COMPACT SF

NEW WORLDS

3/6

CHARLES PLATT

THE GARBAGE WORLD

NEW WORLDS SF

Volume 50 Number 167

Contents

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BALLARD: THE VOICE

WHETHER J. G. BALLARD realises it as yet or not, there is no doubt that he is the first clear voice of a movement destined to consolidate the literary ideas—surrealism, stream of consciousness, symbolism, science fiction, etc., etc.—of the 20th century, forming them into something that is prose, but no longer fiction (as the term is generally understood) and that is a new instrument for dealing with the world of the future contained, observably, in the world of the present. Ballard does not reject the past—but he refuses to see why it should be allowed to influence the present. Most modern fiction, he says, is retrospective in its objectives. He wants a form—and is single-handedly moulding one—that is genuinely speculative and introspective in its objectives. Lacking a sufficiently precise instrument for his purposes, he has built one (an enormous achievement in itself). The instrument has no name, it has still to be refined and developed, but it exists in the shape of a group of stories that have caused impassioned controversy both in this country and the United States (though they have been accepted with general enthusiasm, it appears, in the Latin countries). The titles of these stories are: *You and Me and the Continuum* (IMPULSE No. 1), *The Assassination Weapon* (NEW WORLDS 161), *You: Coma: Marilyn Monroe* (NEW WORLDS 163), and *The Atrocity Exhibition* (NEW WORLDS 166).

Critics may be forgiven for failing to see the significance of these stories as yet. The form is new, the obsessions are personal; but they cannot be identified with any one particular writer or literary movement of the past or the present, and those who have tried to identify them in this way have failed. To identify Ballard with Burroughs is impossible, in spite of Ballard's own enthusiasm for Bur-

roughs's language and obsessions (it is probably fair to say that Ballard has interpreted Burroughs in terms of Ballard, but one cannot interpret Ballard in terms of Burroughs). Ballard's enthusiasm for Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad, as well as the surrealists, Joyce, Kafka and Borges, is quite as marked (if rarely expressed in print) as his enthusiasm for Burroughs, and while he sees Burroughs in a different light from these other writers, he clearly owes far more to them than to Burroughs.

As with music, as with painting, as with poetry, prose is metamorphosing to meet the demands of its time. The most unwieldy, least formal form of art, prose is always the last to change. James attempted to give it rules of structure that resembled those of music or painting, and his success was superb, but James was still adapting the form as it existed, tending to limit the form rather than expand it, whereas writers like Joyce and Burroughs—and now Ballard—were attempting to expand their range and produce something new. Ballard is not advocating a general overthrow of the prose form as we know it, he is saying that we need a new tool in the workshop—preferably a whole range of new tools—and he has invented one such tool.

In the past, composers have had to sit down to develop new musical instruments to express what they are doing (or have had to wait until those instruments were invented), painters have had to produce new pigments and radically new techniques, just as scientists, through the centuries, have had to make or wait for instruments to enable them to pursue their particular lines of enquiry.

Perhaps this is why so many scientists appreciate and sympathise with the work Ballard is doing and why literary critics, with a few outstanding exceptions, have failed (whether they like the work or not) in their interpretation of his recent prose.

In this country there now exists, centred around this magazine, a group of writers and critics who understand and enthusiastically support the work Ballard is doing. This does not mean that they intend to follow Ballard—his is his own direction—but that they realise the need Ballard is fulfilling, and hope, in future, to play some part in

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THE GARBAGE WORLD

BY CHARLES PLATT

(Part one of two parts)

THE BROWN LANDSCAPE stretched away on all sides in gently undulating hills, occasional variations in surface colour and patches of thick, green vegetation breaking up the monotony of the scene. Visibility was restricted by yellow-tinted mist, swirling upwards from small fissures in the soil, high into the mid-day sunlight.

The balloon tyres of the patched-up excursion truck crunched over the irregular, refuse-strewn surface, and its small electric motors whined. Juliette Gaylord stopped the truck at the crest of one of the low hills, overlooking a depression about a quarter of a mile in width and almost perfectly circular.

She adjusted her small air filters to fit more closely within each nostril, slipped on a pair of swamp shoes, and climbed down from the driving seat. A blimp had impacted here two days previously, resulting in the crater-like depression that lay before her. Spreading out from the impact point were irregular patches of green and brown: material that had burst out of the blimp when it had hit the ground. Juliette sighed ; it seemed that her journey here had been a waste of time. The blimp had obviously come from one of the food-manufacturing industrial asteroids in the belt, as occasionally happened. This one had been packed with reject food, of probably faulty composition, and now the ground was covered with edible materials in advanced states of decay. Even through her air filters, and in spite of her being used to the natural stench of the atmosphere, the smell was unpleasant.

She walked back to the truck, annoyed that so far she had been unable to find an impact area rich in material of any use to the village. The motors whined again as she turned the truck and headed back home.

In another environment, she would have been an attractive girl, looking younger than her age of twenty-two. But on Kopra, her pretty and intelligent features tended to become lost underneath the inevitable layer of grime that accumulated on everyone ; and the shapeless, patched-together clothes she wore concealed the fact that her figure lacked the layers of fat that so easily resulted from life on a half-gravity asteroid.

She had only just started back to the village when she heard the noise of distant rocket engines. The rumble

came from behind her, high in the sky; she stopped the truck and squinted upwards, finally locating a moving bright speck, occasionally visible through the yellowish haze. As she watched, the speck passed above her, clearly decelerating, and heading for the village, only a few miles distant. The event was completely outside Juliette's experience; during her life, no visitor had ever come to Kopra from the rest of the gay, affluent asteroid belt. Only the blimps, packed with rich men's refuse, fell through the thin air several times a day in braking ellipses, finally thumping down on to the surface of Kopra and bursting like giant sausages.

The slow deceleration of the craft she saw now was completely different from the unmanned and uncontrolled descent of a blimp. This implied the presence of human beings in control. And intuitively she realised that the sudden intrusion of visitors after twenty-five years of solitude could only imply some sort of trouble.

She re-started the truck and headed for the village at maximum speed, balloon tyres bumping over the rough, uneven, refuse-strewn ground.

First Contact

THE VILLAGE WAS the sole centre of habitation on Kopra, but even so, its population was only a little above a hundred and fifty. Most of these people were standing out in the street now, attracted by the sound of the retro-rockets of the descending space vehicle.

Isaac Gaylord, a large, dirty man, the acknowledged head man of the village, grumbled to himself irritably and rummaged around in the old landing control building that had once served the village's small landing field. He found a battered instruction manual and thumbed through it, leaving dirty marks on the pages. Following the instructions he pressed contacts to deactivate the defence-umbrella that covered the village. He considered making radio contact with the approaching visitors, but then decided it wasn't worth the trouble. He'd be talking to them soon enough.

He went back outside, and squinted upwards. The usual slight shimmer to the sky was gone; the field was down

and the offworlders could land. Still muttering irritably at being disturbed in this way from his usual morning's rest, Gaylord tramped down towards the landing ground, ignoring the occasional question or comment from puzzled villagers who had previously only ever seen the shape of a space vehicle on their battered TV sets.

The landing was undeniably spectacular. The down-blast from the rockets sent clouds of steam hissing up from the damp ground, and the grass that had grown over the battered concrete landing field burst into flame. The noise, guttural and overpowering, shook the ground in trembling waves.

When the ship had finally come to rest, the sudden silence was anti-climactic. The occasional 'ping' of the metal hull as it slowly cooled was the only noise.

Gaylord stood, watching the ship, picking his nose. He waited. At last, the main hatch opened and a descent ramp was extended. Slowly, two figures dressed in bulky protective clothing and wearing respirators, climbed down to the ground. Gaylord grunted in amusement. The offworlders evidently weren't accustomed to the pungency of Kopra's atmosphere and the dirtiness of the soil.

Gaylord walked forward to meet the visitors. They shook his outstretched hand after noticeable hesitation; his fingers left grimy marks on their plastic gloves.

"I'm the head man here," Gaylord said. "Isaac Gaylord. Who are you?"

"My name is Larkin," the shorter of the two offworlders said, "and this is my assistant, Mr. Roach." Larkin looked around him, with obvious distaste. He had known in advance that Kopra would be an unattractive place. An asteroid composed principally of refuse could hardly be anything else. But he was momentarily taken aback by the dirtiness of the people, the primitiveness of the few huts and houses he could see a little way off, and the rubbish littering the ground everywhere.

"Well," said Gaylord, "supposing you tell me what you're here for."

"That will take some time, Mr. Gaylord," Larkin said. "Perhaps if we could talk in some slightly more attractive surroundings . . ."

Gaylord grunted. He turned and started walking back

to the village. After a moment's hesitation, Larkin and his assistant, Lucian Roach, followed. Lucian Roach was younger and correspondingly more open-minded than his superior, Larkin. But he too was taken aback by the surroundings. The village reminded him of slum dwellings and refugee towns he had seen in old twentieth century photographs. The crowd of people, which had now dispersed from around the landing field, showing no further interest in the visitors or their space vehicle, looked not only dirty but hungry and poor. Their rough garments, pieced together from odd scraps of cloth, enhanced the impression of sheer poverty. The houses were similar patchwork pieces of construction, in many cases formed from sections of obsolete space vehicles, beaten flat and welded together.

Lucian, in his official capacity as Recorder, noted down his observations and took one or two photographs. He looked around and identified many species of plants and trees from other planets, growing side by side in the thick vegetation that sprouted in patches around the houses. Evidently, seeds and spores from throughout the habited areas of the solar system had somehow found their way here, carried in the refuse dumped on Kopra by the rest of the asteroid belt. It lent a bizarre air of other-worldly confusion to the roughly constructed houses and huts.

They arrived at Isaac Gaylord's house. It was the only two-storey building in the village, half of it being the old landing field control tower. The other half had been built on to one side of the control tower and was the usual patchwork of metal scrap, welded together. The concrete walls of the tower had been shored up with angle irons, metal plates and daubs of cement, and the whole building was painted a faded brown.

Inside, the dwelling was as dirty as the ground outside. Gaylord sat down heavily on a canvas armchair whose frame was made from scrap pieces of metal and wood. Larkin and Lucian Roach sat down on other, equally roughly-made pieces of furniture, and looked around them. The room was cluttered with oddments and junk; scrap metal and plastic articles littered the rough concrete floor. Every item looked as if it had been kept for some mythical, far-off day when it might come in useful.

The Botched Terraforming Job

LARKIN SIGHED, OPENED the briefcase he had been carrying, and extracted some documents inscribed on permafilm and bearing the official government crest. He spread them out across his knees.

"Now, Mr. Gaylord," he said. "Perhaps we can get down to business."

Gaylord grunted. He extracted his small air filters from each nostril, a sordid operation that involved a certain amount of grunting and grimacing. He blew through each filter in turn, releasing little sprays of accumulated dirt, and then stuffed them back in position. He coughed throatily, and then leaned forward, trying to see the documents that Larkin had taken out of his case.

"What's that?" he said. "Some sort of official business? Government instructions?"

"They are just the official backing to substantiate what I have to tell you," Larkin said. His manner was smooth and impersonal, in a way insulting in its superior tone. "I'll start with a résumé. For almost a hundred years, now, colonies in the asteroid belt have found it convenient—a necessity, in fact—to discharge refuse matter, properly sheathed in sterile plastic envelopes, shot in trajectories leading to your asteroid, Kopra. Ejection of refuse matter at random into space is not only distasteful, but dangerous in that it results in navigation hazards. And obviously colonies are unwilling to clutter their own small land areas with useless waste matter."

Gaylord looked a little puzzled. "Waste matter? You mean garbage?" He shook his head. "You spend a while here, you'll see how useful garbage can be."

Larkin sighed. It was going to be difficult to communicate with these rather dirty people. "Please don't interrupt," he said. "You will simply have to accept that in civilised populations, considerations of hygiene and restrictions of land area make it a necessity to eject waste matter, the aesthetic aspects aside. Until now, the method has been to use small thrust motors to inject the plastic-sheathed refuse parcels—blimps, I believe you call them—into easily calculated trajectories that will result in the refuse

all ending up here on Kopra, in one place, a neat repository which, for most people, is happily out of sight and mind."

Gaylord scratched his head of stringy grey hair, small insects and dirt dropping down from his scalp. "I know all this," he grumbled. "Don't think we like it, either, being a target for all the—the garbage that you bastards are too fussy to have around. But that don't mean things can change, now. None of us likes it, but garbage is the only way we can live here, on Kopra. So if you're threatening . . ."

"I'm stating facts, rather than making threats, Mr. Gaylord. Until now we have tolerated, quietly, the existence of your garbage world, and have left you entirely to yourselves. Our present intervention is forced upon us by circumstances. Routine checks and measurements indicate that because of the growth in size of your asteroid over the past years, caused by the deposition of the layers of refuse, the body has developed an instability of rotation. When the original colonists landed here and installed a terraforming unit and gravity generator, with the idea of setting up a pleasure colony . . ."

"Yeah, my grandfather botched it," Gaylord interrupted. "Made a great balls-up. I know, I know. Used up all the money, too, so they just had to stick it out here and scrape a living as best they could. In those days, we could charge people for dumping their garbage on the asteroid. It was kind of like a convenience people had to pay for. Not any more, though."

"Quite. But as you are aware, this unsuccessful terraforming job not only resulted in barely tolerable living conditions, but also in a uniform half-gee field all over the asteroid. The usual system of maintaining a synthetic field on the inhabited side only allows for easy entry and exit on the other side, free from gravitational pull. It also enables easy waste disposal, of course. But your ancestors, instead of a one-sided one-gee field, ended up with a uniform half-gee field that prevented their leaving the asteroid or disposing of their refuse. As we see now they, ah, made the best of things. A gravity generator is extremely dangerous to deactivate once it is operating; con-

sequently the defective one that they established has been left untouched ever since."

"So?"

"So, Mr. Gaylord, the larger your asteroid gets, the more layers of refuse that accumulate, the greater is the centrifugal force, and the less net pull there is to hold things down, as it were. Half a gee is insufficient, really. A body this size is too small for its innate gravitation, as a direct function of mass, to have any real effect. The result is that, if many more layers of refuse accumulate, unless something is done the result will be catastrophic. The asteroid is liable to fragment—to fall apart, in fact."

Gaylord was on his feet, mouth opening and closing, thick lips trembling.

"What do you mean?" he shouted, making angry gestures at Larkin with his heavy, hairy arms. "What do you mean? It's just a trick to get us off here, isn't it?" He spat on the floor, near Larkin's feet. "Why don't you leave us alone, you pious, clean, rich-living bastards?"

"That's not the point, Mr. Gaylord," Larkin said. "In fact it is probably true to say that the actual fate of the population of Kopra is of slightly less immediacy to the government than is the well-being of people on developed asteroids. What concerns us greatly is that, should your asteroid be allowed to disintegrate, the whole plane of the asteroid belt would be fouled by the release of the accumulated debris of a century of colonisation. The result would be catastrophic for the tourist business, aside from the unsettling health aspect. We just cannot allow any chance of such an event occurring."

Gaylord was silent. He sat back on his chair again, and nodded slowly.

"That makes sense," he said. "I reckon what you've said is straight enough. The last thing you'd want is to have all your rotten garbage slung back in your faces." He laughed. "But what does it mean, then?" He leant forward and banged his fist on the table. "What does it mean to *us*, mister?"

Larkin sighed. "You explain the details, Roach," he said to Lucian. "I must confess I find this very fatiguing."

Lucian Roach cleared his throat, and glanced up at

Gaylord's rough, dirty face. The man's eyes stared straight back, hard and demanding.

"We intend to make certain modifications to the asteroid," Lucian said. "Mainly, this involves siting a new generator near the centre, to provide a field of three-quarter gee total, which will be programmed to rise to one gee maximum over the next fifty years, as more refuse accumulates. Also, surface layers of existing refuse will be compacted, using special equipment. We are confident that these methods will lead to the safety of your world."

Gaylord was silent, chewing his lower lip, obviously giving the matter great thought. His dark brown, leathery skin was creased into folds of concentration.

"But you've still not given me a straight answer," he said at length. "You haven't been doing all this talking for fun. Somehow, what you're going to do is going to mess us up, isn't it? Otherwise you wouldn't have said nothing, you'd have just done what you wanted and left us alone."

"That's very astute of you, Mr. Gaylord," Lucian said, trying to be disarmingly frank. The effort was wasted. "In actual fact, people on Kopra *are* involved, to some extent. When the gravity generator we implant here is activated, there is the possibility of wide field fluctuations at first. Forces of up to ten gee may be experienced until stability is achieved. We would have to evacuate all inhabitants of the asteroid while this was in progress."

Gaylord just laughed, exposing his ragged assortment of yellow teeth. He shook his head. "That's one thing that won't work," he said. "You'll never shift people off this garbage heap. Never in a million years."

"Why ever not?" Lucian said. "It would only be temporary."

Gaylord stood up. "Come with me and I'll show you why not," he said. He walked to a door at the other side of the room and opened it.

As he did so, a pale-faced, thin youth sprang up from a crouching position, as if he had been listening at the door. Gaylord stopped, in surprise, and then laughed.

"What the hell are you playing at, Norman?" he said. "You don't have to listen at keyholes to hear me talk to offworlders. You just come right on in." The youth just

looked embarrassed. "This is my son, Norman," Gaylord said, introducing the youth to Larkin and Lucian. "He's a good lad. Just a bit odd in the head, that's all. Always has washed himself too much. Right Norman?" Gaylord shouted with laughter and slapped the thin figure of his son heartily between the shoulder blades. The youth continued to look embarrassed; his eyes shifted nervously. Quietly he sidled away from Gaylord and out of the front door of the house.

Gaylord scowled and muttered something to himself.

"Anyway, like I was saying. Come this way." He bent down and opened a trapdoor in the floor, exposing a flight of steps leading down into a cellar. He walked down and Larkin and Lucian followed him.

The cellar was large, about twenty feet square. There were shelves all around the walls, piled high with every conceivable kind of semi-valuable refuse. Pieces of bright metal, plastic eating utensils and crockery, control handles from obsolete space vehicles, the seat back of an acceleration couch, some glass-like jewellery, pieces of semi-contemporary plastic sculpture, the repair chart for a Mark II desert tractor, a stack of deleted bills of exchange, a placard that read "Vote for Burton for a fair deal in the asteroid belt", the oxygen cylinder from an archaic space suit, tins of permapaint, a sun hat as used on Martian safari, incorporating a compact respirator . . . these, and a thousand other items, carefully stacked, polished and glittering, displayed in a vast, imposing array.

Lucian started taking a few notes of the scene, then decided it was hardly relevant. "What . . . why exactly have you kept all of these items?" he asked Gaylord.

"Why? What do you mean, why? It's obvious, isn't it?" He looked at their blank faces. "Because it's valuable, of course. Why else?"

Larkin looked annoyed. He decided to try another line of questioning.

"But what has this to do with reluctance of people to evacuate the asteroid?" he asked.

Gaylord scratched his head, and more flakes of dirt fell out. "What's a-matter, you thick?" he said. "This is my hoard, see? Comes down right the way from my grand-dad. It's the biggest hoard in the village. Which is why I'm

head man around here. 'Course, everyone's got some kind of hoard to his name—bits of value he finds in the refuse that the blimps carry. Now, you look around. This isn't the sort of thing you can just gather up and take away with you. And do you reckon any of the folk round here are going to just evacuate the place, leaving their hoards behind?"

"I shouldn't have thought it was all that important . . ."

"Course you wouldn't. You're a pair of offworlders, is why. Listen; for folk living here, all that matters is their hoards, understand? They catalogue 'em and arrange 'em, and keep 'em locked away and hidden. Same as I do. We all do. I mean, a man's not a man without his hoard. Now d'you understand? I can't make it no plainer than that."

Lucian was noting it all down, fascinated. In the terms of the people on the asteroid, he supposed, these useless items must have a kind of scarcity value. But the meticulous arrangement and cataloguing was less easily explicable; there were interesting overtones . . .

Larkin sighed. They were getting nowhere. "Perhaps we had better postpone this discussion until a later date," he said. "In the meantime, a planetary engineering team will arrive tomorrow to start digging a hole to facilitate placement of the new gravity generator. We will notify you of any other activity we contemplate initiating, Mr. Gaylord. You may rely on that."

Larkin turned and walked up out of the cellar, Lucian following him, Gaylord stamping up the steps last of all. At the top, he paused to bang the trapdoor down securely, turning a large key in its lock and putting two padlocks across it. "There's not a few people'd like to get their hands on a hoard like that," he said, and chuckled.

They walked out of the house and back towards the survey craft that Larkin and Lucian Roach had come in. When they were half way there, a hissing sound, gradually rising in pitch and volume, caused them to stop and look up.

"Just a blimp coming down," Gaylord said. "You get used to it."

As he spoke, the sausage-like object, about twenty or thirty feet in length, shot across the sky directly over them.

The ground shook with the impact as it landed not far away. Moments later the sound reached them, and a blast of air swept across the ground, displaced by the explosion.

"Damn it," growled Gaylord. "When I saw your ship coming down, I cut off our defence screen. Usually have it up to keep the blimps from landing on the village. Damned if I didn't forget to turn it on again. Hope the bloody thing didn't land on someone."

They walked on between the ragged line of huts, across the refuse-strewn marshy ground, occasionally having to push their way through growths of thick, tall grass that flourished in the middle of the roughly-defined road. At the edge of the landing field, Lucian paused.

"It might be interesting to see the impact," he said. "And how the villagers react to it."

"Up to you, Roach," Larkin said. "Liaison with the people here is part of your job, as you are aware. Personally, I have a lot of paperwork to get through." With that, he walked away over the field, to the survey craft.

"I'll show you the blimp, if you want," Gaylord said, grudgingly. "I'm going to give it a look over, anyway."

Lucian felt pleased. His attitude towards the environment was mixed; as an observer and recorder, his training required impartiality. But as the produce of a totally sterile and clean upbringing, in a system which knew neither dirt nor poverty, he found the conditions around him emotionally repellent, yet fascinating.

The Garbage Impact

A CROWD HAD collected round the impact area by the time they got there. It was a larger crowd than that which had turned out to see the survey craft land, and the greater interest was obvious. Most of the people were animated in talk and gesticulation.

"Why the enthusiasm?" Lucian asked. "They seem twice as excited as when we landed—yet blimps come down every day, and ours is the first ship to land for twenty-five years."

"Bloody obvious, isn't it?" said Gaylord. "We ain't ignorant, we got a few TV sets and a generator to run 'em. We see programmes, we know about your kind, what

you're like. And we know a survey vehicle when we see it. Who's interested? When one of those bloody things turns up it only means trouble. Offworlders like you, come to push us around. Most people here with any sense would rather not know about it. Can't say as how I blame them. But when one of these things comes down," he gestured at the impact area, "it's a surprise every time. No telling what's going to come out, see. Could be full of industrial diamonds, could be full of shit. But one way or another there'll be something worth having."

His eyes, peering out from within the folds of dirty, sweat-stained flesh, eagerly scanned the wide circle of material that had burst out of the blimp. Only a few figures were walking over the refuse that had burst out of the blimp; the rest of the villagers held back at the edges.

"Why isn't there a free-for-all?" Lucian asked. "I should have expected everyone to be down there, seeing what they could find."

Gaylord sighed. "We're not uncivilised, like you seem to think we are," he said. "Just you think of what would happen if everyone was down there, fighting over that garbage. It'd be anarchy. Hopeless. No, it's all done by a nice orderly system, see. Me, I got the biggest hoard, so I get first pickings. Them's my men, there, sussing the area for me. After they've finished, it'll be the turn of the rest of 'em, one at a time, first the ones with the bigger hoards, the ones who've got the least coming last. Everyone's got his place. Depends how much he's managed to get in the past."

"But that's unfair. The last people never have a chance. The first people have already got the most, yet they have first pickings."

"It sounds all right to me," Gaylord said. "Way I look at it, a man who's got a big hoard has a right to first pick—he's earned it. And them that's got nothing much to their name, well, they don't *deserve* nothing, do they? It's even fairer than that, though, because the last fellow in the line may still be lucky and find something everyone else has missed."

It was a rigid society, Lucian realised, with well-defined status levels that were self-perpetuating. He made notes into his portable steno machine.

