificial Limb Research Institute in Moscow has developed a mechanical hand operated by an electric motor connected directly to the owner's nerve endings. . . . Dean Swift described the highly improbable sizes and orbits of the moons of Mars, with equally improbable near-accuracy, 150 years before the discovery of the satellites. . . . A reputable study in New York City has established the value of strong magnetic fields in the treatment of cancer. . . . Experiments at the University of Moscow indicate that Dermal Optical Perception—"fingertip sight"—is not a freak faculty, but a trainable human sense. . . . One U.S. Veterans Hospital has found a "highly significant statistical relationship" between solar magnetic flares and psychiatric admissions. . . .

All of which does not include the comments on Dr. Gurf's Cube, or the Comte de Saint Germain, for instance . . . or the fantastic state of cyborg and robot development right now . . . or the cumulative effect of the steady shower of quotations from such a marvellously mixed bag as (in small part): Marcus Aurelius, Alexis Carrell, Prof. Dobzhansky, Edison, Goethe, Jung, Keats, John Stuart Mills, Patrick Moore, Ouspensky, Planck, Pope, Tennyson, G. N. Tyrrell, and H. G. Wells.

There are many points on which I disagree with Dr. Cade. My philosophic bases are not his. But few books in recent years have exercised my mind so pleasantly, or added so much entertaining information to my personal store. And much of what he has to say is both important, and too little understood. One last quote, from the final chapter:



Perhaps the best reason of all for meditating upon these rather fantastic themes is that it helps to remove the last remaining taint of anthropocentrism—the irrational feeling that man is the centre of the universe. We stand today in at least as great need of avoiding spiritual anthropocentrism as did our ancestors of the Middle Ages stand in need of avoiding astronomical anthropocentrism. . . .

This is a valuable book for all readers of science fiction (or sf, or speculative fiction, or science-fantasy, or . . .), and an invaluable one to writers in the field.

## TO THE PAST—BUT FAST!

AMERICAN PUBLISHERS HAVE been slow to recognise the fiction of Thomas Burnett Swann, a writer whose popularity began on this side of the Atlantic in the pages of SCIENCE FANTASY. Now Ace Books are making good the omission with *Day of the Minotaur* (40 cents). Partially rewritten from the *Science Fantasy* serial version, *The Blue Monkeys*, it is a mixture of myth and Cretan history in typical Swann style. When the blonde Achaean warriors invaded Crete, Thea and Icarus, children of Prince Aeacus and a Dryad, fled from the palace at Knossos to the forested homeland of their mother. There, in The Country of the Beasts, they met the Minotaur, who was not quite what legend led them to expect.

But Ajax, leader of the Achaeans, had been cut to the quick (and elsewhere) by beautiful Thea. Soon she and Icarus and their semi-human allies and enemies in the Forest, had to face the swords of the invaders. What follows is a far cry from the earth-dark tragedies of such Ancient World chroniclers as the late Henry Treece, and the lighter approach inevitably diminishes the stature of the myth-figures. If, however, you prefer your blood-spilling flavoured with charm, rather than taken raw, then Swann blends these ingredients with considerable skill.

*Quest of the Three Worlds* (Ace Books, 40 cents) by the late Cordwainer Smith, is the tale of the quest of Casher O'Neill for a means by which to free his home planet of a military tyrant. Told with colour and uncommon imagination and a degree of whimsy that sets

the teeth on edge, it is stamped unmistakably with the faults and virtues of a truly individual writer of fantasy.