Gaylord's men were leaving the area, now, and one by one the villagers walked down across the refuse, forming a ragged line that zigzagged over the circular depression created by the impact. Dust and haze still rose from the rubbish, making it hard to see across to the other side of the area. The predominant shade of the refuse was brown, but small items—a child's broken plastic toys, a set of worn-out clothes—were brightly coloured and showed up against the rest. The dust swirled in a light breeze that had blown up, and sheets of paper fluttered across the ground. The roughly-dressed men and women, stooped peering at the refuse, filed back and forth across the depression, often half obscured by the dust, methodically searching for anything of possible value.

Lucian looked away from the scene below as a girl came running across the uneven ground towards Gaylord.

"Father," she gasped, out of breath, "is everything all right? I saw a survey craft land, so I came back as quickly as I could. Is there some kind of trouble?"

"Nothing I can't sort out," he replied. "And nothing that urgent." He turned to Lucian. "Mr. Roach, this is my daughter Juliette. You might as well get introduced." He paused, looking Lucian up and down. He sniffed, his face contorting into an exaggerated grimace. "If it weren't for that stupid plastic suit you got on, and the respirator you're wearing, I'd almost feel pleased for you to meet my daughter, here. As it is . . ." he shrugged.

Lucian shook hands with the girl. "As you see, I've come from the survey craft that landed a little while ago," he said. "But you needn't worry about trouble. Our main aim here is to help your people; and in any case, I'm only here as an official observer, and to try to keep operations running smoothly."

She smiled, a little uncertainly. Lucian suddenly saw that, under the layers of grime, and discounting her straggly, limp, close-cropped hair, she was really quite attractive. It was unsettling; until now, he had not thought of the Koprans as people, exactly. Yet now he was reacting to the girl as if she was a person, in spite of her dirtiness. Decent clothes, foundation garments, a manicure and several baths might be able to transform her into a beautiful girl.

Abruptly Lucian realised he had been staring at her, and looked away in embarrassment.

The men who had been scavenging the refuse on Gaylord's behalf arrived then, carrying various pieces of loot. Gaylord squatted down on the ground opposite them, and started sorting out articles he wanted, and less important objects which he let the men keep.

Lucian looked at his watch. He had to transcribe the day's recordings, and he felt he also needed a meal. He left Gaylord, told Juliette he hoped he would be seeing her again soon, and went back to the survey craft.

He climbed the ramp to the entrance hatch, and walked up to Larkin's cabin. He paused outside the door when he heard Larkin's voice from within, presumably talking via radio contact to someone at headquarters.

"The only successful aspect of the operation," he could hear Larkin saying, "is that the natives here seem convinced by the story we told them. . . . That's right, about installing a more powerful generator. They're still most unco-operative, of course; one hesitates to consider their possible reactions were they to be told the truth . . . No, no, there's no danger of that. My assistant has been told the same story as the natives. I considered that it would be safer that way. Yes. Yes, that concludes my report, sir. Very well. Breaking contact."

Lucian heard the click of the transmitter switch being turned off. He knocked on the door and entered, puzzled by the conversation he had overheard, wondering if he should ask Larkin about it. He disliked the idea that the Koprans were not being told the full story, and disliked even more the possibility that he, too, was being kept in the dark, in some way.

But there was the possibility that the sentences he had overheard could be interpreted differently. It was inconclusive, and he decided to say nothing.

"Come in, Roach," Larkin said, seeing Lucian standing uncertainly in the doorway. "Tell me what the natives are like under the skin. Or should I say, under the grime." His thin-lipped mouth widened fractionally in a faint, cold smile.

"It's early to draw any conclusion, sir. In fact the people here are more complex, in some ways, than one might

have expected. Being third-generation colonists, they are completely adjusted to the unpleasantness of the environment. In fact many of them, as far as I can tell, enjoy their unclean mode of life."

"No doubt because they have never had experience of anything better," Larkin interrupted.

"That is true, to some extent, I suppose. But I was struck, for example, by the great interest shown by Gaylord in the refuse that came down in the 'blimp' a short while ago. He was not exaggerating when he said that people here attach great importance to the hoards of items they collect and keep. I could see Gaylord was quite fascinated, speculating on what his men might find for him in the refuse."

"Interesting, I suppose, to an anthropologist," Larkin said. "But really rather distasteful, don't you agree, Roach? It's as if all these people have remained in the anal stage of their emotional development." He interlaced his fingers and studied his clean, well-manicured nails. "What would you say, if I suggested that it might, in fact, be in the best interests of these people if, somehow, they could be released from the drudgery and dirt of their lives here on Kopra? If it were possible to transfer them into a more civilised environment?"

"I suppose one should really say that it would depend on what the Koprans themselves wanted, sir," Lucian replied, wondering what was behind Larkin's question.

"That's a very interesting viewpoint," the administrator said, swivelling his chair back towards his desk and extracting papers from a pile in front of him. "I will give it due consideration, Roach."

Lucian, considering himself dismissed, left Larkin's room and walked back to his own cabin. He sat down thoughtfully at his desk, and then methodically ran through the day's recordings that he had made, transcribing and reducing them to digest form. During his four years' work for the government as qualified observer and recorder, he had kept carefully indexed copies of all his notes on the work done on asteroids he had visited. The meticulous records accompanied him wherever he went; they were not essential for his work, and were seldom of use, in fact, but he derived great satisfaction from their compilation

and found it pleasing to survey the store of information, each item in its proper place. The records were of great value to him.

Later that evening, Lucian was just finishing his meal when the noise of talking and laughing from the village outside became loud enough to be audible in his cabin.

He looked out of the window. The huts and houses in the village were alive with lights and he could see people in the street, all heading towards a large building situated near Gaylord's house.

Evidently some sort of meeting was to be held. Lucian pulled on his protective clothing and positioned a small air filtering unit to cover his mouth and nose. Perhaps he might find the people more co-operative if he did without such safeguards; but the thought of coming into contact with the raw mud and dirt of the place, and of breathing the pungent air, laden with the heavy smell of decay, was unbearable.

Lucian walked out of the survey craft, and through the now-deserted village. He eventually reached the open doorway of the hall, and looked in. All the villagers seemed to be there, gathered together, listening to Gaylord, who was addressing the hall from a platform at the other end. He was halfway through his narrative.

"And now we come to the important part." He spread out his hands dramatically, and lowered his voice. Everyone strained to listen. "This man Larkin, this offworlder, in my very own house, says to me in his high-handed manner, he says: if much more garbage accumulates on our asteroid—this is what he said to me, you understand—the whole bloody mess will just fall apart, crumble into a whole lot of tiny little pieces. Just like that."

There was disconcerted murmuring amongst the people gathered in the hall. Gaylord, waiting for it to die down, picked up a bottle from one side of the platform and took a swig from it. He was a little unsteady on his feet.

"But that's not all," he said, more loudly. The murmuring died down. "I haven't finished, my friends. Understand, these god-awful clean-living offworlders have been dumping their muck and their garbage on us, all these years, because it offends their . . . aesthetic senses . . ." (he spoke

the words slowly, and with heavy sarcasm) "to have it anywhere else. These people, these offworlders, they're afraid of their own filth. Ashamed of it. So now do you see why they've come here? Now do you see why they've all of a sudden taken notice of us? And are bringing more men tomorrow, to stick this godforsaken asteroid together, and stop it falling apart?"

He paused dramatically. The audience, caught up with the spirit of the speech, began to call out. "Tell us, Isaac!" one man shouted. The rest of them picked up the cry and the noise became deafening.

Gaylord waved his hands frantically for silence, grinning, half-drunk, obviously enjoying himself immensely.

"It's almost a laugh," he said. "A real laugh. The way I understand it, if these offworlders don't do something pretty damn quick, our asteroid, here, shakes itself into little pieces and litters up all their nice, clean little colonies with a hundred years' worth of their own stinking, filthy garbage!"

He stood there, grinning, swaying slightly, and the audience applauded and cheered wildly. Bottles were tilted up and raw, home-brewed alcohol gurgled down a multitude of rough Kopran throats.

Again Gaylord waved his hands, signalling for silence, and finally he could again be heard. It seemed to Lucian that the villagers were not, in fact, very interested in what he had to say. Whatever happened, this was an occasion to enjoy themselves regardless.

"I don't like to bring you all down with a lot of serious crap," Gaylord was saying. "But there's one dodgy aspect of these offworlders' little scheme. Seems that before they finish off their work here, in the last stage they'll want to get all of us off Kopra, temporarily. Evacuate us." The room was now completely silent, and many people seemed attentive.

"Now, you don't need me to tell you what to say if some pansy-faced offworld official comes and tries to get you to up and leave your home, and your hoard, so he can fiddle about with his gravity generators and his machines until he's happy. I won't stand for it, and if you've any sense, neither will you."

There was a general murmuring of agreement. "Any-

way," said Gaylord, "enough of this. The meeting's over and now you can all go and do what you bloody well like."

In the hot, crowded room, the villagers stood up, laughter and shouting broke out, and people started moving back towards the doorway. But at that moment two figures hurried past Lucian, into the hall. One was Juliette, Gaylord's daughter, and the other was his son Norman, who ran down the central aisle and jumped up on to the platform beside Gaylord.

"Quiet!" he shouted. "Quiet everyone! I have some very important news."

People turned to look, clearly surprised by Norman Gaylord's appearance in the hall.

Juliette had stopped just inside the doorway. Lucian saw she was biting nervously on her thumbnail, and there were streaks left by tears in the dirt on her cheeks.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "What's happened?"

"This is terrible, terrible," she said distractedly. "As if we hadn't got enough trouble on our hands."

In response to Norman's shouts, the noise in the hall gradually subsided, and the villagers grudgingly turned towards the platform to listen. He stood, thin and pale-faced, at the front of the platform; his father, to one side, was clearly puzzled by this interruption.

"I'm sorry to stop the evening's entertainment like this," Norman began, his voice rather weak and thin in comparison with the rough, guttural bellow with which his father had addressed the crowd. "But we—my sister and I—we've just come from my father's house and we decided the only proper thing to do under the circumstances was to tell you all what's happened." He paused, and wiped his forehead with a thin, trembling hand. Beside Lucian, Juliette burst into tears again.

"It concerns my father's hoard," Norman went on. "As you probably know, it's kept in the cellar, comprising all the valuables of his father and grandfather, as well as those he has collected himself. We saw just now that . . . that the door had been broken open, in spite of all the safeguards." He paused again, face contorted in deep emotion. "When we looked inside the cellar," he said, his voice

now almost a whisper, "when we looked inside . . . we found almost everything had been stolen."

For a moment, the silence was absolute. Such an event was unprecedented; minor theft was quite common, but from the head man . . .

The silence was broken by Juliette bursting into tears yet again, and by a shout from Isaac Gaylord of pure fury.

"This is unbelievable! My hoard . . . gone . . . No citizen of this village would surely do such a thing. It must be offworlders, after my garbage collection. Or nomads, a raiding party from outside the village . . . all my hoard gone!"

He clutched his head in his hands, and staggered off the stage, slumping into a seat in the audience.

The villagers were now murmuring uneasily amongst themselves. Apart from anything else, such an event on the night of a celebration was in bad taste; it brought everyone down.

"Why does this have to be aired in public?" Lucian whispered to Juliette.

"Because . . . because without his hoard, my father's just nothing," she said, rubbing her eyes. "His hoard is a measure of success and achievement. For any man, it's a social yardstick. For my father, and his father and grandfather, it was almost a badge of office. Now it's gone . . ." again she started sobbing loudly.

"Does this mean your father can no longer be head man?" He offered her a handkerchief, and she tried to dry the tears from her face and cheeks.

"It's never happened before but, yes, I think that's the way it must be. That's what makes it so terrible; daddy's still a great man, but without any form of a hoard to his name . . . who could respect him?"

The unsettled audience had by this time become decidedly edgy.

"What's going to happen, then?" someone called out.

"What's it going to be?" someone else shouted. "I don't fancy standing around here all night." There were several shouts of agreement.

Norman, still on the platform, was chewing his thumbnail nervously. "You know the answer as well as I do," he

said. "We can't be without a leader. Until my father's hoard is recovered we'll have to elect someone to take over temporarily."

"Elect?" Gaylord's voice shouted out from the audience. "That's a filthy word! What is this, a bloody democracy? You're my son, damn it; *you'll* have to take over. Or do you want to ignore and trample on the traditions and the way of life my father and his father built up over the last hundred years?"

"That's right," someone shouted, "it'll have to be you."

"Yours must be the biggest hoard in the village, now," someone else said.

"Well . . ." Norman said weakly, "I suppose so. But only for the time being . . ."

A man stood up in the front row.

"Let's have a cheer for our new head man! We may not like how it's happened tonight, and I pity the scum who stole Isaac's hoard, when we catch up with them. But whatever the circumstances, a new head man is a *cause for celebration*!"

The cheer was halfhearted at first, but gradually grew louder. Juliette turned away from the scene. "How can they?" she said. "My poor father . . ."

Lucian put his arm around her shoulders in consolation, and suddenly found her sobbing against him in great uncontrollable waves of emotion. He patted her helplessly.

At that moment, Isaac Gaylord pushed his way through the boisterous, shouting crowd and walked out of the doorway. He paused momentarily as he saw his daughter resting against Lucian's shoulder, but passed on, face grim, saying nothing. His heavy, stooped figure disappeared into the darkness outside.

A Taste of the Garbage Girl

IT DIDN'T TAKE very long for the celebration to get started. Juliette explained to Lucian that a free-for-all party was held regularly every month, and had just happened to coincide this time with the day of the offworlders' arrival. Lucian concluded that the villagers, half-drunk and ex-

pecting the orgy, had been determined to enjoy themselves whatever the situation. More serious matters could be left until the next day.

And so the villagers left the hall in small groups, shouting and laughing, drinking large amounts of home-distilled rough liquor. They built a great bonfire in the road, and all the lights and all the TV sets were turned on, each one tuned to a different station. The people just seemed to like a lot of background noise. In the light of the fire and of the many lamps shining through the windows of the huts and houses, figures sang and danced in the street. The semi-darkness conccaled the dirt of the place and, now and then, the light playing softly on the green leaves of the trees and shrubs produced an almost romantic atmosphere.

But the villagers did not entirely match this mood. Lucian watched a little bewildered as couples embraced and, too drunk to stand up, collapsed giggling to the filthy ground. In the sterility of his upbringing he had never encountered such an extrovert exhibition of drunken happiness, or such a plenitude of squalor and filth.

Juliette stayed with him for most of the evening, still upset by the loss of her father's hoard. She said that for the time being the disloyalty of the villagers towards him had quite disillusioned her; she preferred not to be involved with them. Gaylord himself was nowhere to be seen—possibly he was searching for his lost collection of pieces of refuse. In the meantime his son Norman, now the new head man, was quite drunk and in high spirits.

Citizens so intoxicated they couldn't recognize Lucian as an offworlder offered him their drink. He sampled it twice, but the operation necessitated removing his air filter, and the heavy, stomach-churning smell of the air he inadvertently breathed in was unbearable. In any case, the liquor was too rough for his taste.

The party went on long into the night. Spasmodic minor earth tremors added to the general chaos; small wisps of yellow gas drifted from fissures in the ground. Everyone ignored the tremors, and Lucian assumed they were the natural result of the asteroid's surface cooling during the night.

When he eventually returned to the survey craft, Juliette was still beside him, leaning on his arm, now miserably drunk. They stopped at the foot of the entry ramp, Lucian feeling a little unsure of himself.

"It's been an . . . interesting evening," he began to say; but before he could continue she reached up suddenly, pulled the air filter off his face and threw it away. Then she grabbed his head between her hands and kissed him.

Lucian felt conflicting emotions. Her lips were very full and soft, and the kiss was heady and in a way sensual; but she was a girl who had been brought up in the filth of Kopra, and his natural feelings of distaste turned to revulsion, as he found suddenly that the very taste of the kiss was unpleasant.

He pulled himself free from her.

"It's not fair," she said, speech slurred. "Not bloody fair. Why d'you have to be so goddam clean?"

Lucian looked around for the lost air filter, but it was too dark to see it. He took a breath of unfiltered air and choked on it.

She took a step back from him. "That's right, breathe our air. It'll be good for you. It's good enough for us, isn't it?" Then she burst into tears and stumbled drunkenly back to the village, where celebrations were still going on.

Lucian stood at the foot of the ramp watching her for a moment, wondering if he ought to follow her. He felt a vague need to apologise in some way. But the smell of the air was overpowering; a century of decaying refuse had contributed to its odour. Choking on another breath, Lucian hurried back up the ramp and into the ship.

Larkin had gone to bed some time before; Lucian crept quietly to his own cabin, sat down on the bed exhausted, and looked at himself in the mirror. He flinched as he saw dirty hand-marks on his cheeks, left there where Juliette had grabbed hold of him.

He peeled off the soiled protective clothing, showered, and finally went to bed. But lying in the darkened room, his imagination re-created the evening's wild and vivid events, that had made such an impact on his senses. And still he could recall the taste of the girl on his lips.

THE NEXT DAY, reinforcements arrived. Four planetary engineering ships set down with a thunder of rockets in military precision about a mile from the village. In the later part of the morning Lucian went over to see what was going on.

Remote-controlled and pre-programmed machines were conducting the erection and siting of larger units. The bottom part of a lattice-work tower, similar in appearance to an oil derrick, was being edged into position over a carefully marked-out area, and large pieces of drilling and blasting equipment were being readied. The black and grey metal shapes contrasted oddly with the brown landscape of refuse, studded with occasional patches of green.

Lucian had wondered if by inspecting the equipment there he could deduce some clue as to the other operations hinted at, in the conversation he had overheard between Larkin and headquarters. This still bothered him, with its hints of there being more than a simple patch-up job planned for the asteroid. But the machinery before him offered no evidence to substantiate his suspicions.

Isaac Gaylord's son Norman arrived on the scene a little later, pale and shadowy-eyed, suffering the effects of a hangover. "What exactly is going on?" he asked. "I only have the rough details of what's planned."

Lucian smiled. "You mean you only know what you managed to overhear of our conversation in your father's house?" Norman bit his lip and looked at the ground, embarrassed.

"I'm sorry," Lucian said, "thoughtless comment. It's quite simple. Most of the equipment here is either connected with drilling a deep hole to the bedrock of the asteroid, or with the other operation whereby surface layers of refuse will be compacted and homogenised. When a more powerful gravity generator is sited at the bottom of the hole they'll be digging, and when the layers of refuse are bedded down, Kopra should be safe from falling apart for another hundred years. Or so we hope."

Norman Gaylord looked thoughtful. "It's not so dan-

gerous, then, that you'd have to take all of us off the asteroid, somewhere else?"

Lucian shook his head. "Only temporarily, while the new generator is stabilised. I know very little about it, but I'm told that when an artificial gravity field is first established, it can be very unstable. Forces of up to ten gee can be experienced before it settles down. Obviously such surges would be very dangerous for anyone on Kopra at the time."

"I see. So you'll be enforcing temporary evacuation, rather than a permanent scheme to take people off Kopra?"

"As far as I know." Lucian thought back to Larkin's comments. "It's possible my superior, Minister Larkin, would greatly prefer it if Kopra could be permanently evacuated; he sees it as a blemish in an otherwise flawlessly clean asteroid belt society. But we're expecting enough resistance to temporary evacuation, without considering permanent schemes."

Norman looked thoughtful. "Probably you're right. Many people lack a detached viewpoint; they see life here as the only form of existence, and the idea of leaving it is impossible. What do you think should happen?" His pale grey eyes met Lucian's.

"I'm old fashioned. I think people, Koprans included, should be allowed to do what they like. Within reason. Don't you?"

Norman sighed. "Depends if they really know what's good for them or not. Anyway, perhaps I'll take your advice and talk to this man Larkin."

"You sound as if you're almost deliberately looking for the possibility of permanent evacuation."

"No," said Norman, "just surveying the possibilities. We're not all close-minded, pig-headed old men like my father, you know."

He turned and walked quietly away, back to the village, his thin, frail-looking body contrasting oddly with the thick-set muscular build of other Koprans.

As Norman Gaylord walked back to the village, Lucian saw Larkin making his way in the opposite direction, towards the planetary engineering site where Lucian stood.

"Ah, good thing I found you, Roach," Larkin said,

slightly out of breath. Walking over the loose, refuse-strewn ground was quite an effort. "We have trouble, Mr. Roach, more trouble. Captain Sterril contacted me a little while ago when I was in our survey craft."

"Captain Sterril?"

"He's in charge of planetary engineering operations here. It seems that when they touched down they attracted the attention of some nomads—savages living away from the village, out in the wasteland and the jungle. They are said to be even less civilised and less wholesome than the Koprans we have so far had to deal with."

Lucian followed Larkin across the uneven ground, tripping and stumbling occasionally as objects shifted under his feet, and carefully avoiding marshy-looking areas of sodden waste paper.

"What exactly is the trouble, though, sir?"

"Use your head, Roach. We had supposed that the entire population was concentrated in this one village. But now it appears that there are possibly many tramps and nomads scattered around the whole of the asteroid."

Lucian suddenly understood what was worrying Larkin. Evacuation of such a widely dispersed population would be almost impossible.

They climbed the entrance ramp of the captain's vessel, and opened the hatch. Inside the main cabin they found three of the scruffiest, dirtiest old men imaginable, faced by a tall muscular man in captain's uniform. He wore the explorer's guild crest and had the clean-cut strength that Lucian normally associated with join-the-army recruitment films. His handsome face implied discipline and courage. This was Captain Sterril.

He shook hands briefly but firmly with Lucian and Larkin, all the time glancing uneasily at the three old men, who stood together incongruously at the other side of the cabin, slightly arrogant, despite their scruffiness.

"They arrived about an hour ago, Minister Larkin, sir. It appears that they supposed our touchdown to be a . . . ah . . . refuse package impacting. They came looking for loot." He paused. "It seems that these people live by scavenging."

Lucian was a little surprised and amused to see that Captain Sterril was decidedly on edge; he was sweating

and his hands trembled nervously. Presumably close proximity with three such revoltingly dirty creatures was outside the captain's experience.

"This presents a very great problem," Larkin said. "I shall have to give the matter a good deal of careful consideration." They stood in silence for a moment, looking at the old men, whose clothing was so tattered and thin that they were really half naked. Underneath, their skins showed through as being of a dark brown colour similar to their grimy garments.

Captain Sterril shifted uneasily. He coughed. "I was wondering if you could arrange for their . . . removal, Minister Larkin, sir. As you see, I am without air filters, and the smell is rather distasteful. Also these nomads have caused a certain amount of nuisance in their interference with our operations; unlike the Koprans from the village, who have kept their distance, these old men have been trying to walk off with anything movable in sight." Sterril mopped his forehead nervously. Lucian smiled; in these days of a civilised solar system, an explorer seldom found himself in anything resembling an untamed environment.

Larkin looked annoyed, but there was obviously no way out of the situation.

"Very well, I will arrange something, captain," he said. "We will take these Koprans with us now. I appreciate that their dirtiness must be embarrassing to you. In fact, we ourselves must seem a little, ah, undesirable, having come in from outside." He gave Sterril the benefit of a frosty smile. The captain said nothing, but obviously he agreed with what Larkin said.

Lucian and Larkin chivvied the nomads out of the control cabin, leaving muddy footsteps on the spotlessly clean stainless steel floor and dirty hand prints on everything they touched. They went down the access ramp to the ground, the old men mumbling to one another in guttural, incomprehensible fragments of sentences. In the sunlight, Lucian was rather struck by the way the whites of their red-rimmed eyes contrasted with the blackened folds of skin on their faces. The eyes seemed to shine with an inner, insane light.

They started back over the dunes of refuse, back towards the village. It was a warm, oppressive afternoon and the

ever-present yellow mist hung in threatening clouds low overhead.

"I think you'd better take care of these people, Mr. Roach," Larkin said. "The paperwork involved is going to keep me busy all day, as it is." He sighed.

"Very well, sir," Lucian replied quietly, accepting resignedly the fact that the buck had now been passed to him. "I'll see what the people in the village can do."

Larkin returned to the survey craft and Lucian led the three old men on into the village, towards Gaylord's house.

The street was a shambles, after the previous night's celebrations. The fire had collapsed into a wide circle of ash which still smouldered dully. Bottles littered the ground, which had been churned into mud in many places. In several places the dense clumps of vegetation growing around the houses had been trampled down, and many windows were broken. It seemed a hoard of paint had been discovered and broken into; the side of one building and all the garden around it was a riot of yellows and crimsons, merging into one another. Lucian shook his head. It could never have happened on his world. The idea of such permissiveness was unsettling.

"Binnunorgyere, lassni?" one of the nomads mumbled to him, grinning, exposing his four yellow teeth. After the tramp had repeated himself several times, Lucian managed to understand what he had said.

"Yes," he said, "there was a big orgy, last night. Everyone drunk."

The old man laughed wheezingly, and spat on the ground, one side of his scarred face twitching. Some of his saliva dribbled down into the matted hairs of his beard.

They arrived at Gaylord's house. Lucian knocked on the door and Isaac Gaylord himself opened it. He peered out suspiciously.

"What d'you want?" he said.

Lucian saw Juliette come up behind Gaylord to see who was at the door. He greeted her, but when she saw him she turned and hurried back into the house. Inside the building, a door slammed.

Gaylord picked his nose, almost insultingly. "She don't

want nothing to do with you," he said, "not after last night. Now, what're you here for?"

Suppressing his curiosity and puzzlement about the girl's attitude, Lucian explained the fact that the nomads had been found and were causing trouble near the engineering crew.

"What d'you want me to do?" Gaylord asked. "I'm not the head man here any more. Can't see it concerns me. Why, some people are saying I never ever did have a real hoard—I didn't show it around, much, see. There's others say it was stolen long ago, only I didn't admit it." He shook his head and spat on the ground. "Filthy bloody rumours."

Lucian smiled uneasily. "I'm sorry to hear this," he said, "but all I wanted, in fact, was your advice. Can these nomads stay in the village?"

"Up to them." Gaylord sniffed, then turned to the old men. His voice changed, becoming harsher and more guttural, and syllables ran together as he spoke in their rough dialect. After a few questions, he turned back to Lucian.

"Got to realise, these are simple folk. They still think that's some kind of a blimp, out there. Never seen a space ship before, see. Still, I straightened 'em out. They'll stay here. Why not?"

Gaylord seemed about to close the door.

"One more thing," Lucian said quickly. "Are there many more nomads like this living outside the village? Do you know?"

Gaylord shrugged. "Quite likely there's more of 'em out there than there are here. All sorts. Tramps, escaped criminals and psychos, religious maniacs, and the usual crowd you get in slums. People who got nothing, got nowhere to go. Someone who lands here, or who crashes his ship, he isn't likely to hear of the village if he's not near it." Gaylord's face creased thoughtfully for a moment. His eyes narrowed. "Why you want to know?"

"If we're going to evacuate Kopra, we'll have to gather up all the nomads as well."

Gaylord nodded. "That's what I thought. Going to have quite a job, right?" He laughed and shut the door.

The man's animosity, and Juliette's indifference, annoyed

Lucian, principally because he didn't understand their causes. He sighed, and turned back to the nomads.

"I suppose you can stay where you like, provided there's no one there already." Without replying, the old men shambled off down the street, their long, thick beards and tattered garments flapping in the light breeze.

Larkin was seated at his desk, which, as usual, was piled high with documents and paperwork, when Lucian got back to the survey craft and informed him of the probable existence of several hundred nomads scattered over the asteroid. The administrator sighed and nodded.

"When those tramps appeared, it was what I suspected," he said. "Most inconvenient. It creates a most embarrassing situation. As I see it, if we *don't* evacuate all these nomadic people, and some of them become . . . indisposed . . . As a result of our operations here, the government will be liable for their injuries."

He sighed again, looking thoughtful. "Of course, this asteroid is not in regular communication with the civilised worlds. And many of these nomads are undesirable people . . . refugees from society, and so on. Their demise would not be entirely a tragedy, in a way, and news of it would not be reported. However, we must make a gesture Mr. Roach, if only for the sake of records. We must make a gesture. The tractor we carry in the hold should be suitable for land exploration here. We could conduct a search pattern centred on the village, taking the trailer to accommodate any nomads encountered *en route*. Do you find that idea satisfactory?"

"Well, if you say so, sir . . ."

"I do, Roach, I do. I would gladly accompany you on this little trip, but as you see, I have a great deal of work on my hands." He smiled blandly. "Besides, you understand these people better than I. And such an excursion would provide interesting data for your records, besides breaking the monotony of remaining here in the village."

Lucian shifted uneasily. He disliked being so obviously manipulated by Larkin. But he couldn't really challenge the man's authority.

"Midday tomorrow should give you sufficient time to

unload the tractor and trailer. And why don't you arrange for one or two of the natives to accompany you; they would be more familiar with the landscape, and might be of help."

Lucian nodded. "Very well, sir." Inwardly annoyed, he walked out of the cabin.

Dirt Philosophy

BACK IN HIS own room, some time later, Lucian was bringing his records and filing system up to date when he heard something tap against his porthole. He looked up. Again the light tap, of a small stone, on the thick plastic window. And finally a volley of gravel, as though the visitor below had become impatient.

Wondering which of the villagers wished to see him, Lucian walked down and opened the main hatch, peering out. It was now quite dark. The figure waiting at the foot of the entry ramp walked up and into the light, and Lucian saw it was Isaac Gaylord.

"I want words with you," Gaylord said. "Private."

Lucian glanced at the man's filthy clothes and skin, and hesitated.

"Come on, damn it. What's the matter, am I too dirty-looking, or something?"

Lucian flinched. "Well, I suppose . . ." He let Gaylord into the ship and led him up to his cabin, distressed by the trail of dirt the Kopran left behind him. Larkin wouldn't approve of this.

"I wouldn't have come here, see," Gaylord said, seating himself comfortably, "if I wasn't desperate. You wouldn't understand, but when a man's lost all his hoard, it's like, well, he can't look his friends in the eye any more. Man's got to have his pride. And I can't feel no pride without having all the stuff in my hoard. When I catch the bastard who ran off with it all . . ."

"Have you any idea yet, who stole it?"

"No. Nothing. That's why I've come here. The past day I've been looking all round this village. I know all the hiding places there are. My hoard just ain't anywhere. So I reckon it must be some nomads, from outside, who did it. It's the only answer."

He stood up and paced back and forth, leaving muddy footmarks on the floor, small flakes of dried dirt dropping off his rough clothes. The air became overpowering with his odour, and Lucian unobtrusively turned up the circulating unit.

"But how could it be nomads?" he asked. "They'd need transport, to get off with all that . . . all those valuables."

"So? Same applies to people in town, I'm the only person who's got a truck. The one Juliette uses, when she goes scavenging. No, it's got to be an organised group, know what I mean? People who salvaged some transport gear from a blimp, out in the wasteland."

"If you say so. But why exactly are you telling me all this?"

Gaylord still paced up and down, chewing on his lower lip. He sniffed loudly, started to say something, then thought better of it. Abruptly he stopped moving about, felt in the baggy pockets of his jacket, and pulled out a small plastic flask.

"Have a drink," he said. "Can't ask no favours of an offworlder, not till we're on better terms."

Lucian thought back to the unbearably rough taste of the alcohol he had sampled the previous night. "I don't think I'd better," he said. "It's a little strong for me. But let me offer you some of mine." He took a half bottle of whisky out of a cupboard, and set two glasses on the table.

"That's fine," Gaylord said. "Much obliged. Can't remember tasting offworld drink before."

He picked up the tumbler that Lucian had half filled, and swallowed it down in one gulp. He smacked his lips, grimaced, took out his plastic flask again and re-filled the glass with his own liquor.

"No offence, but I reckon yours ain't got so much punch to it as mine." He laughed and drank down the dark-coloured liquid he had poured out. "Right, I'll come straight to the point. You're going out to round up all the nomads you can find. Well, I was thinking you wouldn't mind taking me along; wouldn't affect you none. And I'd be able t'look round for any folk who might know where my hoard was. Get the idea?"

"Yes," said Lucian. "You could be some help to me,

too. Minister Larkin suggested I take a Kopran along as a guide; someone who knew the country."

Gaylord scratched his head. "Can't say I'd be much help there. Haven't been out of the village for a long time. Too busy keeping things in order here."

"Well, then, is there anyone else who knows the way around?"

"Yes, course there is. My daughter Juliette takes our truck out every day, picking up stuff from round about. But I don't really . . ."

"You don't really, what?" Lucian said, sensing a chance to get things out into the open. "Perhaps you can explain, now, exactly what's going on. Why Juliette—and you, for that matter—were so unhelpful this afternoon." Warmed by the drink, Lucian began to feel a little aggressive.

Gaylord picked his nose reflectively, wiping his hand under the lapel of his old jacket. "All right," he said. "Might as well have it in the open. Though I'd have thought it were clear enough. We don't like offworlders, see? It's not a matter of you, personally; it's just all offworlders, like on principle. Don't like their too-clean-by-half pious attitudes. Don't like 'em dropping their garbage on us and then complaining 'cos we're so dirty. Now, my girl, Juliette, she was upset last night. Got drunk. With one thing and another, she didn't like to mess about with village folk much, not after what happened, with my hoard gone and all. So she took a sort of a fancy to you, see? Got so drunk she almost convinced herself you weren't an offworlder. 'Course, this morning, it was a different matter. Full of shame, she was. Told me all about it. And I wasn't too pleased, neither."

"It was hardly my fault . . ." said Lucian.

"That's not the point. It's the fact she touched you, that's what matters. And another thing. I can see you took a bit of a fancy to her, when you first met her. Saw how you reacted. I didn't like that, neither."

Gaylord poured out some more of his drink and swallowed it quickly.

"That's ridiculous," Lucian said. "With all respect, I must point out that your daughter is hardly—hardly clean. I could never—never bring myself . . ."

Gaylord laughed. He wagged a dirty finger in front of

Lucian's face. "Don't kid yourself. There's nothing wrong with a good bit of honest dirt, and if you stay here long enough you'll realise it. I can see it in you, that I can."

Lucian drank a little more of his whisky. "That's nonsense, too. My upbringing was as strictly sterile as anyone else's. I have no reason . . ."

"Can't help all that. I dare say if you weren't allowed to play dirty when you were a kid, no mud pies or sand pits, it's still bottled up inside of you. Never had a chance to get out. Yes, that's it. I'll bet that's it." Gaylord laughed again, his face reddening and eyes screwing up. He belched loudly. "What you got to say to that?"

Lucian, unused to drinking, now found it hard to think logically. "Perhaps it's possible, but I'm just not interested. Well, perhaps that's not being really honest. I do remember thinking, if your daughter were less dirty; if she washed herself thoroughly, and wore some different clothes . . . She'd be very attractive. Yes, to be quite honest, she would. But as she is at present . . ."

"See?" said Gaylord, "I knew you had your eye on her. I'll say something for you, and that is, if you were a Kopran—or even if you'd drop your offworld habits and see what's so good about living here on Kopra—if you were as filthy as I am, I dare say I wouldn't give a damn about your messing about with my daughter." He looked at Lucian critically, through half closed eyes. "No, I can't deny it. I wouldn't mind. I might even be pleased."

He looked Lucian over for a little longer, and then without warning leaned forward, extending one of his grimy hands, and rubbed the palm of it first across one of Lucian's cheeks, then across the other. Then Gaylord sat back in his chair, roaring with laughter. "Tell you, it suits you," he said. "That it does. It suits you."

Lucian stood up, annoyed but a little incoherent. "This is ridiculous," he said. "You've got no right . . . spreading dirt all over the place . . ."

"Come on, have another drink, and stop worrying. It don't matter. Here, go on, have some of my liquor. Made it myself, just last week."

Lucian dabbed ineffectually at the dirty hand-prints on his face. "No," he said, "I think you'd better go. You've

caused enough havoc here tonight. I have to finish indexing my records . . ."

"What's that? What you got to do?" Gaylord stood up, a little unsteadily.

"My records." Lucian gestured at the microfilm and filing cards spread out on his desk. "I have records of all the work I've done for the government. Everything's cross-referenced and indexed."

Gaylord stood, regarding the filing system with great thought.

"That's interesting," he said. "Very interesting. You know what you got here, don't you?"

"How do you mean?"

"It's obvious, damn it!" He brought his big fist down on the table with a bang. "I got my hoard, you got all this crap. No difference, is there, really?" He started shaking with laughter again. "Must say, you got your hoard indexed better than mine ever was, though. Tried a microfilm system myself, but couldn't handle the processing. Too much trouble. And the photographic stuff I salvaged didn't work right."

"This is becoming even more ridiculous," Lucian said. "Please get out of here so I can do my work."

"All right, all right. Don't let's get on bad terms, now, not after we've seen as how we've got a lot in common." Gaylord laughed again. "What time you want me tomorrow for this trip out to find the nomads?"

Lucian sighed with relief. The man was going. "About midday. And it would really be most convenient if you could bring your daughter, purely from the aspect of her knowing the country."

"What other aspect were you thinking of?" Gaylord, still laughing, made his way out of the cabin and down to the hatchway. Lucian watched him walking off back to the village, pausing to drink some more from his plastic flask occasionally.

Back in his cabin, he cleaned up some of the dirt that Gaylord had left behind, and then spread cleansing jelly over his face, rubbing it well in and then washing it off. Really, several applications were needed to get right down to the residue, but he couldn't be bothered. Head still buzzing a little from the drink, he considered doing some

more work, but finally fell into bed and turned out the light.

It had been an unsettling experience, talking to Gaylord. The man's animation and his single-mindedness disrupted clear, logical thought. In a way Lucian could almost appreciate some of the man's outlook. But emotionally . . . emotionally, his sterile upbringing told him that dirt was revolting, and he saw no reason to think otherwise.

The Hole

THE NEXT MORNING Lucian went to Gaylord's house with a map of surrounding territory, based on photographs taken while the survey craft had been in orbit. Together they worked out a five day route that would cover an area centred around the village.

"We'll need you along, too, Juliette," Gaylord said to his daughter. "I once knew my way around, ten years back. But you're the one who's used the truck since then, out at the blimps."

She nodded, looking away from Lucian. "As you wish, father."

Gaylord grunted. "Right. Well, I warn you, Roach, it'll be tough at times; there's jungle and mutations, probably like you never seen before."

"Mutations?"

"That's what I said. Some factory asteroids, they don't give a damn; shoot down radioactives along with everything else. Kills off most creatures. But some live long enough and give birth to monsters."

"I'll include some weapons. And a geiger."

"Be best if you did." Gaylord rubbed his large hands together, the thick, stumpy fingers interlacing. "I'm looking forward to this. Long time since I last went on a trip out of the village. And if there's a chance of catching up with the bastards who stole my hoard, so much the better."

Shortly after midday, Lucian had completed loading operations and the tractor was completely stocked with provisions for the five day trek. It was a bizarre-looking, but obviously practical vehicle. The power source was a

direct conversion nuclear device, feeding four high flux electric motors. Hovercraft travel was utilised over smooth surfaces; for rough terrain, the air cushion was let down and the tractor proceeded on its huge caterpillar tracks. Its grey plastic body shell hung between them, like an insect crouching, its two front viewing bubbles reminiscent of protruding compound eyes, radio antennae waving like delicate feelers. The trailer that would be used for carrying any nomads encountered was a similar vehicle. It was, however, entirely operated by control from the tractor, and did not have its own nuclear power source.

Gaylord and Juliette seated themselves inside the tractor and Lucian started the motors. The down blast from the fans stirred up loose refuse, throwing it into the air in miniature vortices. The plume of dust stretched behind them as they headed out of the village.

Lucian had chosen their route so that on the outset they could pass close to the planetary engineering team. He stopped nearby, leaving Gaylord and Juliette inside the tractor, and walked across to the excavation site.

Using a combination of laser blasts, mechanical drilling and high pressure air jets, the men had already excavated a hole to a depth of several hundred feet. It was round, about twenty feet in diameter, tapering very slightly as it deepened. The sides were fused smooth and slick by the laser action. They glittered a dark brown, so smooth and shiny as to appear almost moist.

All around were great mounds of brown earth and refuse that had been dredged out; it lay, steaming slightly in the midday sun, the chemical reactions of decay giving rise to a strong-smelling gas that swirled intermittently across the site, carried by a light wind.

The material that had been excavated was largely compacted into a uniform, earthy-looking substance the consistency of thick porridge. Much of the refuse had oxidised or had broken down spontaneously into decayed forms. Pieces of mechanical junk protruded here and there, there were patches of paper pulp and food waste, and empty drinking and eating containers were visible. The combination of low gravity and the extremely high fertility of the refuse had led to plants already sprouting from the heaps of rubbish; they looked oddly clean and pure,

the light shades of green contrasting with the uniform browns and blacks of the refuse.

"How long before you reach bedrock?" Lucian called to one of the workmen, who had just been winched out of the hole on the end of a cable, suspended by the tall derrick standing over the excavation.

The man wiped dirt and sweat off his forehead, and shrugged.

"Another few days. We're trying to get through a century of refuse, you see. It's been solidly accumulating all those years, more and more of it, as the population of the asteroid belt expanded."

"After you hit bottom, you put in the new generator?"

The man looked puzzled. "Generator? Got no generator with us."

"Then what *are* you going to put in the hole?"

The workman's eyes narrowed. "Why the questions? Come to think of it, you're not on our team, are you? Are you the one from the survey craft—Larkin's assistant?"

"What of it?"

The workman shook his head. "Stupid of me. My big mouth. Sorry, friend. Can't waste any more time. Come round tomorrow and I'll tell you all about it."

Lucian called after the man, but he just walked away, still muttering to himself.

Lucian went back towards the tractor. He had hoped to be reassured as to the genuineness of the scheme Larkin had outlined. But now it just looked more suspect and underhand—as if the engineering team had been given instructions not to divulge the nature of their work.

When he had almost reached the tractor, he was surprised momentarily as the ground shook under his feet, and there was a subdued rumble as, deep below, the hole was blasted further into the asteroid. Lucian turned and saw a great billowing cloud of yellow gas erupt from the hole. Small fragments and lumps of earth shot high into the air, spattering down on the surrounding mounds of refuse.

Lucian turned back to the tractor and climbed into the cabin. He took off his protective suit and air filter.

wrinkling his nose in distaste at the smell that had already gathered inside the tractor as a result of the presence of Gaylord and Juliette. It was a mixture of the smell of the asteroid and its garbage, and of simple body odour and sweat.

He sat down in the control seat and started the motors with a whine and a flurry of dust from the fans. The tractor rose on its air cushion and began to move forward over the ground. He boosted the air circulation to a maximum, but decided he ought not to wear his filter for fear of annoying the Koprans. Perhaps he would become used to the smell.

"Did you find out what you wanted to find, at the excavation?" Gaylord asked.

"Yes, thanks," Lucian said. There was no point in involving Gaylord in his suspicions of Larkin's integrity. The Kopran was suspicious enough already.

The Garbage Jungle

THE TRACTOR SPED over the undulating surface of the asteroid. Travelling fairly fast, it was hard to distinguish the nature of the ground over which they passed. At one point they stopped to eat lunch, overlooking a crater below that sparkled with reds and blues, glittering small plastic fragments scattered from the impact of a blimp from a factory asteroid. The brightly-coloured fragments had spread out from the central impact point in irregular concentric rings, forming a kind of mis-shapen target symbol. The colours looked as if they had been painted on the ground, covering an area almost a quarter of a mile across.

Juliette explained that factory asteroids rarely jettisoned refuse of value. The plastic fragments they now saw were no doubt material of faulty composition. Best pickings came from the pleasure centres, where rich colonies disposed of anything at all unclean or malfunctioning.

"Ever been to one of the pleasure asteroids?" Gaylord asked Lucian.

"One or two. They escape various legislation clauses, being isolated and often uncatalogued. So many of them turn into examples of total indulgence for its own sake. Others undergo miniature political revolutions. Sometimes we've landed and found weird religious groups in power."

"In the midst of the sterility, there's still corruption," Juliette said to herself, loudly enough for Lucian to hear. She had been very quiet throughout the journey so far, and distant in her manner. It was as if she wanted to avoid all possible contact with Lucian.

After lunch they travelled a little more than two miles before encountering the jungle. It stretched before them in a solid green wall twenty or thirty feet high. Lucian saw it was composed of comparatively few trees, the low gravity and high soil fertility allowing the exaggerated growth of plants and shrubs. Species and strains from every inhabited planet were there, crowding each other, competing for a patch of sunlight. Many of the large plants, ten or twenty feet high, bore great flowers sparkling in strange mauves and pinks, swaying gently in the breeze. Near ground level, where it was shadowy and dark under the umbrella of foliage, the plant stems were almost completely white, though nearer the sunlight they were a deep shade of green that was almost translucent.

Lucian switched the drive from air jets to caterpillar tracks, and the vehicle sank slowly into contact with the ground. Progress would be slower, but the extra traction provided by the treads was necessary to break through the jungle.

He revved the motors and they nosed into the forest of thick stems. From all around, the noise of snapping and crunching vegetation was easily audible inside the tractor. Occasionally they came up against the trunk of a tree, and the motors groaned and the tracks slipped until finally the tree trunk snapped and collapsed with a great crash into the surrounding jungle.

Sometimes dog-like creatures were seen running off into the gloom of the jungle, fleeing from the headlights of the tractor which sent powerful beams out on all sides. Gaylord explained that the dogs were wild, descended from animals brought to Kopra by the first colonists. There was little other animal life, none having been imported, and the dogs were mostly cannibalistic.

The insect life, on the other hand, was quite prolific; a number of species had inevitably been borne to Kopra in with the refuse dumped by the other asteroids. Brightly

coloured wasp-like things, up to two inches long, darted in and out of the beams of the tractor's lights. Occasionally large spiders and ants, dislodged from falling plants and trees, landed on the transparent viewing bubbles, and scuttled quickly away.

The motors whined, the tracks banged and thumped, and the jungle crunched and groaned as they forced their way through it The noise and the lurching of the vehicle became as monotonous as the face of the shadowy vegetation.

The Mud Lake

IT WAS DUSK when they found themselves suddenly out of the jungle and at the edge of a wide area where no vegetation of any kind was growing.

"Looks like some kind of mud," Gaylord said. "Marshy. Better go round it."

"No need," said Lucian. "The tractor and trailer are both amphibious."

The mud lake lay smooth and free from ripples, a lustrous deep shade of brown. Here and there, giant bubbles broke the surface, bursting with leisurely slowness in the viscous liquid.

Lucian nosed the vehicle down to the lake edge, and operated controls that extended paddles from the caterpillar tracks. They edged on to the surface of the lake, and sank into it very gently and slowly, so thick was the mud. The paddles slapped down with great liquid smacking noises, and threw dollops of mud high into the air. Soon the windows were spattered with the stuff.

They ploughed slowly across, leaving a wake in the mud which slowly closed in on itself and smoothed out, restoring the surface to its former unbroken state. Juliette and her father occupied the viewing bubble the other side of the tractor to Lucian's, staring out in fascination, never having seen anything like the lake before.

"There's legends about this place," Gaylord said. "All folklore, mind you. Strange things, men getting swallowed up. Evil spirits. That kind of nonsense."

"It's certainly a strange phenomenon," Lucian said. "I can't understand why it should have occurred—why the

mud remains liquid, and where it all came from. The lake's too wide for all the mud to have been brought by one blimp."

They continued on until they had reached a point near the centre of the lake. The tractor was rocking in a barely noticeable, but steadily increasing rhythm, as if under the action of slow thermal currents, and soon Lucian could see great bubbles surfacing and bursting all around them, releasing little puffs of dark coloured gas. But there was nothing visible to account for the action, the only abnormality being that the geiger registered radioactivity slightly higher than usual.

"What's the trouble?" Gaylord asked, when the rocking motion had become unpleasant. "Not sinking or anything, are we?"

Juliette said nothing, but bit her lip nervously.

Lucian laughed. "There's not much can sink this tractor. Probably some thermals in the lake that are disturbing us like this."

But as he spoke, the tractor gave one last great sickening lurch that sent Juliette and her father sprawling on the floor. The vehicle shot several feet in the air, rocking wildly. Lucian strapped himself in hastily, peering out of the mud-spattered windows, trying to see what was happening.

The tractor landed on its side in the mud and then, very slowly, righted itself, the viscous goo tending to restrain it. Lucian peered out of the viewing bubble and saw, with amazement, a serpent-like creature rising out of the mud. It was fleshy-looking, about ten feet in diameter, and where its skin was exposed it was a lustrous white. Ponderously, the creature's head swung around, as if trying to detect where the tractor lay. But it seemed to lack any eyes, its motions being blind and instinctive, and not co-ordinated or purposeful. A mouth that looked small in the giant stumpy face opened and closed, and two truncated antennae waved tentatively around before the creature sank back into the lake and gradually submerged.