The reasoning behind the allocation of sf awards is not always easy to follow, but it would be difficult to nominate a more deserving winner than Roger Zelazny's *The Dream Master* (Ace Books, 40 cents). In the world of the 1990's Charles Render is one of a small number of psychoanalysts qualified to use the ro-womb, a device which enables him to participate in, and control, his patient's dreams. It is a dangerous therapy, for the therapist, and only an armour-plated integrity can protect him from too deep an involvement in the mental worlds of these disturbed people. Until a blind analyst, Eileen Shalot, asks him to transfer from his mind to hers, via the ro-womb, impressions of the world of light and colour which she has never seen. Render agrees, and the decision is deadly. What began as therapy becomes a weird conflict of powerful, disembodied egos. Around this theme Zelazny builds a picture of a civilization under stress, turning inwards upon itself in an increasingly automated world. The result fully justifies the Nebula Award given it by The SF-Writers of America. Possibly to stimulate the reader's imagination, Ace have scattered typographical errors liberally throughout the above three titles; p. 41 of *The Dream Master* appears to have been proof-read from the back of a galloping horse.

Lost somewhere in *The Corridors of Time* (Gollancz SF, 18/-) by Poul Anderson, is a potentially fine novel about a contemporary American adrift in the Northern Europe of 2000 B.C. The conflict of character, culture and *mores* emerges at intervals; mostly, it is smothered by a superstructure of intrigue and pseudo-science. Anderson has constructed here a more elaborate version of the framework used for his earlier, and better, *Guardians of Time* series. It takes the form of a conflict between two factions, the Wardens and the Rangers, who operate from the world of A.D. 4000, fighting a Time War in which human history is victim, prize and battlefield. Agents are recruited from many eras by both forces, but only the controllers, products of genetic manipulation, can grasp the full significance of move and counter-move.

The account of the Time War and its technicalities be-



comes tedious and is never very convincing. There is, too, an odd naïveté to Anderson's picture of a future America with the genetic *élite* in the high towers, and the debased workers down below. The twentieth-century hero, Lockridge, ranges through past, present and future, battling the chariot-borne Indo-Europeans, encountering fear and oppression in medieval Denmark, struggling with some fairly unpleasant aspects of A.D. 4000. History, ethnology, archaeology, religion and much else contribute to the sprawling panorama of Anderson's story, but the narrative only comes to life when Lockridge is meeting the challenge of life in the Stone Age with brains, brawn and compassion. If the views expressed by Lockridge are also those of the author, then he holds little hope for our current civilization or for any form of society above the tribal level. He may have a case; unfortunately he loads the dice heavily in favour of the primitive life, passing rapidly over some of its less agreeable facets to concentrate upon Lockridge's pretty, nubile and uninhibited Stone Age girlfriend, Auri.

*The Corridors of Time*, in short, adds up to something less than the sum of its parts. Recommended, with reservations.

The source-material upon which an author draws for a convincing picture of prehistoric societies is furnished largely by the archaeologist. Prof. Stuart Piggott, in *Approach to Archaeology* (Pelican Book 5/-) shows once again that science, in the hands of a skilled and knowledgeable writer, can outrun science-fiction with ease in the stimulation of the sense of wonder. The most encouraging aspect of modern archaeology, in this era of specialization, is that despite the astonishing refinement of technique since the days of the dig-and-be-damned treasure-hunters, there is still a place for the amateur enthusiast. Under supervision.

— J. Cawthorn

# Ballard of a Whaler

Each morning Konrad would go down to the edge of the moraine and gaze across at the skinners stripping the blubber from the whales. Architectural rather than organic, the white bones of the stranded monsters traced the structural relationships of underlying strata with the world above the ice, counterpointing in their curved sequence the prismatic and crystalline complexity of the glaciers, embodying the forms of all sequential aspects of duration. Engrossed by their fundamental geomorphic resonance with the rib-cage of Ulrica Ulsenn, he did not immediately notice the towering figure of Urquart the whale-hunter by his side. The harpooner's eyes were sombre and brooding and when he spun his eighteen-foot lance end-over-end in a characteristic gesture and drove it splinteringly into the ice, he betrayed by no flicker of a muscle that he had impaled his left foot.

J. Cawthorn



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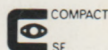
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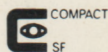
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