It was, Lucian realised, a kind of giant slug. Presumably the passage of the tractor across the lake had sent out disturbing shock waves that had aroused the creature, bringing it to the surface. Lucian turned the tractor and,

at full power, headed for the nearest bank of the lake. He looked through the rear-view periscope and saw the giant slug turning in their direction, its antennae waving inquisitively, but it just sank ponderously back into the mud again and made no attempt to pursue them.

Apart from a stifled scream from Juliette, there had been grim silence in the tractor while it was tossed around. Now, conversation broke out.

"How awful," Juliette said, "like a giant worm . . ."

"A slug," Gaylord said. "Mutant slug. Queerest mutant I ever seen. Ain't no record of anyone seeing one like that before."

"A mutant. I suppose so," said Lucian, "but it's so unusual . . . I would have thought impossible. The radioactive count on the surface here is high, so I suppose that deeper down there's some 'hot' waste of some kind. But I'd have thought a mutation of that magnitude was out of the question."

They were near the shore, now, and Lucian retracted the paddles from the tracks. The tractor pulled itself out of the lake on to solid ground, still dripping thick mud. When they were clear of the mud and under the trees of the jungle, Lucian cut the motors and slumped back in his driving seat, feeling suddenly exhausted. The emotional reaction had hit him without warning.

"Reckon we need a drink," said Gaylord. He went back to the stores, and returned with one of his plastic flasks. "Brought a few along, just in case. Freshly distilled, too."

The flask was passed round. Lucian still felt slight nausea after the dangerous episode of a few moments ago, and hesitated.

"Come on, come on," grumbled Gaylord. "It'll put hair on your chest and bring out a nice healthy sweat. Does yer good."

Lucian took a swig, swallowing it quickly, and passed the flask back. He choked a little, and saw Juliette watching him with faint amusement. The liquor burned his stomach and throat.

Gaylord chuckled. "Second time's not so bad," he said, taking a great gulp. Lucian realised, still coughing a little, that this was something he would have considered impos-

sible, a few days ago. Sitting next to two Koprans, wearing no filters or protective clothing, and drinking their raw, germ-laden, home-made liquor. He looked at his hands and saw dirt under the nails; he touched his face and felt his sweaty skin. Already at this stage of the trip he was beginning to feel a little unclean. It was a strange feeling, that he found unpleasant.

"Well," he said, "we'd better press on, else we'll fall behind schedule."

The sun had almost set, now, but the jungle would be dark at any time of day. The sky over the mud lake glowed a deep yellow, which was reflected in the lake's smooth surface. Wisps of cloud and mist hung near the horizon. In the dim light, the edge of the jungle looked black, featureless and forbidding.

Lucian pressed the panel switch to activate the motors. But there was no result. Alarmed, he turned on the headlights. But they, too, were dead.

"Something wrong," he said. "Possibly damaged by what happened on the lake."

He pulled on an anti-contamination suit and walked back through the cabin to the engine compartment. The inspection lights were dead; it seemed all the electrical systems had failed. Using a torch, he started checking.

The trouble was soon obvious. Indicators showed the pile-source was semi-critical. Dampers had jammed open so that, if the pile were to be activated now with the shielding retracted, the reaction would be insufficiently curtailed and would pass the critical stage unchecked. A safety interlock prevented this from happening, and maintained the pile completely out of action. There was no way round the situation; once a power unit was in this state, it was unusable.

He walked back into the cabin and told them what had happened.

"What did it?" Gaylord asked. "That shake-up on the lake?"

"I doubt it. I can't understand it, in fact. It's very unlikely for this to happen. The dampers must already have been jammed open when we started out; it's been building up since then."

"Pity their equipment isn't as foolproof as offworlders like to think," Juliette said. "What do we do now?"

Lucian shrugged. "Simple enough. Radio Larkin, get him out here to pick us up in the survey craft. The main radio won't work without the power equipment, but the emergency system is battery powered."

He took a unit out of a compartment in the control panel, and flicked a switch. He reset it, then turned it on again. Nothing happened.

In the twilight, it was hard to see anything. He focused his torch on the emergency radio.

The back of the case, where the batteries were, had been ripped open. The batteries were missing, obviously torn out, wires left broken.

At first, it took some time to sink in. He was so used to being in contact with civilisation, to being a part of organised operations, that the thought of being stranded on an alien world with two of its natives, fifteen miles from help, was unreal.

Gaylord broke the sudden silence, grabbing the radio out of Lucian's hands. "It's been bloody sabotaged," he said. "Obvious, isn't it? Tractor was, too, most likely."

Lucian nodded. "It's the only possible conclusion."

"What will we do?" said Juliette.

"We can wait here, can't we?" Gaylord replied. "They'll come out looking, if we don't get back. Send out a ship or something. Easy path we left through the jungle, for them to follow. We got food here, won't starve."

Lucian shook his head. "It's not so simple. The path we left in the jungle ends at the lake edge. We're now some distance to one side, hidden under trees. It'll look as if we went into that lake and never came out on the opposite edge. Any search party would just assume we'd gone down in the mud."

Gaylord looked thoughtful. "No signals? No flares or anything?"

"The tractor isn't equipped with any emergency equipment."

"Well, then." Gaylord scratched his head. "Just have to make it back on foot. Be tough on you, what with your being an offworlder and all. But you got no choice, have you?"

Lucian imagined the thick jungle they had broken their way through in the tractor, and then the expanse of rolling hills of refuse. Fifteen miles away from the village, over difficult country.

He sighed. "I suppose you're right. I've no alternative. We'll spend the night here, and then we'll just have to make it back on foot."

(concluded next month)

to the pure

damon knight

"JEFF, PLEASE DON'T, you're hurting me."

"Ah, you frigid dames give me a pain."

Her voice altered, and he knew she was crying. "Why did you marry me, then?"

"Sometimes I wonder. Come on, baby. . . ."

Monday morning when he showed up for work, there was an Antarean in the place. Jeff stopped in the doorway and looked at it. The thing was taller than him, slender, all golden down and feathers. It looked like one good belch would blow it away.

The super beckoned him over. Five or six of the other guys were standing around, looking uncomfortable. "Jeff, this is Mr. Nellith from the Antarean Technical Exchange Commission. He's going to find out what's wrong with our hyper-radio. Mr. Nellith, Jeff Gorman, our circuits man."

"Harya," Jeff said warily, and stuck out his hand, then pulled it back. Somebody snickered. What was the thing going to shake with, for Christ's sake? It had flimsy golden wings, held close to its body, like a chicken's. The head was more birdlike than anything else—big cranium, great big glowing eyes, and a little thing like a bill, only soft-lipped. All the clothing it had on was a thing like a vest with pockets, but as far as Jeff could tell, there was nothing male about it.

"I am pleathed to know you," Nellith said in a chirping voice. "You are a thpethialitht in communicathionth thircuitth? Then we have thomething in common."

Damned if we do, Jeff told himself, bunching the muscles in his arms and chest. Everything about him was short and thick—neck, fingers, his legs, his torso.

The super said hurriedly, "Well, Mr. Nellith, here's our problem." He pointed to the big enamel-faced cabinet set up at one side of the room. It was an Antarean hyperradio, one of the first items the Government had asked for when the technical exchange programme started. They used it to monitor U. S. spaceships everywhere they went with the new Antarean drive. It had worked great for two years, then it had gone sour.

Jeff was a T5 and had studied the schematics. It should have been up to him to fix it, but there was no commonsense way to get into the damn thing. The cabinet was built in horizontal sections, with narrow spaces in between. Midway back in these spaces, running up into the machine, there were little access holes not even an inch in diameter, seven or eight inches deep. To get a component out, you would have to work with jointed tools and a periscope—and what if you dropped one into the machine?

The others followed the Antarean over to the cabinet, and after a minute Jeff went too.

Nellith's wings stirred; something like a stubby coil of rope appeared at the tip of each one, opened out—it was a tentacle, about seven inches long, with a bunch of weak-looking filaments at the end. Using them like fingers, the Antarean turned the power on, fiddled with the gain and tuning dials a minute. Then he bunched one set of filaments together and stuck them into an access hole. The tentacle flowed up into the hole, deeper, still deeper. It pulsed, as if the alien was feeling around there inside.

"You have been overloading the thircuitth," Nellith piped.

Everybody looked at Jeff. He felt his face getting red. "Well, we had to try something, didn't we? What the hell, why don't you make these damn things so you can get into 'em?"

The super said hastily, "The Antareans are building another rig to our specs. Meanwhile, we've got a service

contract—it breaks down, they send a, hum, man to fix it." He coughed. "What do you say, Mr. Nellith, can do?"

The creature pulled out a component—one of the little Antarean hyper-resonators—clutched in the tendrils at the end of his tentacle. "It may take thome time," he said.

"Guess what Nelly did today?" Jeff asked sourly. He pulled off his tie, yanked his collar open.

"What?" Marge asked. She was clean and pretty as always—blonde hair brushed, a touch of make-up—but her blue eyes were dull. She was two inches taller than he was, slender and fragile-looking. Maybe they were not especially well-matched, physically or any other way, but he was proud of her. She was the kind of doll that made other guys eat their hearts out when they saw her on his arm. He had married her practically out of high school; he was the first man in her life, and he was proud of that, too.

"One of the guys wrote down some parts numbers," he said. "Then he lost the paper like a damn fool. Nelly took the scratch pad and felt the next sheet, and read off the numbers. Then they asked him to read the date off a coin without looking, and he did that. So Andy Wolchak took him down to the Silver Grill for lunch and won twenty bucks betting on him. A bunch of us was going to go back after work and clean up, but Nelly wouldn't. Said he 'didn't realise it was dishonest.' Can you tie that?"

The beginning of Nellith's second week on the job, the Department found him a room in one of the housing units right across the court from Jeff. They threw a party for him that night, and invited all the Project personnel.

Marge spent practically the whole evening talking to Nellith, while Jeff gave her sour looks across the room. They had their heads together, eager and interested. Standing side by side that way, they even looked something alike—both tall and delicate, and Marge's blonde hair was not so far off the colour of Nellith's feathers.

"What the hell were you talking about all night?" he asked her when they got home.

"He's interesting—very spiritual," she said. "He's been all over the galaxy, studying religions. He says our Vedanta is very interesting."

"Ah, for Chrissakes."

Jeff started calling the Antarean "Nelly", first behind his back, to get a laugh from the other guys, then where Nellith could hear him. Finally he took to saying, "Hey, Nelly—oh, sorry, I mean Mr. Nellith." But the alien was always polite, and he could not tell if it bothered him or not.

One day when they were alone in the room, he crossed over next to Nellith and stepped on his fragile-looking foot, but the super came in at the wrong time, and he had to say it was an accident and would not happen again.

Next day he began making up to Nellith in a falsetto voice—praising the way he walked, his slender body, patting him on the downy top of his head. Once he even put his hands around Nellith's waist to show how narrow it was. One or two of the guys snickered.

Night after night, when he came home from poker or bowling with the guys, the same thing—Marge sitting up on the roof garden under the cool violet sky side by side with Nellith.

"What in hell do you *talk* about all the time?"

"I told you—religion, mysticism, spiritual things like that."

"Ah, hell."

One thing he had found out. When Nellith was working on the circuits, with his tentacle stuck up deep into the insides of the cabinet, he was like an absent-minded professor—you could do damn near anything and he would not notice.

One lunch hour Jeff went down to the shopping area and picked out a wrap-around beach skirt, white cotton with big yellow and blue flowers on it. He got it from the children's department.

He smuggled the thing in under his jacket and hid it. After about an hour, when everybody was busy and Nellith was probing away at the insides of the machine,

he got up and tiptoed over. He got the skirt around Nellith's skinny hips and buttoned it. Nellith did not notice a thing.

He went back to his desk, and when one of the guys happened to look up and saw Nellith wearing the skirt, there was a roar of laughter.

The super was sore, and he knew Jeff was the one, but let him prove it.

"It ith not important," Nellith said, looking at Jeff.

That was on the Monday of Nellith's last week. Tuesday, Jeff came home and found Marge gone—just gone, no note, all her stuff cleared out and the apartment tidied up.

On Wednesday, he got a letter from a lawyer. She was suing him for divorce.

Friday afternoon, one of the guys said something he could not believe. He laid for the man out in the parking lot after work and pasted him good, but he still could not get it out of his head. That night there was a farewell party for Nellith. Jeff did not go, but stayed home by himself drinking beer and brooding.

Come eight o'clock, he put on a clean shirt and hopped a cab out to the spaceport.

He found them there in the waiting room—Nellith the same as ever, all golden down and feathers; Marge looking young and pretty in a new blue suit, with an orchid on her lapel.

Two spaceport cops got in his way when he tried to walk closer, and some guy in civilian clothes moved up and flashed a badge in a leather folder. "Let's not have any disturbance, please, Mr. Gorman."

"But damn it, that's my wife!"

The man looked embarrassed but determined. "As I understand it, she's going to marry Mr. Nellith as soon as your divorce comes through."

"What are you talking about, marry—how can she marry that thing?"

There were reporters crowding around, and more cops, and more guys in civilian clothes. One of them said, "Nellith has reciprocal citizenship rights under the treaty.

According to Antarean law, there's nothing wrong with interspecies marriage. In fact, it's not uncommon."

Jeff loosened his fists and said, "Just let me talk to her. Okay? Just two minutes."

They did not like it, but they let him get closer, sticking tight around him. He ignored the alien and looked at Marge. She looked back as if he was a stranger.

"Tell me why," he said between his teeth. "If it was some other guy maybe I could figure it, but how can you run off with a goddamn bird?"

Then the Antarean tender came down outside with a whoosh of jets, and the porters began picking up Marge's luggage. She gave him a look of contempt that took in his low brow, his thick hairy torso, his stubby hands and fingers. "You wouldn't understand," she said.

Then they all went away and left him standing there.

THE squirrel CAGE

thomas m. disch

THE TERRIFYING THING—if that's what I mean—I'm not sure that 'terrifying' is the right word—is that I'm free to write down anything I like but that no matter what I *do* write down it will make no difference—to me, to you, to whomever differences are made. But then what is meant by 'a difference'? Is there ever really such a thing as change?

I ask more questions these days than formerly; I am less programmatic altogether. I wonder—is that a good thing?

This is what it is like where I am: a chair with no back to it (so I suppose you would call it a stool); a floor, walls, and a ceiling, which form, as nearly as I can judge, a cube; white, white light, no shadows—not even on the underside of the lid of the stool; me, of course; the typewriter. I have described the typewriter at length elsewhere. Perhaps I shall describe it again. Yes, almost certainly I shall. But not now. Later. Though why not now? Why not the typewriter as well as anything else?

Of the many kinds of question at my disposal, 'why' seems to be the most recurrent. Why is that?

What I do is this: I stand up and walk around the room from wall to wall. It is not a large room, but it's large enough for present purposes. Sometimes I even jump, but there is little incentive to do that, since there is nothing to jump *for*. The ceiling is quite too high to touch, and the stool is so low that it provides no challenge at all. If I thought anyone were *entertained* by my jumping . . . but I have no reason to suppose that. Sometimes I exercise: push-ups, somersaults, head-stands, isometrics, etc. But never as much as I should. I am getting fat. Disgustingly fat and full of pimples besides. I like to squeeze the pimples on my face. Every so often I will keep one sore and open with overmuch pinching, in the hope that I will develop an abscess and blood-poisoning. But apparently the place is germ-proof. The thing never infects.

It's well nigh impossible to kill oneself here. The walls and floor are padded, and one only gets a headache beating one's head against them. The stool and typewriter both have hard edges, but whenever I have tried to use *them*, they're withdrawn into the floor. That is how I know there is someone watching.

Once I was convinced it was God. I assumed that this was either heaven or hell, and I imagined that it would go on for all eternity just the same way. But if I were living in eternity already, I couldn't get fatter all the time. Nothing changes in eternity. So I console myself that I will someday die. Man is mortal. I eat all I can to make that day come faster. *The Times* says that that will give me heart disease.

Eating is fun, and that's the real reason I do a lot of eating. What else is there to do, after all? There is this little . . . nozzle, I suppose you'd call it, that sticks out of one wall, and all I have to do is put my mouth to it. Not the most elegant way to feed, but it tastes damn good. Sometimes I just stand there hours at a time and let it trickle in. Until *I have* to trickle. That's what the stool is for. It has a lid on it, the stool does, which moves on a hinge. It's quite clever, in a mechanical way.

If I sleep, I don't seem to be aware of it. Sometimes I do catch myself dreaming, but I can never remember what they were about. I'm not able to make myself dream

at will. I would like that exceedingly. That covers all the vital functions but one—and there is an accommodation for sex too. Everything has been thought of.

I have no memory of any time before this, and I cannot say how long *this* has been going on. According to today's *New York Times* it is the Second of May, 1961. I don't know what conclusion one is to draw from that.

From what I've been able to gather, reading *The Times*, my position here in this room is not typical. Prisons, for instance, seem to be run along more liberal lines, usually. But perhaps *The Times* is lying, covering up. Perhaps even the date has been falsified. Perhaps the entire paper, every day, is an elaborate forgery and this is actually 1950, not 1961. Or maybe they are antiques and I am living whole centuries after they were printed, a fossil. Anything seems possible. I have no way to judge.

Sometimes I make up little stories while I sit here on my stool in front of the typewriter. Sometimes they are stories about the people in *The New York Times*, and those are the best stories. Sometimes they are just about people I make up, but those aren't so good because. . . .

They're not so good because I think everybody is dead. I think I may be the only one left, sole survivor of the breed. And they just keep me here, the last one, alive, in this room, this cage, to look at, to observe, to make their observations of, to— I don't *know* why they keep me alive. And if everyone is dead, as I've supposed, then who are they, these supposed observers? Aliens? *Are* there aliens? I don't know. Why are they studying me? What do they hope to learn? Is it an experiment? What am I supposed to do? Are they waiting for me to say something, to write something on this typewriter? Do my responses or lack of responses confirm or destroy a theory of behaviour? Are the testers happy with their results? They give no indications. They efface themselves, veiling themselves behind these walls, this ceiling, this floor. Perhaps no human could stand the sight of them. But maybe they are only scientists, and not aliens at all. Psychologists at M.I.T. perhaps, such as frequently are shown in *The Times*: blurred, dotty faces, bald heads, occasionally a moustache, certificate of originality. Or, instead, young, crew-cut Army doctors studying various brainwashing

techniques. Reluctantly, of course. History and a concern for freedom has forced them to violate their own (privately-held) moral codes. Maybe I *volunteered* for this experiment! Is that the case? O God, I hope not! Are you reading this, Professor? Are you reading this, Major? Will you let me out now? I want to leave this experiment *right now*.

Yeah.

Well, we've been through that little song and dance before, me and my typewriter. We've tried just about every password there is. Haven't we, typewriter. And as you can see (can you see?)—here we are still.

They are aliens, obviously.

Sometimes I write poems. Do you like poetry? Here's one of the poems I wrote. It's called *Grand Central Terminal*. ('Grand Central Terminal' is the right name for what most people, wrongly, call 'Grand Central Station.' This—and other priceless information—comes from *The New York Times*.)

Grand Central Terminal
How can you be unhappy
when you see how high
the ceiling is?

My!
the ceiling is high!
High as the sky!
So who are *we*
to be gloomy here?

Why,
there isn't even room
to die, my dear.

This is the tomb
of some giant so great
that if he ate
us there would be
simply no taste.

Gee,

what a waste
that would be
of you and me.

And sometimes, as you can also see, I just sit here copying old poems over again, or maybe copying the poem that *The Times* prints each day. *The Times* is my only source of poetry. Alas the day! I wrote *Grand Central Terminal* rather a long time ago. Years. I can't say exactly how many years though.

I have no measures of time here. No day, no night, no waking and sleeping, no chronometer but *The Times*, ticking off its dates. I can remember dates as far back as 1957. I wish I had a little diary that I could keep here in the room with me. Some record of my progress. If I could just save up my old copies of *The Times*. Imagine how, over the years, they would pile up. Towers and stairways and cosy burrows of newsprint. It would be a more humane architecture, would it not? This cube that I occupy does have drawbacks from the strictly human point of view. But I am not allowed to keep yesterday's edition. It is always taken away, whisked off, before today's edition is delivered. I should be thankful, I suppose, for what I have.

What if *The Times* went bankrupt? What if, as is often threatened, there were a newspaper strike! Boredom is not, as you might suppose, the great problem. Eventually —very soon, in fact—boredom becomes a great challenge. A stimulus.

My body. Would you be interested in my body? I used to be. I used to regret that there were no mirrors in here. Now, on the contrary, I am grateful. How gracefully, in those early days, the flesh would wrap itself about the skeleton; now, how it droops and languishes! I used to dance by myself hours on end, humming my own accompaniment—leaping, rolling about, hurling myself spread-eagled against the padded walls. I became a connoisseur of kinesthesia. There is great joy in movement—free, unconstrained speed.

Life is so much tamer now. Age dulls the edge of

pleasure, hanging its wreathes of fat on the supple Christmas tree of youth.

I have various theories about the meaning of life. Of life *here*. If I were somewhere else—in the world I know of from *The New York Times*, for instance, where so many exciting things happen every *day* that it takes half a million words to tell about them—there would be no problem at all. One would be so busy running around—from 53rd St. to 42nd St., from 42nd St. to the Fulton Street Fish Market, not to mention all the journeys one might make *crosstown*—that one wouldn't have to worry whether life had a meaning.

In the daytime one could shop for a multitude of goods, then in the evening, after a dinner at a fine restaurant, to the theatre or a cinema. Oh, life would be so full if I were living in New York! If I were free! I spend a lot of time, like this, imagining what New York must be like, imagining what other people are like, what I would be like with other people, and in a sense my life here is full from imagining such things.

One of my theories is that they (*you* know, ungentle reader, who they are, I'm sure) are waiting for me to make a confession. This poses problems. Since I remember nothing of my previous existence, I don't know what I should confess. I've tried confessing to everything: political crimes, sex crimes (I especially like to confess to sex crimes), traffic offences, spiritual pride. My God, what *haven't* I confessed to? Nothing seems to work. Perhaps I just haven't confessed to the crimes I really did commit, whatever they were. Or perhaps (which seems more and more likely) the theory is at fault.

I have another theory th

A brief hiatus.

The Times came, so I read the day's news, then nourished myself at the fount of life, and now I am back at my stool.

I have been wondering whether, if I were living in that world, the world of *The Times*, I would be a pacifist or not. It is certainly the central issue of modern morality, and one would have to take a stand. I have been thinking about the problem for some years, and I am inclined to

believe that I am in favour of disarmament. On the other hand, in a practical sense I wouldn't object to the bomb if I could be sure it would be dropped on me. There is definitely a schism in my being between the private sphere and the public sphere.

On one of the inner pages, behind the political and international news, was a wonderful story headlined: BIOLOGISTS HAIL MAJOR DISCOVERY. Let me copy it out for your benefit:

Washington D.C.—Deep-sea creatures with brains but no mouths are being hailed as a major biological discovery of the twentieth century.

The weird animals, known as pogonophores, resemble slender worms. Unlike ordinary worms, however, they have no digestive system, no excretory organs, and no means of breathing, the National Geographic Society says. Baffled scientist who first examined pogonophores believed that only parts of the specimens had reached them.

Biologists are now confident that they have seen the whole animal, but still do not understand how it manages to live. Yet they know it does exist, propagate, and even think, after a fashion, on the floors of deep waters around the globe. The female pogonophore lays up to thirty eggs at a time. A tiny brain permits rudimentary mental processes.

All told, the pogonophore is so unusual that biologists have set up a special phylum for it alone. This is significant because a phylum is such a broad biological classification that creatures as diverse as fish, reptiles, birds, and men are all included in the phylum, Chordata.

Settling on the sea bottom, a pogonophore secretes a tube around itself and builds it up, year by year, to a height of perhaps five feet. The tube resembles a leaf of white grass, which may account for the fact that the animal went so long undiscovered.

The pogonophore apparently never leaves its self-built prison, but crawls up and down inside at will. The worm-like animal may reach a length of fourteen inches, with a diameter of less than a twenty-fifth of an inch. Long tentacles wave from its top end.

Zoologists once theorised that the pogonophore, in an early stage, might store enough food in its body to allow

it to fast later on. But young pogonophores also lack a digestive system.

It's amazing the amount of things a person can learn just by reading *The Times* every day. I always feel so much more *alert* after a good read at the paper. And creative. Herewith, a story about pogonophores:

STRIVING

The Memoirs of a Pogonophore

Introduction

In May of 1961 I had been considering the purchase of a pet. One of my friends had recently acquired a pair of tarsiers, another had adopted a boa constrictor, and my nocturnal roommate kept an owl caged above his desk.

A nest (or school?) of pogs was certainly one-up on their eccentricities. Moreover, since pogonophores do not eat, excrete, sleep, or make noise, they would be ideal pets. In June I had three dozen shipped to me from Japan at considerable expense.

A brief interruption in the story: do you feel that it's credible. Does it possess the *texture* of reality? I thought that by beginning the story by mentioning those other pets, I would clothe my invention in greater verisimilitude. Were you taken in?

Being but an indifferent biologist, I had not considered the problem of maintaining adequate pressure in my aquarium. The pogonophore is used to the weight of an entire ocean. I was not equipped to meet such demands. For a few exciting days I watched the surviving pogs rise and descend in their translucent white shells. Soon, even these died. Now, resigned to the commonplace, I stock my aquarium with Maine lobsters for the amusement and dinners of occasional out-of-town visitors.

I have never regretted the money I spent on them: man is rarely given to know the sublime spectacle of the rising pogonophore—and then but briefly. Although I had at that time only the narrowest conception of the thoughts that passed through the rudimentary brain of the sea-worm

("Up up up Down down down"), I could not help admiring its persistence. The pogonophore does not sleep. He climbs to the top of the inside passage of his shell, and, when he has reached the top, he retraces his steps to the bottom of his shell. The pogonophore never tires of his self-imposed regimen. He performs his duty scrupulously and with honest joy. He is *not* a fatalist.

The memoirs that follow this introduction are not allegory. I have not tried to 'interpret' the inner thoughts of the pogonophore. There is no need for that, since the pogonophore himself has given us the most eloquent record of his spiritual life. It is transcribed on the core of translucent white shell in which he spends his entire life.

Since the invention of the alphabet it has been a common conceit that the markings on shells or the sand-etched calligraphy of the journeying snail are possessed of true linguistic meaning. Cranks and eccentrics down the ages have tried to decipher these codes, just as other men have sought to understand the language of the birds. Unavailingly, I do not claim that the scrawls and shells of *common* shellfish can be translated; the core of the pogonophore's shell, however, can be—for I have broken the code!

With the aid of a United States Army manual on cryptography (obtained by what devious means I am not at liberty to reveal) I have learned the grammar and syntax of the pogonophore's secret language. Zoologists and others who would like to verify my solution of the crypt may reach me through the editor of this publication.

In all thirty-six cases I have been able to examine, the indented traceries on the insides of these shells have been the same. It is my theory that the sole purpose of the pogonophore's tentacles is to follow the course of this "message" up and down the core of his shell and thus, as it were, to think. The shell is a sort of externalized stream-of-consciousness.

It would be possible (and in fact it is an almost irresistible temptation) to comment on the meaning that these memoirs possess for mankind. Surely, there is a philosophy compressed into these precious shells by Nature herself. But before I begin my commentary, let us examine the text itself.

The Text

I

Up. Uppity, up, up. The Top.

II

Down. Downy, down, down. Thump. The Bottom.

III

A description of my typewriter. The keyboard is about one foot wide. Each key is flush to the next and marked with a single letter of the alphabet, or with two punctuation signs, or with one number and one punctuation sign. The letters are not ordered as they are in the alphabet, alphabetically, but seemingly at random. It is possible that they are in code. Then there is a space bar. There is not, however, either a margin control or a carriage return. The platen is not visible, and I can never see the words I'm writing. What does it all look like? Perhaps it is made immediately into a book by automatic linotypists. Wouldn't that be nice? Or perhaps my words just go on and on in one endless line of writing. Or perhaps this typewriter is just a fraud and leaves no record at all.

Some thoughts on the subject of futility:

I might just as well be lifting weights as pounding at these keys. Or rolling stones up to the top of a hill from which they immediately roll back down. Yes, and I might as well tell lies as the truth. It makes no difference what I say.

That is what is so terrifying. Is 'terrifying' the right word?

I seem to be feeling rather poorly today, but I've felt poorly before! In a few more days I'll be feeling all right again. I need only be patient, and then. . . .

What do they want of me here? If only I could be sure that I were serving some good *purpose*. I cannot help worrying about such things. Time is running out. I'm hungry again. I suspect I am going crazy. That is the end of my story about the pogonophores.

A hiatus.

Don't *you* worry that I'm going crazy? What if I got catatonia? Then *you'd* have nothing to read. Unless they gave *you* my copies of *The New York Times*. It would serve *you* right.

You: the mirror that is denied to me, the shadow that I do not cast, my faithful observer, who reads each freshly-minted *pensée*; Reader.

You: Horrorshow monster, Bug-Eyes, Mad Scientist, Army Major, who prepares the wedding bed of my death and tempts me to it.

You: Other!

Speak to me!

YOU: What shall I say, Earthling?

I: Anything so long as it is another voice than my own, flesh that is not my own flesh, lies that I do not need to invent for myself. I'm not particular, I'm not proud. But I doubt sometimes—you won't think this is too melodramatic of me? —that I'm real.

YOU: I know the feeling. (Extending a tentacle) May I?

I: (Backing off) Later. Just now I thought we'd talk. (You begin to fade.)
There is so much about you that I don't understand. Your identity is not distinct. You change from one being to another as easily as I might switch channels on a television set, if I had one. You are too secretive as well. You should get about in the world more. Go places, show yourself, enjoy life. If you're shy, I'll go out with you. You let yourself be undermined by fear, however.

YOU: Interesting. Yes, definitely most interesting. The subject evidences acute paranoid tendencies, fantasises with almost delusional intensity. Observe his tongue, his pulse, his urine. His stools are irregular. His teeth are bad. He is losing hair.

I: I'm losing my mind.

YOU: He's losing his mind.

I: I'm dying.

YOU: He's dead.

(Fades until there is nothing but the golden glow of the eagle on his cap, a glint from the oak leaves on his shoulders). But he has not died in vain. His country will always remember him, for by his death he has made this nation free.

(Curtain. Anthem.)

Hi, It's me again. Surely you haven't forgotten *me*? Your old friend, me? Listen carefully now—this is my plan. I'm going to escape from this damned prison, by God, and *you're* going to help me. 20 people may read what I write on this typewriter, and of those 20, 19 could see me rot here forever without batting an eyelash. But not number 20. Oh no! He—*you*—still has a conscience. He/you will send me a Sign. And when I've seen the Sign, I'll know that someone out there is trying to help. Oh, I won't expect miracles overnight. It may take months, years even, to work out a foolproof escape, but just the knowledge that there is someone out there trying to help will give me the strength to go on from day to day, from issue to issue of *The Times*.

You know what I sometimes wonder? I sometimes wonder why *The Times* doesn't have an editorial about me. They state their opinion on everything else—Castro's Cuba, the shame of our Southern States, the Sales Tax, the first days of Spring.

What about me!

I mean, isn't it an injustice the way *I'm* being treated? Doesn't anybody care, and if not, why not? Don't tell me they don't know I'm here. I've been years now writing, writing. Surely they have some idea. Surely *someone* does!

These are serious questions. They demand serious appraisal. I insist that they be *answered*.

I don't really expect an answer, you know. I have no false hopes left, none. I know there's no Sign that will be shown me, that even if there is, it will be a lie, a lure to go on hoping. I know that I am alone in my fight against this injustice. I know all that—and *I don't care!* My will is still unbroken, and my spirit free. From my isolation,

out of the stillness, from the depths of this white, white light, I say this to you—I DEFY YOU! Do you hear that? I said: I DEFY YOU!

Dinner again. Where does the time all go to?

While I was eating dinner I had an idea for something I was going to say here, but I seem to have forgotten what it was. If I remember, I'll jot it down. Meanwhile, I'll tell you about my other theory.

My *other* theory is that this is a squirrel-cage. You know? Like the kind you find in a small town park. You might even have one of your own, since they don't have to be very big. A squirrel-cage is like most any other kind of cage except it has an exercise wheel. The squirrel gets *into* the wheel and starts running. His running makes the wheel turn, and the turning of the wheel makes it necessary for him to keep running inside it. The exercise is supposed to keep the squirrel healthy. What I don't understand is why they put the squirrel in the cage in the first place. Don't they know what it's going to be like for the poor little squirrel? Or don't they care?

They don't care.

I remember now what it was I'd forgotten. I thought of a new story. I call it "An Afternoon at the Zoo." I made it up myself. It's very short, and it has a moral. This is my story:

AN AFTERNOON AT THE ZOO

This is the story about Alexandra. Alexandra was the wife of a famous journalist, who specialised in science reporting. His work took him to all parts of the country, and since they had not been blessed with children, Alexandra often accompanied him. However this often became very boring, so she had to find something to do to pass the time. If she had seen all the movies playing in the town they were in, she might go to a museum, or perhaps to a ball game, if she were interested in seeing a ball game that day. One day she went to a zoo.

Of course it was a small zoo, because this was a small town. Tasteful but not spectacular. There was a brook that

meandered all about the grounds. Ducks and a lone black swan glided among the willow branches and waddled out onto the lake to snap up bread crumbs from the visitors. Alexandra thought the swan was beautiful.

Then she went to a wooden building called the 'Rodentiary'. The cages advertised rabbits, otters, racoons, etc. Inside the cages was a litter of nibbled vegetables and droppings of various shapes and colours. The animals must have been behind the wooden partitions, sleeping. Alexandra found this disappointing, but she told herself that rodents were hardly the most important thing to see at any zoo.

Nearby the Rodentiary, a black bear was sunning himself on a rock ledge. Alexandra walked all about the demi-lune of bars without seeing other members of the bear's family. He was an enormous bear.

She watched the seals splash about in their concrete pool, and then she moved on to find the Monkey House. She asked a friendly peanut vendor where it was, and he told her it was closed for repairs.

"How sad!" Alexandra exclaimed.

"Why don't you try *Snakes and Lizards*?" the peanut vendor asked.

Alexandra wrinkled her nose in disgust. She'd hated reptiles ever since she was a little girl. Even though the Monkey House was closed she bought a bag of peanuts and ate them herself. The peanuts made her thirsty, so she bought a soft drink and sipped it through a straw, worrying about her weight all the while.

She watched peacocks and a nervous antelope, then turned off on to a path that took her into a glade of trees. Poplar trees, perhaps. She was alone there, so she took off her shoes and wiggled her toes, or performed some equivalent action. She liked to be alone like this, sometimes.

A file of heavy iron bars beyond the glade of trees drew Alexandra's attention. Inside the bars there was a man, dressed in a loose-fitting cotton suit—pyjamas, most likely—held up about the waist with a sort of rope. He sat on the floor of his cage without looking at anything in particular. The sign at the base of the fence read:

Chordate.

"How lovely!" Alexandra exclaimed.

Actually, that's a very old story. I tell it a different way every time. Sometimes it goes on from the point where I left off. Sometimes Alexandra talks to the man behind the bars. Sometimes they fall in love, and she tries to help him escape. Sometimes they're both killed in the attempt, and that is *very* touching. Sometimes they get caught and are put behind the bars *together*. But because they love each other so much, imprisonment is easy to endure. That is also touching, in its way. Sometimes they make it to freedom. After that though, after they're free, I never know what to do with the story. However, I'm sure that if I were free myself, free of this cage, it would not be a problem.

One part of the story doesn't make much sense. Who would put a person in a zoo? Me, for instance. Who would do such a thing? Aliens? Are we back to aliens again? Who can say about aliens? I mean, *I* don't know anything about them.

My theory, my best theory, is that I'm being kept here by people. Just ordinary people. It's an ordinary zoo, and ordinary people come by to look at me through the walls. They read the things I type on this typewriter as it appears on a great illuminated billboard, like the one that spells out the news headlines around the sides of The Times Tower on 42nd Street. When I write something funny, they may laugh, and when I write something serious, such as an appeal for help, they probably get bored and stop reading. Or *vice versa* perhaps. In any case, they don't take what I say very seriously. None of them care that I'm inside here. To them I'm just another animal in a cage. You might object that a human being is not the same thing as an animal, but isn't he, after all? They, the spectators, seem to think so. In any case, none of them is going to help me get out. None of them thinks it's at all strange or unusual that I'm in here. None of them thinks it's wrong. That's the terrifying thing.

'Terrifying'?

It's not terrifying. How can it be? It's only a story,

after all. Maybe *you* don't think it's a story, because you're out there reading it on the billboard, but I know it's a story because I have to sit here on this stool making it up. Oh, it might have been terrifying once upon a time, when I first got the idea, but I've been here now for years. Years. The story has gone on far too long. Nothing can be terrifying for years on end. I only *say* it's terrifying because, you know, I have to say something. Something or other. The only thing that could terrify me now is if someone were to come in. If they came in and said, "All right, Disch, you can go now." That, truly, would be terrifying.

be good sweet man

by hilary bailey

THE PRIME MINISTER entered the long airy office at Ten Downing Street, appreciatively examined the fresh bowl of primroses arranged on the polished desk and sat down to examine the morning's correspondence.

In a flash of red corduroy the principal secretary bustled in, arms piled with letter-tapes, memoranda and files, short blond hair bobbing up and down like the petals on a fresh-cut chrysanthemum.

"Thank you, Alex," the Prime Minister said. "And I expect I have you to thank for these lovely flowers, too."

The secretary looked pleased and skimmed out, skimmed back again. "The President of Martian Minerals asked this morning to see you urgently. I remembered your instructions and said you were free until ten."

"Thank you, Alex. What's it about?"

"I don't know."

At that moment, the famous iron-grey shock of hair belonging to the President of the Martian Algium Mines appeared round the door.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you, Margaret," she said.

"Of course not, Iris," the Prime Minister replied. "You can leave us now, Alex. Oh—and get someone to bring us coffee, will you?"

She slid her short, fat frame back into the chair and said, "Do sit down, Iris."

Iris Fredericks dropped into the chair opposite, leaned forward and said, "Chirpy little chap, your secretary. Is he any good?"

"Splendid," Margaret Smith said, with perverse pleasure. "Under that fluttery exterior he's got a mind like a steel trap. He was ten times better than any of the women candidates I had in mind after old Lalage retired. My staff grumbled a bit at first—said they'd feel uneasy working under a man—but I told them to get on with it. I'd picked the best candidate for the job. In fact there's been no trouble at all."

"Very progressive of you, Margaret," Iris Fredericks said coldly. She was well known for her prejudice against men. Martian Minerals, an industry relying almost solely on male labour, had never promoted a man to the administrative side. Iris Fredericks' husband was a shadowy and unknown figure living somewhere in the depths of the country—it was common knowledge that she had never permitted him a child, much as he wanted one.

"Well," she said, "I'm sure you'd like to know why I'm disturbing both our mornings so abruptly. But a situation has arisen at the mines which is going to give us both a lot of trouble unless it's dealt with quickly."

"Oh yes?" The Prime Minister said leaning forward. A secretary appeared, poured coffee and left.

"It's this," Iris Fredericks said tensely. "As you know, Jennifer Bennington has represented South Sector of the British Section of Mars since the constituency was formed twenty years ago. She's very able and she's always spoken up for an expansionist policy in the mines."

"Quite," said the Prime Minister, studying the long lined face opposite her. "And so?"

"As I also don't need to tell you, neither of us has ever been concerned about the Mars seats going out of the hands of the New Radical Party."

"South Sector's last majority was 5,016 and North Sector's 6,703," the Prime Minister said.

"Exactly. But now I'd say your position on South Sector is very shaky—and probably on North Sector too. The Conservative and Reform Party has kicked out Frances Cranford and put in a new prospective candidate."

"I see. What makes you think she can win the seat?" the Prime Minister said calmly.

"It's a man."

"Ho, ho," said Margaret Smith, concealing any slight shock she might have felt.

Iris Fredericks went on rapidly. "His name's Robert Dunlop. He's a manager in one of the mines. He's got a lot to recommend him to the miners and, as you know, they make up eighty per cent of the voting population. To start with, he's a miner himself. He's also very intelligent—the youngest manager we've got and a year ago there was talk of bringing him into the office. However, the majority feeling was that a man had no place there—they're basically too unstable, despite any surface qualifications. And it was felt there might be embarrassments."

The Prime Minister lifted a thick eyebrow. On occasion she had questioned Iris Fredericks' fanatical opposition to promoting the men in the algium mines.

"Don't you think," she said, "that in spite of all this the men will still prefer a woman to vote for? They do, after all, look to women to lead them. They've got a natural prejudice against their own sex—"

"Here, perhaps," Iris Fredericks said. "But on Mars a new spirit is developing. We've got a completely different social structure there. Men are vital to do the heavy job of mining. Down here, it's all push button and paper work—up there, the men know they're necessary and this makes them feel important. Three quarters of them are bachelors and the others have mostly left their wives behind so none of them have the traditional male responsibilities. They earn good money, spend it as they please. They feel indispensable, free and independent. Of course," she said with some satisfaction, "as we get mechanised

techniques for getting the algium, this will stop but they don't know that yet. And," she said threateningly, "if Dunlop gets in to represent Conservative and New Party, we won't be getting the machinery. You know we're number one on the list in their expenses-cutting campaign. That's why, for both our sakes, you've got to do something about Dunlop immediately. You can't afford to lose the seat at the election and I don't want a Conservative and Reform candidate chipping at my annual estimates—still less if he's a man. More than that, once Sandra Harris sees Dunlop making headway, she'd snatch Boudis Wood out of North Sector and put in another man there. That will be two seats gone. And, as we both know, there are other seats in the country where the same technique might win her seats—up in the Highlands Reforestation Sector, for example—anywhere where there are gangs of men doing the heavy work which can't be done by women."

"I think you're postulating a kind of male resentment which will make them vote in favour of any male candidate, whoever he represents, and I'm not sure I agree," the Prime Minister replied.

"You know what men are," Iris Fredericks said. "They run their lives on a personal basis. Traditionally, they keep house, tend children, deal with the family and the neighbours. They're used to thinking in personal terms, not in principles. That could apply here. And naturally they'll vote for anyone pulled out of their ranks who tells them that he understands their problems and will help them in Parliament. I can tell you this—the miners are very enthusiastic about Dunlop."

"I see what you mean. The situation will bear watching," the Prime Minister said.

"Watching!" cried Iris Fredericks. "Look here, Margaret, with the election six months off, you've got no time for watching situations. You'd better do something quickly."

"All I could do is put men candidates into North and South Sector Mars as soon as possible and I'm certainly not going to do that in a hurry. It might be creating a situation where none was going to arise."

"For God's sake, Margaret!" the President cried. "Do you want a Parliament full of men?"

"Not really," the Prime Minister replied. "Although they do quite well in some jobs. Arthur Fitch as Permanent Secretary to the Interior Ministry for example. That male combination of combativeness, ability to act fast without thinking of the consequences and deep interest in personalities is perfect in a spycatcher. And, like most men, he always feels he's being got at. What could be better in someone whose job is to guard internal security?"

Iris Fredericks twitched with impatience. "Don't sit there appraising the situation for too long, that's all I ask. That habit of delaying your actions will finish you one day, Margaret, and it may be that day's not too far off now." She stood up, pushing back her mop of grey hair. "I'll be in touch," she said shortly, and left with her feral step.

After she had gone, Margaret Smith, with a long, smooth, practised movement, press-buttoned a glass out of one desk drawer and swung it over to the drinks dispenser on the wall beside her. She siphoned a treble brandy into the glass and sat back to think over the electoral situation on Mars.

One of the facts that had to be taken into account was that, although the information was substantially correct, it came from a polluted source. Iris Fredericks was paranoid about men. Product of a marriage between a normally male husband and a woman wholly dominated by primitive instincts, she had been the eldest of ten brothers and sisters all, improbably, womb-born, as so few children in the civilised world now were. Subsequently over-protected, smothered and over-mothered by both their mother and, of course, father, who naturally wanted to fill his traditional rôle adequately, the whole brood, like a great tangle of kittens, had grown up under no direction, their physical needs well-attended to, their intellectual needs completely neglected by their masculinised mother. Iris Fredericks escaped the fate of the rest of the girls in the family by overcompensating on the female side and had risen by pure nervous and intellectual tension to her present eminence. She had spent her life shunning the emotional, personal side of life in a vigorous attempt to

cut the male side, as shown by her ineffective, masculine mother, out of her life.

The Prime Minister buzzed the intercom and Alex Cunningham's face appeared on the screen.

"Alex," she said. "Has Sandra Harris's pre-election briefing of key candidates begun yet?"

"It starts tomorrow. I've managed to get the names of about half the candidates attending."

"Good man. Anyone from Mars on your list?"

"Both of them. Anne Bush for North Sector and a man, Robert Dunlop, from North Sector."

"Any biographical details about Dunlop?"

"Only those supplied when I checked with Martian Minerals. But I understand he'll be with Miss Harris at the Goldsmiths' dinner tonight."

"Splendid," said the Prime Minister. "Would you telephone Mr. Smith and tell him to wear his spectacles—that I particularly want him to?"

"Of course, Prime Minister."

I have, the Prime Minister told herself firmly, no prejudice against men in politics. She took a heavy pull on the brandy. The time, she thought, might indeed be ripe for them to be more heavily represented than they were. Facing facts, a great deal of the feeling against them was pure living in the past—the feeling that they might take over completely again and, by their own short-sightedness and aggression, lead the world into the same confusion as they had done more than once.

Her fat and knobbly face creased in the effort to overcome her own unconscious bias. She regarded herself as a liberal woman but, cosseted and fussed over by her father and then her husband, shown preference over her brother on all occasions in childhood, it was hard to accept that those who normally supported and protected her, attended to all her physical needs from the haven of the home, could suddenly appear at her side and start treating her with a brutal equality. And even now she remembered her grandmother's stories of the tragic Third World War started, as everyone knew, by the innate competitiveness of men, continued by their aggressive refusal to give another man best, and only concluded by women. The women on one side who had been manning in-

dustry and the public services during the fighting slowed down their war work, then the women on the other side responded and the war stopped altogether. The women, expecting a return of confident men from the war to take over their jobs, had been amazed and horrified to find them so morally exhausted that they had, unwillingly, to carry on in all the key positions.

The real reason for the female hegemony, however, lay in the biological discoveries of a few generations before. As contraception had become more and more efficient, women were released from their former rudderless existence, from continued and unexpected pregnancies, from the exhausting process of childbearing and consequent dependence on the men who supported them and their children. Able, for the first time in history, to plan their lives in advance, full of pent-up strength and endurance no longer used up in rearing many children, they were still confined mainly to their traditional rôles by three things—automation, which had reduced the number of working people needed to a minimum, making men more reluctant to allow women on to the labour market, traditional male resentment of women in key positions and the fact that, although their pregnancies were now not numerous, the bearing and rearing of children still meant that women stayed in the home for periods long enough to make their careers impossible to pursue, at top level anyway, afterwards.

The last impediment had been removed when artificial gestation was perfected. In spite of much male prejudice against what were known as bottle-babies, women leaped at the chance to avoid the risks and discomforts of pregnancy and child-bearing. Within a generation of the discovery, the sight of a pregnant woman in the street drew all shocked eyes. Although the result was that only perfect children were produced—the discovery and elimination of damaged foetuses being easy—the lack of physical contact with the child from the moment of conception and the fact that, instead of being born of a mother in the traditional way, the child was brought out of its bottle at the correct moment rather like the contents of a jar of jam, seemed to lessen the emotional feeling of the mother for the child, so that when women took on all the tradi-

tional responsibilities of men and vice-versa, there was very little emotional disturbance on either side.

Mr. Smith, an original thinker in some ways, had often remarked to his wife that the alteration of rôles led to a starved emotional life on both sides, men and women needing to see each other correspondingly closely to certain psychological stereotypes but the Prime Minister, a practical woman, usually ignored him.

The Prime Minister had a nightmare vision of a world in which men threw down the switch-controls of their domestic appliances, jumped on their prams and drove up to the Houses of Parliament in millions demanding the right to leave the home. The thought of the removal of the comforting arm, sympathetic ear, pillow-smoothing hand and loving, uncritical heart made her feel that sudden sag of the child who goes home to find no one waiting for her. She pulled herself up short. This Dunlop is only one man, she told herself, and anyway, I'm a liberal woman.

Twelve hours later she was smiling with pleasure as she sat down, applause in her ears, after her usual witty, sensible address at the Goldsmiths' dinner. Simultaneously gauging the strength and quality of the cheering, responding gracefully to the Mayoress's words of congratulation and quenching her thirst in a glass-draining gulp, she had noticed the hand of Sandra Harris, seated on the Mayoress's left, grasp the knee of her companion and prospective candidate for Sector South, Mars.

Turning to her husband, a short, pudgy man, very like Margaret Smith herself in looks and acuteness, she said in an undertone, smiling a merry social smile all the while, "Mrs. Harris is feeling herself again after the business of the ballet dancer, I see."

Mr. Smith, wearing his hated spectacles for the express purpose of seeing what went on said, with the same social smile, "I've been noticing her assaults on Dunlop since the partridge was served. A high price to pay for a prospective candidacy."

Just as the principal guests were preparing to leave, the Prime Minister was amazed to hear Sandra Harris suggest that she and her husband might like to go on to her house for a drink. She accepted with alacrity and,

dismissing her own chauffeur, she and Mr. Smith were handed into Sandra Harris's luminous car by her handsome negro chauffeur appointed, it was said, on the Harris tour of Guinea although he was at the time unable even to ride a bicycle.

Dunlop was already sitting in the darkened car. Margaret Smith sat down beside her husband giving him a cruel pinch in the arm as she saw him remove his spectacles and begin to put them in his pocket. She needed her husband's raking masculine eye to sum up the qualities of the other man. In the darkness of the car she chatted with Sandra Harris and took in what she could herself see of Dunlop. At the dinner, dressed in an expensive but discreet suit of olive green, she had seen him as an exceptionally good-looking, redheaded man, full of smiles and pleasant replies but with no character. In the dimness, as they sped through the lights of London, she altered her opinion. In repose, away from the scrutiny of many eyes, Dunlop was alarmingly self-contained. His perfect oval face, with the large soft, brown eyes masked in darkness, was cold and intelligent although his full lips lacked firmness. He was about five feet ten with broad shoulders, a well-muscled chest and long tapering legs. His obvious strength was tempered by an engaging boyishness. The Prime Minister guessed that his looks and the air of politeness and submission he assumed made him appeal to almost every woman he met. Behind it all, Margaret Smith saw a cold ambition and determination she did not like at all.

Meanwhile, she observed Sandra Harris's hand again slide on to his knee. Dunlop gave a slight start, then relaxed with a conscious effort. The Prime Minister was shocked. A woman of the world, she still prized men who did not give their favours lightly and would have been highly alarmed if Mr. Smith so much as flirted with a woman at a party. Her home, after all, depended on him.

She smiled civilly into Sandra Harris's long, dark face over which the hand of time was moving rapidly to wipe out beauty. Large-eyed, ripe-mouthed, stern-nosed, she looked like some ageing, corrupt Roman empress.

The car arrived at her house, one of the show-places of

London, with its musical fountain playing in the marble entrance hall, its bright silk wall-hangings and high rooms, full of light.

The party went into a small room off the main drawing room and settled down on brocaded furniture in front of a log fire.

Taking a good, grateful pull on her drink, the Prime Minister defiantly stuck her thin, knobbly, wool-clad legs out on the white fur rug.

"I really thought," Sandra Harris said with a crafty smile, "that you might like to meet Robert. He'll be my chief candidate in the election as far as publicity goes."

Dunlop smiled modestly. The Prime Minister said, "How very nice of you." This explanation hardly accounted for the meeting, unless the opposition leader was just leading with her ace. The true explanation was probably that Sandra Harris wanted to assess the merit of her untried man by exposing him to the ordeal of meeting the Prime Minister.

Dunlop gave her an open, winning smile. "I was surprised that in your speech you didn't touch on the question of the economy in the Martian mines, Prime Minister," he said. "Surely you're not uncertain yourself about how far you're prepared to invest."

Margaret Smith, on her guard, gave him a friendly smile indicating willingness to converse and incredulity that he could possibly find the subject interesting. She gave him a long and detailed reply. Obviously on his mettle, Dunlop replied by asking the one question she did not want to answer—whether the Government would be able to finance the mines as they envisaged them without investment from abroad. Acutely uncomfortable that a man should be putting her on the spot, she replied evasively and changed the subject. Mr. Smith loyally tried to interest Dunlop in masculine topics. Dunlop, asserting that he was competing in a female world, politely brushed him off. Both the Smiths felt annoyed, Mr. Smith at being presumed inferior by his fellow-man and Mrs. Smith at being asked awkward questions by a man. They cut the whole thing short by rising to leave.

Farewells were made and they got in the car to go home.

"So that's her game," Margaret Smith said to her husband as the car moved off. "Parading Dunlop to collect the man's vote. It might work, too."

"That poor man," said Mr. Smith. "Sandra Harris's plaything. Did you notice how she looked at him?"

"He's got an alternative," the Prime Minister said shortly. She wanted her husband's opinion on whether or not men would vote Conservative and Reform when they saw Dunlop as the leader's pet and right hand man. She was angry because she knew from the expression on her husband's face that he would not be prepared to discuss anything but Dunlop's hideous fate at the hands of Sandra Harris. If only men, she thought, would stop weeping and wailing about their weakness like slaves complaining in the slave market. It approached the morbid, she considered.

Meanwhile Dunlop relaxed, but warily, in Sandra Harris's intimate sitting room.

She was going over her plans for him in the campaign. "So don't worry," she said. "I'll be right behind you all the time."

Dunlop stood up to go. "I'm very grateful for this opportunity," he said. "I hope I can do you credit. But really, I must be going—"

"Where to?" said Sandra Harris in mock surprise. "You can't stay at that hotel for the whole six months. I've had your things moved here." Teeth and eyes flashing, she paced restlessly round him as he reclined nervously on the couch. "You and I will have to be in constant touch now," she said in her rich voice.

Dunlop shivered apprehensively. Sandra Harris dropped down beside him on the couch and placed her smooth, supple hand on his thigh. A lecherous, sure-to-win smile came over her face. "Come on, now," she said. "Surely I'm not so repulsive."

"You are, you are," screamed the rebel inside Dunlop. She took his face in her hands, staring at him strongly and compellingly. Inside Dunlop, the small voice screamed protests. The fruity voice went on hypnotically, "Together you and I could go far."

Dunlop, feeling faint, started to reply but with one bound she was on him, grasping at him with agile

hands, smothering him with kisses, as exotic as some rotting tropical flower. Weakly, overcome with mingled desire and horror, Dunlop responded to her disgusting caresses.

A week later, he was sitting in Alex Cunningham's flat telling all over the teacups. Together the two men made a charming picture. Cunningham, mature, blonde, sympathetic and Dunlop with his vivid hair, angel face and large, sad, brown eyes.

The meeting had been engineered by Cunningham at Margaret Smith's request. Representing himself as the put-upon second-in-command of a company where promotion was denied to him on grounds of his sex, he had started a conversation with Dunlop in a café and invited him back for a talk at his flat.

Now the Prime Minister's secretary sat regarding Dunlop. Although the same cold, beautiful man he had been a week before, his face now bore the traces of a man who has been introduced to strange passions, his sagging posture betrayed a beaten man. At the same time, the inner Dunlop gave off the glow of secret strength gained through humiliation.

"It's unspeakable," he was saying. "She treats me like something made for her pleasure. I'm not a person at all. It's not just the sex. I have to listen to her boasting all the time and if the servants have gone to bed, I have to pour her drinks and find her papers and mend the dictaphone. She thinks I'm there for her convenience. I, myself, don't matter at all."

"I know, I know," Alex Cunningham said, pouring more tea. "Some women are like that—they do nothing but make demands of you without giving anything in return. Really, I wonder why you put up with it. Why don't you leave her?"

"How can I, when my future depends on it?" Dunlop appealed to him.

"Yes—but to endure all that—" Cunningham suggested.

"What's my alternative?" Dunlop demanded. "It's either back to the mines or becoming some woman's housekeeper. No thank you."

"Oh dear," sympathised Cunningham, glancing at Dunlop's new and obviously expensive clothes. "Well, there

you are, you've made your choice. I suppose this is just the price you must pay."

"I suppose so," Dunlop replied.

Cunningham reported all this to Margaret Smith next morning. "Disgusting little prostitute," the Prime Minister commented. "Well, there's no doubt he'll get in for South Sector. And Sandra Harris has already found a male candidate for the North Sector. Those two seats are as good as lost. What does the computer say about the other seats?"

"There are five other constituencies which, assuming the men vote as they will do on Mars, will go to Conservative and Reform. And there are only two we could win by the same means."

"And that's not counting the seats where a strong male vote for Conservative and Reform, based on Dunlop's performance in the election, would tip the balance for them," Margaret Smith remarked gloomily. "Dunlop's obviously the key figure in this election. What's his weakness?"

"He has," Cunningham remarked judiciously, "a certain basic male lack of security and confidence in his powers. He thinks that really women are his natural superiors. But then, Sandra Harris is standing behind him, propping him up. He's overridingly ambitious. And, I've told you, he feels beaten, bullied and victimised by Sandra Harris but I still think he's gaining a perverse, male satisfaction from it. And since the relationship she offers satisfies his needs, to be bullied and get into Parliament, then I can't se why he'd want to make any changes. He's a very cold fish—out for himself."

"I suppose he's not bribable?" asked the Prime Minister.

"I doubt it. Certainly not with money."

The Prime Minister sighed. "Well, you did your best," she said. "Come and sit down and have a drink."

Cunningham took his drink and, basking in the Prime Minister's confidence, drank with nervous sips.

"Oh," he said. "Mrs. Fredericks wants to see you urgently at four."

Margaret Smith grimaced and said, "Tell her half past. If I don't see the Chinese Ambassador soon she'll declare war."

Cunningham smiled respectfully at this joke. Government by women at least avoided war, for female governments were generally too satisfied with the *status quo* to upset it, taking out their animosities in extended verbal battles in which victory was to make the other leader lose face.

As Cunningham trotted out, the Prime Minister reflected how attached she was growing to this loyal, undemanding, impersonal servant. And, what was more, he was a pleasure to look at in his bustly, blond way. The experiment of having a male secretary was certainly a success. She turned back to her dictatotype and began to speak rapidly.

At half past four Iris Fredericks burst in like an unleashed greyhound. "Well, Margaret," she said. "What are you doing about Dunlop?"

"What can I do?" the Prime Minister asked. "He's a legitimate candidate, apparently not suggestible or open to bribes. The situation's quite simple. Our candidate, Jennifer Bennington, will have to fight Dunlop."

"You're going to get a Parliament full of men—and yourself into opposition—and my mines undermechanised and probably filled with men in top positions through Dunlop's influence," Iris Fredericks said bitterly, her face working.

"Come, come, Iris," the Prime Minister said. "Don't be too dramatic. If all else fails, I'll put up a man everywhere that Harris has one. Not, mark you, that I want to reduce the election to this level but if I have to do it, I will."

"You must stop this rot at once," Iris Fredericks said passionately. The Prime Minister, gazing at her drawn face and tense body began unconsciously to go over the possible candidates for the new President of Martian Minerals."

"When you say 'rot', do you mean in the mines or the sexual rot?" she asked.

"Both," the other woman replied. "You must get rid of Dunlop."

This was what Margaret Smith knew but with her broad back firmly against the back of the chair she said, "You must try to see this in perspective, Iris."

"Perspective!" the other woman said. "You'll fill Parliament with men, all jabbering, fighting and plotting

among themselves—you're prepared to hand key industries over to Sandra Harris and her masculine rabble—what's the matter with you, Margaret—are you mad?"

"I'm not," Margaret Smith said, stressing the 'I' slightly. "But if you feel so passionately about it, perhaps you'd like to tell me how to get Dunlop withdrawn as a candidate?"

Iris Fredericks stared at her opponent with mad, piercing blue eyes. "I'll find a way," she said slowly. "Have no fear of that."

As soon as she had gone, Margaret Smith pressed the intercom button. "Alex," she said. "I want someone to report on the activities of the President of Martian Minerals where they concern the Conservative and Reform Party or any of its candidates."

"I understand perfectly, Prime Minister," said Alex, Uncle Tom, Cunningham.

So every night for a long, weary fortnight, the Prime Minister, tired after a day's work, sat opposite to Mr. Smith in their cosy sitting room, spaniels lying on the woollen rug they had bought in Finland, watching the film of Iris Fredericks' attempt to disgrace Dunlop.

Tight, crafty little Dunlop was plied with beautiful women, strong drink, hard drugs, hard cash and seats on the boards of companies controlled by Iris Fredericks. He was never even tempted—he had no needs not supplied by Sandra Harris.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith sat watching placidly as women with whips, women with aprons and mixing bowls, women in gold paint, women in sea captains' uniforms were admitted to the flat while Dunlop was alone. They saw Dunlop driven to strange low dives by the rejected, jealous, bribed chauffeur. There he was plied with alcohol, hemp, L.S.D. and opium. Injected unawares with heroin. No woman and no drug could tempt him.

They saw him walk away from suitcases of banknotes opened enticingly in front of him in public lavatories. They saw him reject the offers of marriage with a millionairess, games of roulette, vice-chancellorships of universities, islands in the Pacific and sure tips on the Stock Exchange, made to him wherever he stopped for more than a minute. Dunlop was sea-green incorruptible—or rather, as the

Prime Minister said, he had already sold out to the highest bidder. The highest bidder, with the face of some old, hard-living Roman goddess, stood by and sneered or laughed unpleasantly at these crude attempts to corrupt her boyish protégé, her festering lily, Dunlop.

"Oh, my God," yawned the Prime Minister after the fourteenth showing, "won't Iris give up? All she's managing is to provide a free comedy show for Sandra Harris. I shall have to sack her, you know. To attempt this is bad enough, to fail so abysmally is just stupidity!"

The next day passed too quickly for the Prime Minister to organise the dismissal and it was with a feeling of unease that she sat down to the evening's showing late the next night.

Towards the end of it a sinister note appeared. The lean figure of Iris Fredericks appeared for the first time, hunched, burning eyed over a table in Surbiton, with a dark out-of-focus figure at each shoulder.

The film ran on. Mr. and Mrs. Smith, still in evening dress after an embassy dinner, watched appalled. When the film ended, Mr. Smith turned to his wife.

"She can't do it!" he exclaimed.

"You're right," said the Prime Minister and promptly had her police guard on Dunlop trebled and organised a note of resignation to be placed on Iris Fredericks' desk ready for signing the following morning.

"Murder!" exclaimed Mr. Smith. "The woman's mad."

"Quite right. Mind you," the Prime Minister said judiciously, "it would be the answer to all my problems. If I were a lesser woman I'd take the police guard off."

However, she did not and for the next few nights the weary Smiths sat watching the assassins as they dogged Dunlop, three plainclotheswomen and six uniformed policewomen from house to club to party headquarters and back. And watched Iris Fredericks, lonely and mad, in her huge suite at the Savoy.

There was a moment of drama when one of the would-be murderers shot the lobe off Dunlop's ear as he was having a rare evening off at the Pancinema and then escaped in the affray. Otherwise the nightly film shows persisted, like a form of compulsory television, for the Smiths.

Meanwhile the election campaign was gaining impetus. As Sandra Harris had planned, Robert Dunlop, modest, handsome and clever, was exhibit number one, used to demonstrate the broadmindedness of Conservative and Reform Party. At the same time, the Party managed to give the impression that the small band of male candidates, like a pack of performing superdogs, was a never-to-be-repeated phenomenon.

The real exposure began three months before the election. Sandra Harris, with Dunlop at her side, helicoptered up and down the country addressing public meetings. Dunlop was whipped back to London to appear on TV, to be interviewed for films and newspapers, to pose in his new wardrobe for smart monthly magazines. In between, he attended and spoke at dinners and went to gatherings of industrialists and financiers.

Two months before the election, computer polls showed not only that Dunlop and his colleagues were going to sweep into the two Mars constituencies but that Dunlop was having a huge success with the male voters. Even the vague threat to his life added glamour and excitement, appealing to the male voter who identified with him.

The Prime Minister's party began to try to goad her inert body into action. The rumour started that a thyroid deficiency was beginning to show. But, fat and grim, she sat on in the large, airy room in Downing Street, refusing to put male candidates into seats to combat Conservative and Reform's candidates, refusing to state her position publicly on the mines or Dunlop, drinking brandy and keeping her ear to the ground.

The wall TV opposite her desk was always on. As she conferred, telephoned and planned she stared at it, watching the face of Dunlop with what seemed like obsessional interest, drinking brandy and tackling everything but him, her main problem.

As the last month of the election loomed up she began to smile as she stared at Dunlop's interviews and solo appearances.

Dunlop was cracking. His air of quiet confidence was disappearing. He spoke more hesitantly, used, unconsciously,

more of the little tricks of expression, the cast-down eyes and appealing smiles which the weak, like children, use to charm the strong. He had lost weight. There were dark circles under his eyes. He began eventually to lisp. What a charming little boy he must have been, reflected Margaret Smith with triumphant grimness.

At Dunlop's side, Sandra Harris kept her Trilby going by willpower. But more and more the personality of Dunlop—strong, bright, beautiful and able—washed away and the poor, naked, aboriginal Dunlop appeared.

Margaret Smith watched Dunlop's last TV appearance with a cup of tea, at which she sipped calmly, in her hand. The room was full of her staff, especially summoned in from the election room upstairs.

"Yes, yes," said Dunlop, looking at the interviewer with the eyes of a radiant lover, "it is quite true that I have agreed to marry Mrs. Gulbenkian." The Prime Minister, seeing the building beginning to topple, started to laugh.

"Does this," asked the interviewer, "mean your retirement from politics?" The Prime Minister went on laughing. Her staff, smiling weakly, looked at her with suspicious eyes.

"Why, yes, I'm afraid so," said Dunlop seriously. "I don't think marriage and politics really mix."

"And your career from now on?"

"Well," Dunlop said, casting down the soft brown eyes, then raising them and looking courageously into the camera. "Our baby-bottle is already labelled at the London Clinic."

The Prime Minister's staff giggled. The Prime Minister herself was rocking with laughter. She wiped the tears from her eyes. "Who couldn't take it then? What a retreat, what a retreat," she crowed. "Defeated by Harris's demands, he retires into the arms of the richest woman in the world. Oh, well done, Dunlop. Your gain is our gain. They haven't a chance now."

She began to laugh again.

At the back of the room, Alex Cunningham bent silently over his notebook, half-feeling that the coarse mockery was directed at him. Although a loyal Party member, he felt betrayed. The Prime Minister beckoned him for-

ward, wiping more tears away. Putting an arm round Cunningham's shoulders and chucking him under the chin, she said, with just a hint of cruelty, "Be a good little man and get on with your work for me. You're my best secretary, aren't you?" Brightening up, Cunningham rushed, as always, to do her bidding.

George MacBeth—for Martin Bell:

crab apple crisis

'To make this study concrete I have devised a ladder—a metaphorical ladder—which indicates that there are many continuous paths between a low-level crisis and an all-out war.'

from *'On Escalation'* by HERMAN KAHN

Level 1: Cold War

Rung 1: Ostensible Crisis

Is that you, Barnes? Now see here, friend. From
where I am I can see your boy quite
clearly soft-shoeing along towards
my crab-apple tree. And I want you

to know I can't take that.

Rung 2: Political Economic and Diplomatic Gestures

If you don't
wipe that smile off your face, I warn you
I shall turn up the screw of my frog
transistor above the whirr of your

lawn-mower.

Rung 3: Solemn and Formal Declarations

Now I don't want to sound
unreasonable but if that boy
keeps on codding round my apple tree
I shall have to give serious thought

to taking my belt to him.

Level II: Don't Rock the Boat

Rung 4: Hardening of Positions

I thought
you ought to know that I've let the Crows
walk their Doberman through my stack of
bean canes behind your chrysanthemum

bed.

Rung 5: Show of Force

You might like a look at how my
boy John handles his catapult. At
nineteen yards he can hit your green-house
pushing four times out of five.

Rung 6: Significant Mobilisation

I've asked
the wife to call the boy in for his
coffee, get him to look out a good
supply of small stones.

Rung 7: 'Legal' Harassment

Sure fire my lawn
spray is soaking your picnic tea-cloth

but I can't be responsible for
how those small drops fall, now can I?

Rung 8: Harassing Acts of Violence

Your
kitten will get a worse clip on her
left ear if she come any nearer

to my rose-bushes, mam.

Rung 9: Dramatic Military Confrontations

Now see here, sonny, I can see you pretty damn clearly up here. If you come one step nearer to that crab-apple tree you'll get a taste of this strap across your back.

Level III: Nuclear War is Unthinkable

Rung 10: Provocative Diplomatic Break

I'm not going to waste my time gabbing to you any longer, Barnes: I'm taking this telephone off the hook

Rung 11: All Is Ready Status

Margery, bring that new belt of mine out on the terrace, would you? I want these crazy coons to see we mean business.

Rung 12: Large Conventional War

Take that, you lousy kraut. My pop says you're to leave our crab-apple tree alone. Ouch! Ow! I'll screw you for that.

Rung 13: Large Compound Escalation

O.K., you've asked for it. The Crows' dog is coming into your lilac bushes.

Rung 14: Declaration of Limited Conventional War

Barnes. Can you hear me through this loud-hailer? O.K. Well, look. I have no intention of being the first to use stones. But I will if you do.

Apart from this I won't let the dog go beyond your chrysanthemum bed unless your son actually starts to climb the tree.

Rung 15: Barely Nuclear War

Why, no. I never told the boy to throw a stone. It was an accident, man.

Rung 16: Nuclear Ultimatum

Now see here. Why have you wheeled your baby into the tool-shed? We've not thrown stones.

Rung 17: Limited Evacuation

Honey. I don't want to worry you but their two girls have gone round to the Jones's.

Rung 18: Spectacular Show of Force

John.

Throw a big stone over the tree, would you: but make sure you throw wide.

Rung 19: Justifiable Attack

So we threw a stone at the boy. Because he put his foot on the tree. I warned you now, Barnes.

Rung 20: Peaceful World-Wide Embargo Or Blockade

Listen, Billy, and you too Marianne, we've got to teach this cod a lesson. I'm asking your help in refusing to take their kids in, or give them any rights of way, or lend them any missiles until this is over.

Level IV: No Nuclear Use

Rung 21: Local Nuclear War:

John. Give him a small fistful of bricks. Make sure you hit him, but not enough to hurt.

Rung 22: Declaration of Limited Nuclear War

Hello there. Barnes. Now get this, man. I propose to go on

throwing stones as long as your boy is anywhere near my tree. Now I can see you may start throwing stones back and I want you to know that we'll take that.

without going for your wife or your windows unless you go for ours.

Rung 23: Local Nuclear War—Military

We propose to go on confining our stone-throwing to your boy beside our

tree: but we're going to let him have it with all the stones we've got.

Rung 24: Evacuation of Cities—About 70%

Sweetie. Margery. Would you take Peter and Berenice round to the Switherings?

Things are getting pretty ugly.

Level V: Central Sanctuary

Rung 25: Demonstration Attack On Zone Of Interior

We'll start on his cabbage-plot with a strike of bricks and slates. He'll soon see what we could do if we really let our hands

slip.

Rung 26: Attack On Military Targets

You bastards. Sneak in and smash our crazy paving, would you?

Rung 27: Exemplary Attacks Against Property

We'll go for their kitchen windows first. Then put a brace of slates through the skylight.

Rung 28: Attacks on Population

O.K.

Unless they pull out, chuck a stone or two into the baby's pram in the shed.

Rung 29: Complete Evacuation—95%

They've cleared the whole family, eh, baby and all. Just Barnes and the boy

left. Best get your mom to go round to the Switherings.

Rung 30: Reciprocal Reprisals

Well, if they smash the bay-window we'll take our spunk out on the conservatory.

Level VI: Central War

Rung 31: Formal Declaration Of General War

Now listen, Barnes. From now on in we're going all out against you—windows, flowers, the lot. There's no hauling-off now without a formal crawling-down.

Rung 32: Slow-Motion Counter-Force War

We're settling

in for a long strong pull, Johnny. We'd better try and crack their stone stores one at a time. Pinch the bricks, plaster the flowers out and smash every last

particle of glass they've got.

Rung 33: Constrained Reduction

We'll have to crack that boy's throwing-arm with a paving-stone. Just the arm, mind. I don't want him killed or maimed for life.

Rung 34: Constrained Disarming Attack

Right, son. We'll break the boy's legs with a strike of bricks. If that fails it may have to come to his head next.

Rung 35: Counter Force With Avoidance

There's nothing else for it. We'll have to start on the other two up at the Jones's. If the wife and the baby gets it, too, it can't be helped.

Level VII: City Targeting

Rung 36: Counter-City War

So it's come to the crunch. His Maggie against my Margery. The kids against the kids.

Rung 37: Civilian Devastation

We can't afford holds barred any more. I'm going all out with the slates, tools, bricks, the whole damn shooting-match.

Rung 38: Spasm or Insensate War

All right, Barnes. This is it.

Get out the hammer, son: we need our own walls now. I don't care if the whole block comes down. I'll get that maniac if it's the last thing I—Christ. O, Christ.

divine madness

roger zelazny

". . . I is This ?hearers wounded-wonder like stand them makes and stars wandering the conjures sorrow of phrase Whose . . ."

He blew smoke through the cigarette and it grew longer.

He glanced at the clock and realised that its hands were moving backwards.

The clock told him that it was 10.33, going on 10.32 in the p.m.

Then came the thing like despair, for he knew there was not a thing he could do about it. He was trapped, moving in reverse through the sequence of actions past. Somehow, he had missed the warning.

Usually, there was a prism-effect, a flash of pink static, a drowsiness, then a moment of heightened perception—

He turned the pages, from left to right, his eyes retracing their path back along the lines.

"?emphasis an such bears grief whose he is What"

Helpless, there behind his eyes, he watched his body perform.

The cigarette had reached its full length. He clicked on

the lighter, which sucked away its glowing point, and then he shook the cigarette back into the pack.

He yawned in reverse: first an exhalation, then an inhalation.

It wasn't real—the doctor had told him. It was grief and epilepsy, meeting to form an unusual syndrome.

He'd already had the seizure. The Dialantin wasn't helping. This was a post-traumatic locomotor hallucination, elicited by anxiety, precipitated by the attack.

But he did not believe it, could not believe it—not after twenty minutes had gone by, in the other direction—not after he had placed the book upon the reading-stand, stood, walked backward across the room to his closet, hung up his robe, redressed himself in the same shirt and slacks he had worn all day, backed over to the bar and regurgitated a Martini, sip by cooling sip, until the glass was filled to the brim and not a drop spilled.

There was an impending taste of olive, and then everything was changed again.

The second-hand was sweeping around his wristwatch in the proper direction.

The time was 10.07.

He felt free to move as he wished.

He redrank his Martini.

Now, if he would be true to the pattern, he would change into his robe and try to read. Instead, he mixed another drink.

Now the sequence would not occur.

Now the things would not happen as he thought they had happened, and un-happened.

Now everything was different.

All of which went to prove it had been an hallucination.

Even the notion that it had taken twenty-six minutes each way was an attempted rationalisation.

Nothing had happened.

. . . Shouldn't be drinking, he decided. It might bring on a seizure.

He laughed.

Crazy, though, the whole thing . . .

Remembering, he drank.

In the morning he skipped breakfast, as usual, noted that

it would soon stop being morning, took two aspirins, a lukewarm shower, a cup of coffee, and a walk.

The park, the fountain, the children with their boats, the grass, the pond, he hated them; and the morning, and the sunlight, and the blue moats around the towering clouds.

Hating, he sat there. And remembering.

If he was on the verge of a crackup, he decided, then the thing he wanted most was to plunge ahead into it, not to totter halfway out, halfway in.

He remembered why.

But it was clear, so clear, the morning, and everything crisp and distinct and burning with the green fires of spring, there in the sign of the Ram, April.

He watched the winds pile up the remains of winter against the far grey fence, and he saw them push the boats across the pond, to come to rest in shallow mud the children tracked.

The fountain jetted its cold umbrella above the green-tinged copper dolphins. The sun ignited it whenever he moved his head. The wind rumpled it.

Clustered on the concrete, birds pecked at part of a candy bar stuck to a red wrapper.

Kites swayed on their tails, nosed downward, rose again, as youngsters tugged at invisible strings. Telephone lines were tangled with wooden frames and torn paper, like broken G clefs and smeared glissandos.

He hated the telephone lines, the kites, the children, the birds.

Most of all, though, he hated himself.

How does a man undo that which has been done? He doesn't. There is no way under the sun. He may suffer, remember, repent, curse, or forget. Nothing else. The past, in this sense, is inevitable.

A woman walked past. He did not look up in time to see her face, but the dusky blonde fall of her hair to her collar and the swell of her sure, sheer-netted legs below the black hem of her coat and above the matching click of her heels heigh-ho, stopped his breath behind his stomach and snared his eyes in the wizard-weft of her walking and her posture and some more, like a rhyme to the last of his thoughts.

He half-rose from the bench when the pink static struck his eyeballs, and the fountain became a volcano spouting rainbows.

The world was frozen and served up to him under glass. . . . The woman passed back before him and he looked down too soon to see her face.

The hell was beginning once more, he realized, as the backward-flying birds passed before him.

He gave himself to it. Let it keep him until he broke, until he was all used up and there was nothing left.

He waited, there on the bench, watching the slithey toves be brillig, as the fountain sucked its waters back within itself, drawing them up in a great arc above the unmoving dolphins, and the boats raced backward across the pond, and the fence divested itself of stray scraps of paper, as the birds replaced the candy bar with the red wrapper, bit by crunchy bit.

His thoughts only were inviolate, his body belonged to the retreating tide.

Eventually, he rose and strolled backwards out of the park.

On the street a boy backed past him, unwhistling snatches of a popular song.

He backed up the stairs to his apartment, his hangover growing worse again, undrank his coffee, unshowered, unswallowed his aspirins, and got into bed, feeling awful.

Let this be it, he decided.

A faintly-remembered nightmare ran in reverse through his mind, giving it an undeserved happy ending.

It was dark when he awakened.

He was very drunk.

He backed over to the bar and began spitting out his drinks, one by one into the same glass he had used the night before, and pouting them from the glass back into the bottles again. Separating the gin and vermouth was no trick at all. The proper liquids leapt into the air as he held the uncorked bottles above the bar.

And he grew less and less drunk as this went on.

Then he stood before an early Martini and it was 10.07 in the P.M. There, within the hallucination, he wondered about another hallucination. Would time loop the loop,

forward and then backward again, through his previous seizure?

No.

It was as though it had not happened, had never been.

He continued on back through the evening, undoing things.

He raised the telephone, said "good-bye", untold Murray that he would not be coming to work again tomorrow, listened a moment, recradled the phone and looked at it as it rang.

The sun came up in the west and people were backing their cars to work.

He read the weather report and the headlines, folded the evening paper and placed it out in the hall.

It was the longest seizure he had ever had, but he did not really care. He settled himself down within it and watched as the day unwound itself back to morning.

His hangover returned as the day grew smaller, and it was terrible when he got into bed again.

When he awakened the previous evening the drunkenness was high upon him. Two of the bottles he refilled, recorked, resealed. He knew he would take them to the liquor store soon and get his money back.

As he sat there that day, his mouth uncursing and undrinking and his eyes unreading, he knew that new cars were being shipped back to Detroit and disassembled, that corpses were awakening into their death-throes, and that priests the world over were saying black mass, unknowing.

He wanted to chuckle, but he could not tell his mouth to do it.

He unsmoked two and a half packs of cigarettes.

Then came another hangover and he went to bed. Later, the sun set in the east.

Time's winged chariot fled before him as he opened the door and said "good-bye" to his comforters and they came in and sat down and told him not to grieve overmuch.

And he wept without tears as he realised what was to come.

Despite his madness, he hurt.

...Hurt, as the days rolled backward.

...Backward, inexorably.

... Inexorably, until he knew the time was near at hand.

He gnashed the teeth of his mind.

Great was his grief and his hate and his love.

He was wearing his black suit and undrinking drink after drink, while somewhere the men were scraping the clay back onto the shovels which would be used to undig the grave.

He backed his car to the funeral parlour, parked it, and climbed into the limousine.

They backed all the way to the graveyard.

He stood among his friends and listened to the preacher.

".dust to dust; ashes to Ashes," the man said, which is pretty much the same whichever way you say it.

The casket was taken back to the hearse and returned to the funeral parlour.

He sat through the service and went home and unshaved and unbrushed his teeth and went to bed.

He awakened and dressed again in black and returned to the parlour.

The flowers were all back in place.

Solemn-faced friends unsigned the Sympathy Book and unshook his hand. Then they went inside to sit awhile and stare at the closed casket. Then they left, until he was alone with the funeral director.

Then he was alone with himself.

The tears ran up his cheeks.

His suit and shirt were crisp and unwrinkled again.

He backed home, undressed, uncombed his hair. The day collapsed around him into morning, and he returned to bed to unsleep another night.

The previous evening, when he awakened, he realised where he was headed.

Twice, he exerted all of his will power in an attempt to interrupt the sequence of events. He failed.

He wanted to die. If he had killed himself that day, he would not be headed back toward it now.

There were tears within his mind as he realised the past which lay less than twenty-four hours before him.

The past stalked him that day as he unnegotiated the purchase of the casket, the vault, the accessories.

Then he headed home into the biggest hangover of all and slept until he was awakened to undrink drink after

drink and then return to the morgue and come back in time to hang up the telephone on that call, that call which had come to break . . .

. . . The silence of his anger with its ringing.

She was dead.

She was lying somewhere in the fragments of her car on Interstate 90 now.

As he paced, unsmoking, he knew she was lying there bleeding.

. . . Then dying, after that crash at 80 miles an hour.

. . . Then alive?

Then re-formed, along with the car, and alive again, arisen? Even now backing home at a terrible speed, to re-slam the door on their final argument? To unscream at him and to be unscreamed at?

He cried out within his mind. He wrung the hands of his spirit.

It couldn't stop at this point. No. Not now.

All his grief and his love and his self-hate had brought him back this far, this near to the moment . . .

It *couldn't* end now.

After a time, he moved to the living room, his legs pacing, his lips cursing, himself waiting.

The door slammed open.

She stared in at him, her mascara smeared, tears upon her cheeks.

"!hell to go Then," he said.

"!going I'm," she said.

She stepped back inside, closed the door.

She hung her coat hurriedly in the hall closet.

"it about feel you way the that's If," he said, shrugging.

"!yourself but anybody about care don't You," she said.

"!child a like behaving You're," he said.

"!sorry you're say least at could You"

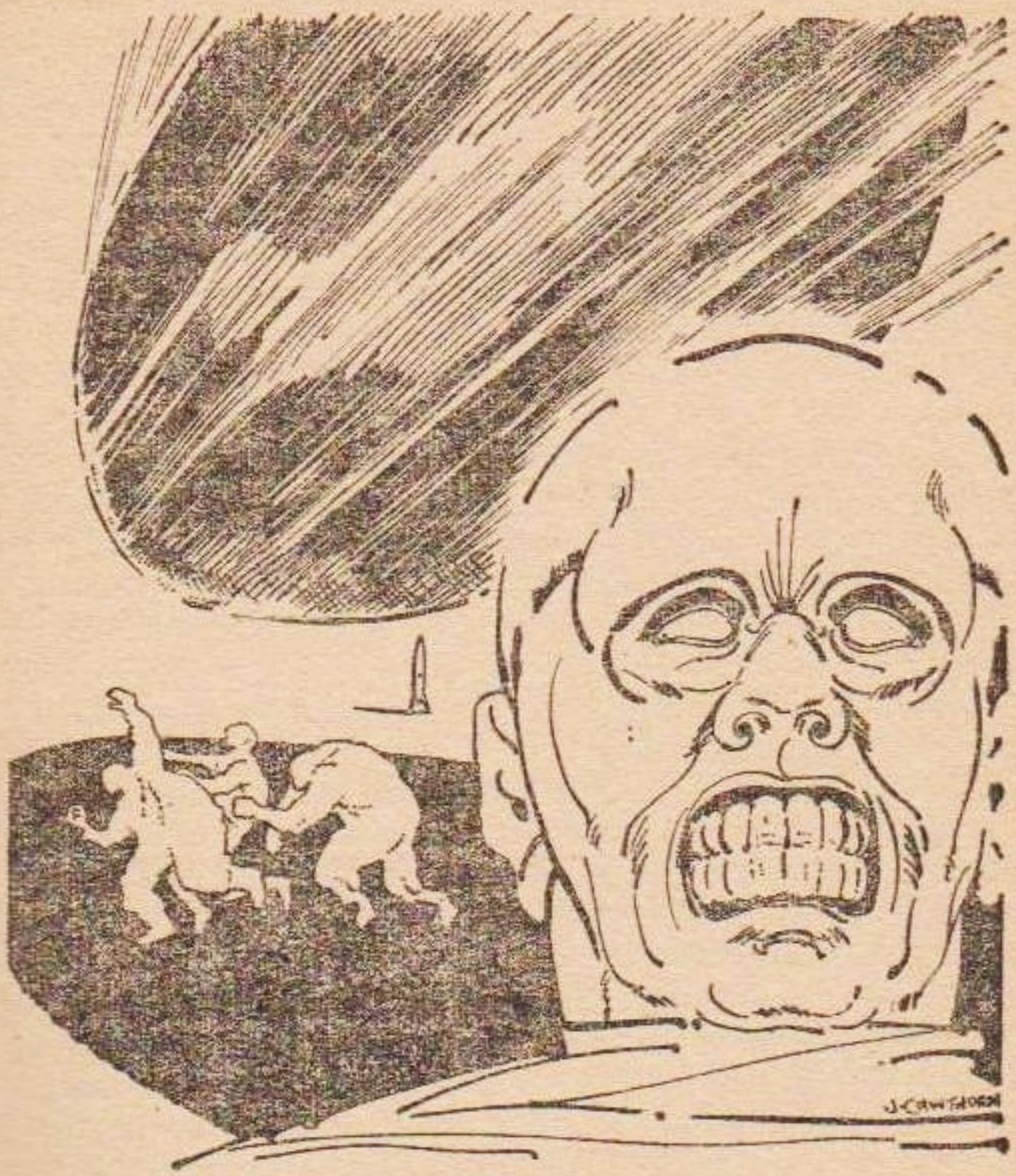
Her eyes flashed like emeralds through the pink static, and she was lovely and alive again. In his mind he was dancing.

The change came.

"You could at least say you're sorry!"

"I am," he said, taking her hand in a grip that she could not break. "How much, you'll never know.

"Come here," and she did.



The Steel CORKSCREW

michael butterworth

ENTRANCE

THE SPACECRAFT landed on the soft desert. Eight people climbed down from a hole in the shiny hull. There for the first time people. Their feet kicked-up years of peopleless desert-dust and powdered crystalmen. Fine powders settled over their tattered clothes and found places to rest in the crevices on Krau's watch-face.

"Ten," he said hiding his watch-arm instantly from the scathing dust. "Sand and miles of it. Fine to dust so."

The eighth member of the party was Fingletor, expert at driving people round the bend. He descended the last rungs of the escape ladder and joined the others in conversation. "Heard you," he said lamely. "A sized crowd aren't we? Now tell me about these houses you keep mentioning. What about the houses?"

"What houses," Krau the team-leader lisped. "What houses? There are no houses."

"No houses here," Tevern agreed. He was an engineer in the fine tradition of Morple. "Here's houses plenty of houses," he smiled stooping down to the sand-pan floor, scooping up an armful of debris.

Fingletor looked hurt.

Morple, chief engineer laughed at Tevern. "Well done," he mouthed. Aloud he said: "Let's move from this place. I don't like busted-up houses dust or not. This place must have life. What's that over there?" His thin arm pointed to a spire some miles away. From this distance the long slender structure could have been anything. It looked like a corkscrew stuck blade-down in the desert.

"A place on Mars I suppose," Snaff mumbled, holding his fast gun arm to his side.

Lastly Ankle spoke booming into the breezy air: "Open-spaced gut this!" The desert tried to enter him. He felt sick. "Getout, getout," he stamped his feet. The desert hardly moved. Ankle smiled sickly to show the others how sane he really could be.

"Krau," said Krau. "Krau says move on. Let's move. Our first stop is that spire—that's the only landmark."

Antwill stared at the desert floor. Apparently he had not seen the spire, nor did he look as if he particularly cared

about anything. Antwill was the dumb beast, suspected telepath.

The eight men who had lived cramped in close living quarters for twenty-one years were pleased to be out in the vast opening desert. The desert opened like a flower.

"It's good to get out," was all Smetherill the electrician could say. Electricity had sent him crazy a long time ago. Simpleminded.

"So this is Earth in glory. Good bad Earth," Ankle smashed his great hoofed foot into the sand.

Miles of sand shuddered.

"No this is Earth," Krau the team-leader lisped. "If it rejected us once it certainly nursed us once for some long while. We can't get angry with a desert besides." Slightly more intelligent than his other members he carried the conversation for some miles across the desert. "Yes we were chucked out. Now the mother-place has blown itself to bits."

"No we weren't criminals," Smetherill joined-in with Krau. "were we, Krau?"

"Yes," said Krau sternly. "We were. One time we have smashed something up, destroyed something beautiful, perhaps even accomplished this," his hands encompassed the surface of the desert. "Who knows? We could have played the cards this way, unwittingly, illogically."

Krau least of all eight members of his team remembered the hard times, the twenty-one-year struggle aboard ship with hardly a stopping-place for his friends to exercise their cramped bodies. His stony interests had been absorbed elsewhere. Throughout those long tedious years books had been his salvation of mind. Ideas, warped out of proportion with the comparative social ideas of his own age before his exile had nourished his mind-crave.

Krau's ugly face turned to Smetherill. "We were criminals. The sentence is over." He glanced back over his shoulder at the shining-dot ship perched on the horizon. "Our prison," he snapped. "It's returned—bang on time. Our exile is over. You can breathe."

"We were prisoners," Smetherill emphasised the fact to his friends. "We're freed now."

"Look what freedom!" Ankle snorted pig-faced into the head-wind blowing from the spire. "Open-mouthed desert!"

The eight men were silent. Since they had left the ship they had shared no ill-feelings. Now the fact that their "glorious", "longed-for" home had finished itself, blown-itself-up, depressed them to the point of argument. They trailed with nostalgia burning their brains out over the wide-brimmed desert. The desert once overflowed with flowers.

Krau sensed the unease with which his men acted. He could do nothing to avoid friction between them. His power over them did not extend that far. Krau was relieved when Smetherill said:

"Look, it revolves! Revolutions!" Smetherill was excited beyond reason. His depressed friends responded to the excitement. Krau smiled. Smetherill: "Look at it! Look at it!"

They had arrived at the spire. The spire spindled up to them from across the desert spinning like a top. The eight men stood a short distance away from it, open-mouthed watching it turn. Behind them they could feel the emptiness of the vast empty desert singing in dry dust rain. But the spire resembled an advanced form of symbolic art scarcely unknown to them. It was a sign. It was more: it worked. It turned. It meant life.

"It revolves!" Smetherill was amazed. Electricity buzzed in his brain. He saw the spire's electrical circuits complete in every detail. "Electricity," he breathed, jogging forward his severed legs, breaking into a run.

Entranced by the sight of the rushing spire miles high, it took the two engineers time to realise what Smetherill had planned in his tight mad head. Nearest to Smetherill they chased him, caught hold of him and brought him back to the group. The Smetherill who intended to run to the swirling blades of the spire was white-faced. He gasped.

"Hold him tight," Morple said to Snaff the gunarm. "Till we get back. Tevern and I are seeing over the place. You keep him tight you understand. He'll kick mad to get those blades."

Freed of Smetherill the two engineers tip-toed cautiously towards the spire's glistening blades.

"I'll come," Krau joined them, anxious to be teamleader in the true spirit.

The other side of the spire was little different from the first. It was as circular, as startling, as terrifying.

"It resembles a corkscrew," Krau's voice was lost in the rising noise of the wind. The desert answered him bleakly via the strained voice of Morple: "Like a pile of coins hah? Bits of building inbetween there see?" Inner segments of white plastic spaced the revolving coins. Regular black dots patterned their surfaces indicating portals of some kind.

"And the whole lot towers like a god," Krau breathed to himself. "A steel god."

The bright circular blades flashed in the sunlight. They turned spinning incredibly silently fast.

"What is it?" Tevern wondered. "What does it do?"

The spire rose out of the desert like a fat screw but churning no sand. It was as wide and circular at the point where it hit the sky as it was at its base. A cigar-shaped object rested horizontally on its crown in the sky, giving the entire odd structure the appearance of a slowly-revolving handle.

"It's a corkscrew, just like a corkscrew," Krau said. The blades flashing in the sunlight gave it the added honour of being made of steel.

A steel corkscrew.

It took them twenty minutes or more to walk completely round its perimeter. The ground-floors of the building had no entrances.

"The blades prevent you entering," Krau was disappointedly mumbling. The silent deadly blades agreed with him.

"We could enter some other way," Morple lightened.

"How?"

"That rock there," he pointed to a large rock half-buried in sand. "If that's a natural rock kill me. What's it there for if nothing else?"

The rock was shipward side of The Corkscrew. The rest of Krau's team stood some hundred feet away watching the activity.

Krau ran back to the five waiting members of his team, leaving the two engineers to investigate the rock. The bright light of the desert suddenly blinded them all.

"That!" Ankle growled. "What the hell was that? Potty sun's blowing too."

Krau ignored him. He turned to the others who were coming round from the affects of the sudden blinding glare.

"Like somebody turned a light on-and-off," Smetherill who had recovered from his fit voiced. His face was still white.

"Take no notice of that now," Krau said impatiently. "There's work to do. I need help to shift that rock—you see that rock? It's not a rock at all."

"What is it?"

"Never mind now. Come on. It might be a cold night. We've got to move fast."

As they obeyed his command, as they ran to the rock, Krau lagged behind to look up at the blinding sun. It appeared to fade. It grew in intensity, and faded, dancing before his eyes. Like a fat black fly crawling across the steel sky.

He turned to follow the rest.

The two engineers, Tevern and Morple helped Krau to budge the rock. It would not. Watched by five tense men the three acting men rose from their work to stand debating hotly. Wind from the shiny-blade movements of The Corkscrew ruffled their hair. They tried again.

Apart from the noise of the wind slicing across the steel rotary blades no sound disturbed them at their task.

"No use," Krau groaned sweating. "Snaff," he turned to his gunarm. "Leave Smetherill go. He's quiet now."

Snaff, eager to be in on the risk of killing himself, ambled the few feet across the sand to where Krau sat, exhausted on the rock. His gunarm swung upwards into the blinding glare of the sun. Flash metal winked down at the stubborn rock. "I'll doit," he slurred. "I'll doit," knowing the instant Krau called him what he had to do. The gun-nozzle pointed buried in sand to the base of the rock.

The rock was definitely artificial. Something had manufactured it. Something was about to get it blown-open. Snaff trembled with excitement at the thought. His hands itched on the button.

"Now low power," Krau warned him.

Snaff nodded. He set the dial. "Low power," he grunted.

A few whirring sounds came from deep underground as the gun blasted into depths.

The group stood well back as Snaff's long arm continued

to operate the gun. Suddenly there was a loud crack. Rock pieces spat into the air.

A flash—Snaff's seared arm was bandaged in seconds by mad Doctor Fingletor who rushed onto the fiery scene with boxes. Snaff winced.

"What happened?" Fingletor asked him. "Take time to heal."

"Never mind that," Snaff grinned. "I enjoyed it."

His bad fingers itched to press on other buttons. Fire-pains coursed through his arm.

Smetherill and Ankle joined the crowd round the rock. Antwill, the dumb semi-intelligent animal walked between them. His eyes blazed a mixture of sorrow and hatred on everything he saw.

Ankle used brute-strength to shift the massive rock. Loosened by the blast it cracked-open in his large arms. Tevern and Krau coughed, caught in the face by a cloud of blue smoke drifting from the fissure. Down in the black interior Tevern's sharp eyes spotted a slide-down of crumbled steps, presumably broken in the blast.

"Stop!" he called. "This is it."

"Entrance to The Corkscrew," Morple grasped the situation. His head felt the cold dying wind of Earth as he said this. His ears heard its debris-laden vapour pouring whining sounds through the blades. Seven men heard with him and fell silent. They stood half-peering into the open crack of rock. Their ears strained to catch the slightest sound. Tevern winced. From the top of The Corkscrew far above their heads came a rusty grating noise as if one of the rotary blades had broken, turning slower. A shower of metal pieces fell down on the group.

"It's falling," Tevern shrieked. He glanced up at the full sickening height of The Corkscrew. It consisted of angry segments of rotary steel blades, knife-edged shiny in the strong sunlight. Between the rapidly-revolving blades were openings in the teeth-white plastic. Tevern saw The Corkscrew rotate slowly like a warning finger pointing a hammer-head nail at the sky. His mind sank in the sand for one awful instant when he thought The Corkscrew would topple. The noise from the faulty blade grew deafening. He clasped his hands to his head shrieking. He began to run awkwardly in the general direction of the ship.

"Don't fool," Krau ordered. Tevern reddened and fell back into the eight-man group. "Listen carefully," Krau said, ignoring the cold sound of the broken blade, "two of you go back to the ship. Four of you stay here over the entrance to this rock. Snaff and I go under down these steps to investigate. Got that?"

The desert frightened the silent group and grew enormously into a wild flower that believed essentially in rearing broken rotary blades.

"I'll stay," Smetherill said. "I'll wait top here."

"I'll go back," Tevern said. He turned impulsively to face the ship.

The strange hot light of Earth began to flash madly for a second time. The sunlight brightened and blinded them, and dimmed and darkened them.

Krau grew mad. "You'll do as I say, see?" Tevern nodded. Smetherill smirked. Krau continued to speak, aware the fear his men held in their heads. To Tevern it seemed that Krau's hollow lisp was in some strange way connected with The Corkscrew's broken blade. Clanking:

"Snaff. Arm OK? You'll come with me down. Smetherill? Back to the ship with Tevern . . ." Tevern grinned, then fell silent afraid of his cowardice. Krau continued: "Doc Fingletor? Morple, the rest stay here. Understand?"

They nodded.

"OK. Set orders," Krau continued in the same strange voice. "The four last mentioned guard this entrance. Watch. Observe. If that gam blade falls it'll kill you. Watch it."

Smetherill and Tevern were already crossing the great hot desert. Every so often they stopped to shield their eyes from the bursts of light coming from the sun. They were dots on the blinking horizon. The sun's eyelids closed over them for the last time, swallowing flesh.

"Now us," Krau decided. Together he and the grinning Snaff descended the cool dry steps crumbling into the dark.

Four silent figures were left standing watch, warily scanning the horizon. A kind of half-bestial smile watered Antwill's face. He stared hard-up at the top-most region of The Corkscrew where the broken blade cried out. He began to shake and tremble; language came from his black mouth. Strange shriek language.

Morple turned to him. "Stop that," he said. His nerves could not take any more: A definite screech of tortured metal abruptly came from the top of The Corkscrew.

"Look-out!" Ankle shouted.

Morple looked-up at the tumbling height. Some dark object was hurtling down to crush them. The metallic noise had subsided leaving only the wind and this dark shape. He grabbed the babbling Fingletor and slung him ahead of him. Ankle followed them both at a death-inspired speed. They would never make it. A dark shadow hung over them. It grew rapidly, staining all the desert. Then it stopped. Morple was up on his feet again in time to see the shadow glide away and a large silver-grey circle of metal hundreds of feet in diameter shoot itself from behind his head and crash into the desert some miles away. The thing travelled at a terrifying velocity. The monster disk thudded in sand sending a fountain into the sky. It churned-up most of the desert. The shock-wave shook the land to bits and a deep rumbling filled the sky. Silence. The gradual brightening of the sun. Its gradual dimming.

The three who had run away turned to walk back to the rock. Antwill stood on his own half-paralysed by something, shaking, smiling or crying, tottering to the rock for support.

Morple realised what had happened.

Still shaking he ran over to Antwill and pressed his arm to show affection. "Saved my life," he gasped. "Not forget that . . ." but Antwill who could never speak thudded to the ground. Lifeless. "Fingletor!" Morple yelled. "Here quickly!"

After precious seconds Fingletor arrived out of breath, found his boxes covered in sand, undid them and bent over the still form of Antwill. As Morple had suspected nothing could be done to save Antwill's life. Antwill's entire brain was burnt-out. His skull showed marks of discoloration where the horrible heat had crept through. His stupid grinning head was blistered and his body taut as iron wire.

There was silence. They could see the massive blade sticking out of the sand several miles away. Sunlight glinted from it. In the sad silence Morple felt he wanted to cry, but had no time. The fierce solar-flares lightening the desert from the sun began to thunder silently out-of-hand. Flash-

fire, intolerable heat hit the desert. Spasms of searing light shook Morple's body. His eyes dropped out. He fell floundering to the ground lost in miles of flashing silence.

Between each burst of light the desert fell dark in contrast, when Morple saw the weird landscape as a stage lit by maniac photographers. With each successive flare the heat and the light grew stronger. The interim between each flash grew darker.

He struggled to regain his feet. The shouts from Ankle and Fingletor did not interest him at all. He wanted to totter to the brink of the rock entrance down which Snaff and Krau had disappeared earlier. He did so.

"God!" he called down. "Get out Krau. Do you hear me? Get out. Get to the ship. Do you hear that? The ship!"

He turned away to stagger with Ankle and Fingletor across the swooning landscape. Fingletor took the rear screaming. Ankle ploughed ahead cursing. Three went over the death teeth. Searing heat. Pain. Terror. Death.

CLOSURE

THE GREATEST CAR IN THE WORLD

BY HARRY HARRISON

ERNEST HAROWAY'S NERVE was beginning to fail, and he clasped his hands together to stop their shaking. What had seemed such a wonderful idea back in Detroit had become strange and frightening now that he was in Italy—and actually on the grounds of the Castello Prestezza itself. He controlled an involuntary shiver as his gaze rose up the grey and age-seared walls of the castle to the greyer and even more ancient palisade of the Dolomite Alps that loomed behind. The courtyard held a hushed and almost sacred stillness, broken only by the rustle of pine needles brushed by the late afternoon breeze and the clicking of the cooling engine in his rented car. His throat was dry and the palms of his hands were wet. He had to do it! With a convulsive motion he threw the door open and forced himself out of the car, stopping only long enough to grab up his briefcase, before he crunched across the gravel toward the stone-framed and iron-bound portal of the castle.

There was no sign of bell or knocker on the dark wood of the door but, set into the stone at one side, was a carved bronze gorgon's head, now green with age, with a rounded knob over its mouth. Haroway tugged at this knob, and, with a grating squeal, it came out about a foot

on the end of the iron rod, then slowly returned to its original position when he released it. Whatever annunciatory mechanism it operated appeared to be functioning because within a minute there came a dreadful rattling from behind the door, and it swung slowly open. A tall, sallow-faced man in servant's livery stared down the impressive length of his nose at the visitor, his eyes making a slow—and unimpressive—sweep the length of Haroway's charcoal grey drip-dry, summer-weight suit before fixing on his worried face.

"*Si signore?*" he said through cold, suspicious lips.

"*Buon giorno . . .*" Haroway answered, thereby exhausting his complete Italian vocabulary. "I would like to see Mr. Bellini."

"The Maestro sees no one." the servant said in perfect English with a marked Oxford accent. He stepped back and began to close the door.

"Wait!" Haroway said, but the door continued to swing shut. In desperation, he put his foot in the opening, a manoeuvre that had served him well during a brief indenture as a salesman while in college, but was totally unsuited to this type of architecture. Instead of bounding back, as the lightweight apartment doors had done, the monstrous portal closed irresistibly, warping the thin sole of his shoe and crushing his foot so tightly that the bones grated together. Haroway screamed shrilly and threw his weight against the door, which slowly stopped, then reversed itself. The servant raised one eyebrow in quizzical condemnation of his actions.

"I'm sorry," Haroway gasped, "but my foot. You were breaking all the bones. It is very important that I see Mr. Bellini, the Maestro. If you won't admit me, you must bring this to him." He dug into his jacket pocket while he eased his weight off the injured foot. The message had been prepared in advance in case there was any trouble in gaining admittance, and he handed it over to the servant who reluctantly accepted it. This time the great door closed completely, and Haroway hobbled over to one of the stone lions that flanked the steps and sat on its back to ease his throbbing foot. The pain died away slowly, and a quarter of an hour passed before the door opened again.

"Come with me," the servant said. Was it possible that

his voice was just a shade warmer? Haroway could feel his pulse beating in his throat as he entered the building. He was in—inside the Castello Prestezza!

The interior was dark, and, in his elated state, he noticed no details, although he had a vague impression of carved wood, beamed ceilings, suits of armour and pieces of furniture bulky as freight cars. With uneven step, he followed his guide through one chamber after another until they came to a room where tall, mullioned windows opened onto the garden. A girl stood in front of the window holding his note disdainfully by the edge as though it were a soiled Kleenex she was about to discard.

"What do you want here?" she asked, the cold tones so unsuited to the velvet warmth of her voice.

At any other time, Haroway would have taken a greater interest in this delightful example of female construction, but now, incredible as it seems, he looked upon her only as an undesired interference. The jet-dark tresses, dropping to the creamy tan of her shoulders, were just hair. The ripeness of her bosom swelling above the square neck of her dress was another barrier placed in his way, while the pouting loveliness of her lips spoke only words that barred him from Bellini.

"It is no business of yours what I want here," he snapped. "I will tell that to the Maestro."

"The Maestro is a sick man and sees no one," she answered, voice just as imperious as his. "We can have no one disturbing him." She dangled the card like a dead mouse. "What does this message mean: 'Unfinished business from Le Mans 1910'?"

"That business is none of your business, Miss . . ."

"I am Signorina Bellini."

"Miss Signorina . . ."

"Signorina is the Italian word for Miss."

"Sorry, Miss Bellini. What I have to say is only for the ears of the Maestro himself." He took a firmer grip on the handle of his briefcase. "Now—will you bring my message to him?"

"No!"

"Chi e?" a deep voice rumbled from the direction of the ceiling, and the girl went white and clutched the note to her breast.

"He's heard!" she gasped.

The apparently deific voice grumbled again, and the girl answered it in staccato Italian and appeared to be talking either to heaven or to a corner of the ceiling. After some blinking, Haroway could make out a loudspeaker suspended from the crenellated moulding with, what appeared to be, a microphone hanging next to it. Then the conversation terminated in what could only have been a command, and the girl lowered her head.

"That was he—him?" Haroway asked in a hushed voice. She only nodded her head and turned to the window until she could speak again.

"He wants to see you—and the doctor has expressly forbidden visitors." She swung about to face him, and the impact of emotion in those large and tear-dampened eyes was so great that it cut through his indifference instantly. "Won't you leave—please? He's not to be excited."

"I would like to help you, but—I just can't. I've waited too long for this chance. But I promise you that I won't get him excited, I'll do my best, really I will."

She sighed tremulously and lowered her head again, turning. "Come with me," she said, and started toward the door.

Haroway did not feel the pain of his injured foot, for in truth he felt scarcely anything as he stumbled after her as through a sea of cotton wool. His senses were suspended as though, unbelieving, they could not accept the fact that a lifetime ambition was being realized at last. One final door swung open, and he could see the bulky figure swaddled in blankets and seated in a wheelchair—a chance ray of sunlight fell from the window and struck a reflection from his mane of white hair, a halo of light that would not have surprised Haroway if it had been real. He could only stand petrified and speechless while the girl went over and silently handed the Maestro his note.

"What does this mean?" the old man asked, waving the card at him. "There was only one piece of unfinished business at Le Mans that year, and it is too late now to start a lawsuit or anything like that. What do you want?" He frowned at Haroway and the effort wrinkled a network of fine furrows into the mahogany skin.

"N-nothing like that," Haroway stammered, then took

a deep breath and grabbed hold of himself. "I, of course, wasn't there, I hadn't been even born yet . . ." he fought down an impulse to giggle hysterically. "But my father has told me about it, many times, so I almost feel as if I had seen the race myself. When that 11-litre Fiat brushed against your 1327 cubic centimetres type 13 and turned it over, what a horrible moment that must have been! But your driver, Fettuccine, was thrown clear, and it was only when the radiator cap flew off and into the crowd . . ."

"The cap—I knew it!" the Maestro said, and pounded on the arm of the wheelchair. "It had to be that, there was no other unfinished business at Le Mans!"

"Grandfather, please!" the girl begged as she stroked his hand. "You promised not to!" she said, glaring at Haroway.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to. Anyway, there's nothing to get excited about, my father was the one who was hit on the head by the radiator cap."

"Aha—the mysterious wounded man, found at last."

"He wasn't really hurt, it was a very small fracture and he was out of bed inside of a month. And he still held onto the radiator cap—his greatest treasure. He had no money, he had worked his way to Europe just to see Le Mans, and he was treated in a charity hospital, that is why you never discovered him, although I know you tried very hard to find the man who had been injured."

"It was a mystery, many saw him fall—yet, later, there was no trace."

"Well, Dad always was shy, he couldn't possibly consider talking to a great man like you. When he recovered he managed to make his way back to the United States, and life was different for him after that. He always said that he had sown his wild oats and he was satisfied. When he met Mom and they married he used to work in a filling station, then, finally, he saved enough to buy in and that was all he ever did—but he was always a happy man. He had the radiator cap sealed inside a glass case and framed and hung over the fireplace, and it's the earliest thing I remember, and him telling me about it. I grew up with that cap, Mr. Bellini, and it would be no lie to say that it shaped my whole life. I loved cars and I studied them and went to school nights and right now I'm an automotive

engineer and there has never been anything else I have ever wanted in the whole world. Outside of meeting you, that is. Then Dad died last year, and his last words were: 'Bring it back, son. It don't rightly belong to us, and I knew it would have to go back someday, but couldn't bear to do it, not in my lifetime. That's your job, son, what you have to do. Bring it back to the man that rightly owns it.'"

Haroway had his briefcase open and fumbled through it and extracted an object wrapped in many layers of polythene. One by one, with light, reverent touch, he unwrapped them until the old radiator cap was revealed, dented and scratched but polished like a jewel. He held it out to the Maestro who took and turned it over, squinting at it.

"A nice piece of brass," he said, then handed it back. "Keep it."

"Thank you," Haroway said in a humble voice as he carefully rewrapped it and slid it gently back into the briefcase. "Thank you, too, for your courtesy in receiving me." He locked the case and picked it up. "I'll not disturb you any more—but, if you would permit, there is just one question I would like to ask before I go."

"What is that?" the Maestro asked distractedly, looking out the window and seeing only Le Mans in the year 1910. If it hadn't been for that hulking Fiat, his type 13 should have won. With the overhead camshaft they were getting 3,000 rpm . . .

"It's something that has bothered me for years. Do you think that if it hadn't been for the accident that the type 13 would have placed first? After all, with your new overhead camshaft you should have been getting 3,000 rpm . . ."

"*Dio mio!*" the Maestro gasped. "You read my mind—those were my very thoughts!"

"Not really mind-reading, sir, just a lifetime of study. I have had one hobby, one possessing enthusiasm and interest, the Bellini automobiles and the Bellini genius."

"A healthy hobby for a young man, most of the new generation are spineless wonders who think that a vehicle with an automatic gearshift is really a *car*! Stay a moment, you will have a glass of wine with me. Have you met my granddaughter, Vergine, the apple of an old man's eye, although she is very strict with me." She glared at him

and he laughed heartily. "Don't scowl so, my blossom, it puts ugly lines upon your face. Instead, bring a bottle of '47 Valpolicella and some glasses, we shall have a little holiday today."

They drank and talked and the talk was only of cars, Bellini cars, which they both agreed were the only fit cars to discuss. The afternoon faded and at dinner time an invitation was forced upon the not-reluctant Haroway and the talk continued; worm and wheel steering with the spaghetti, semicentrifugal, wet multiplate clutches with the meat, and banana-shaped tappets with the dessert. It was a highly satisfactory meal.

"There you see the proof," Haroway said, scratching a last number at the end of a row of equations that stretched across the white surface of the linen tablecloth. "When you developed your 16-valve engine for the type 22 with four valves per cylinder, you developed higher scavenging pressure with the smaller valves—this *proves* it! Did you work out these equations first?"

"No. I leave it for others to prove. I *knew* what would happen, a matter of intuition you might call it."

"Not intuition—*genius*!"

Bellini nodded his great, grey head, accepting his due.

"What do you think I have been doing the past ten years?" he asked.

"Nothing. You retired to this castle after having given more to the automotive world than any other man."

"That is true. But, although I did retire, I have kept a small workshop here, for tinkering, working out ideas, an old man's hobby. I have constructed a car . . ."

Haroway went white, half rising to his feet, a convulsive movement of his hand sending one of the crystal wine glasses crashing to the floor: he was not aware of it.

"Car . . . new car . . ." was all he could gasp.

"I thought you might be a little interested," the Maestro said with an impish grin. "Perhaps you would like to see it?"

"Grandfather, no!" Vergine broke in. She had sat silently through the meal since the conversation seemed to be doing the Maestro no harm, mellowing his usual spiky mood, but this was too much. "The exertion and the ex-

citement, the doctor forbid you to go near the car for at least two weeks more . . ."

"Silence!" he roared. "This is my house and I am Bellini. No fat oaf of an overpaid quack tells me what to do in my own house." His temper changed and he patted her hand. "My darling, you must forgive an old man his moods. I have only a few laps left of the race of life and my magneto is failing and my oil pressure is low. Allow me a few moments of pleasure before I pull into the pit for the last time. You must have seen how different Haroway is from the other young men, for, even though he labours in the satanic mills of manufacture of Detroit iron, his heart is pure. I think he must be the last of a vanishing breed. He came here offering—not asking—expecting nothing. He shall see the car."

"What is it called?" Haroway asked in a hushed voice.

"The type 99."

"A beautiful name."

Haroway pushed the wheelchair, and Vergine led the way to the elevator which hummed down its shaft to the garage and workshop concealed beneath the castle. When the door opened, Haroway had to hold onto the wheelchair for support or he would have fallen.

There was the car.

It was a moment of pure joy, the high point of his life. He did not realize that tears of unalloyed happiness were running down his face as he stumbled across the spotless concrete floor.

This was frozen motion. The silver form of the type 99 was poised like a captive thunderbolt, yearning to leap forward and span the world. The body was simplicity itself, its curve as pure and lovely as that of a woman's breast. And under that glistening hood and concealed beneath the perfection of the body, Haroway knew there were hidden even greater wonders.

"You installed . . . mechanical improvements?" he asked hesitantly.

"A few," the Maestro admitted. "The brakes, I have never given much attention before to the brakes."

"With good reason—did you not say yourself that a Bellini car is designed to go, not to stop?"

"I did. But the world changes and the roads are more

crowded now. I have turned my attention to the brakes and devised a wholly new system of braking. Fool-proof, non-fade, non-grab, impossible to lock, just what you imagine a Bellini brake should be."

"And the system is . . ."

"Magnetostriction."

"Of course! But no one ever thought of it before."

"Naturally. A laboratory phenomenon where the application of magnetism changes the dimensions of a ferromagnetic substance. It makes a good brake. And then I was so tired of the devil's dance of the piston engine. I decided a new principle was needed. The type 99 is powered by a free-piston turbine."

"But—that's impossible! The two can't be combined."

"Impossible for others, not for Bellini. Another problem that has been eliminated is unsprung weight, this car has *no* unsprung weight."

"That's impos . . ."

The Maestro smiled and nodded, accepting his accolade.

"There are a few other small items, of course. A nickel-cadmium battery that cannot wear out or be discharged completely. An all aluminium body, rustproof and easy to repair."

Haroway let his fingers caress the steering wheel. "You owe this car to the world."

"I had not thought of producing it. It is just an old man's toy."

"No, it is more than that. It is a return to the purity of the vintage motor car, a machine that will take the world by storm. Just the way it is, the perfect car, the finest car in the world. You have patented all the modifications and inventions?"

"Bellini has been accused of a number of things, but never of having been born yesterday."

"Then let me take the car back with me to the United States! There are enough true car lovers in my firm, I only have to show them the type 99 to convince them. We'll manufacture a limited number, loving care, hand labour, perfection . . ."

"I don't know," the Maestro said, then gasped and clutched at the arm of the chair, his face growing white with pain. "My medicine, quickly, Vergine." She ran for

the bottle while he held tightly to his chest, speaking only with difficulty.

"It is a sign, Haroway, a greater power than I has decided. My work is done. The car is finished—and so am I. Take it, bring it to the world . . ."

He finished with a tired mumble and barely roused enough to sip the medicine that his granddaughter brought to him. The noble head was hanging tiredly when she wheeled him away. After the doors of the elevator had shut behind them, Haroway turned back to the car.

Joy!

A button on the wall swung open the garage door and a spray of wind-blown rain speckled the floor. The rented car could stay here, the firm could pick it up tomorrow, because tonight he was driving a Bellini! The car door opened to a touch, and he slid into the comforting embrace of the leather driver's seat. He switched on the ignition, then smiled when he found out there was no starting button. Of course, Bellini had always disdained electric starters. A single pull on the crank was enough to start any Bellini car. Now the system had been refined to the utmost, and a tiny, two-inch miniature crank handle protruded from the dashboard. He flipped it with his fingertips, and the perfectly balanced engine roared into throbbing life. Through the wheel he could feel the vibrating power of the engine, not the mechanical hammer of an ugly machine but a muted rumble like the purr of a giant cat. With the ease of a hot knife cutting butter, it slipped into first gear, and when he touched the throttle the silver machine threw itself out into the night like an unleashed rocket.

Zero to a hundred miles an hour took four seconds because he was not yet used to the divine machine and was hesitant with the gas. Immense tunnels of light were cut through the rainswept night by the searchlight-bright headlights. And, although there was no cover over the open car, he was perfectly dry as an ingeniously designed curtain of air rushed above him and shielded him from the rain. The road was a nightmare of hairpin turns, but he laughed aloud as he snaked through them, since the steering was only one turn from lock to lock and as positive in response as though the car were running on rails.

There had never been a car like this in the history of

the world. He sang as he drove, hurling his happiness into the sky. A new day was coming for the motoring world, the day of the type 99. And they would all be manufactured with the same loving care that the master had lavished on his protoype, he would see to that.

Of course, there would have to be one or two very minor modifications, like the battery. Nickel-cadmium was out, they had a contract with their lead-acid battery suppliers and you can't break a contract like that. And the aluminium body, good enough in theory, but you needed special dyes to press it, and they had stockpiled steel sheet that had to be used, and, anyway, the dealers would howl because the aluminium bodies would never rust or wear out and no one would trade in for a newer model. Then the engine would have to be considered, they would modify one of their stock engines. It was all right to say that here was a new principle, but they were tooled up to make a different kind of engine, and you don't throw away a couple of million dollars worth of machine tools.

Anyway, a few changes under the hood didn't matter, the body would be the same. He glanced back happily at the car as he swung into the illuminated highway. Well, almost the same. You couldn't change a market overnight, and there was something pretty European about the lines. Probably need fins to sell the U.S. market, fins were coming back big.

With a giant's roar from the exhaust, he passed a clutch of sports cars as though it was standing still and swung out into a long bend of the road. The rain was clearing, and, on a ridge high above, he could see the outlines of the Castello Prestezza, and he waved his hand in a warrior's salute.

"Thank you, Bellini!" he shouted in the wind. "Thank you!"

That was the best part, the important part of him.

Not only would he be making the finest car in the world, but he would be making the old man's dream come true!

three days in summer

george collyn

one

THE WORKERS IN the ant-heap buildings which lined Whitehall formed the broad base of the social pyramid. They, the New Hereditary Civil Service, tended to the bureaucratic minutiae of a powerless administration and in return were badly fed, clothed and housed by an impotent government. They were a grey people, rendered asexual by government-issue smocks, the sack-like folds of which hid starvation-lean bodies and the brevity of which revealed arms and legs of matchstick thinness. In return for the merest subsistence they toiled on in a pattern that was routine, ritual and without meaning.

two

AT A SIXTH floor window the man paused as sweat trickled from his forehead into his eyes and blurred the printed page before him. The humidity of the summer

evening turned the air into a soup of discomfort which eddied around him so that the coarse wool scratched at the skin of his shoulders and thighs, the backs of his bare legs stuck uncomfortably to the tacky leather seat of his chair and the sweat off his hands left damp fingermarks on the papers he handled. He longed for the working period to be over but the heaviness of the air seemed to weigh as well on the hands of the clock so that they crawled with exasperating slowness towards six o'clock.

In the distance thunder crackled and its echoes reverberated round the Thames Basin. For a fleeting moment he felt his intestines turn to water. Then he remembered that the day before the Street Bosses of Camden Town and Paddington had gone to the rebel leaders on the Heath and promised them that the men of North London would refuse to fight for the government if only the rebels would halt their shelling of the city. The horror of explosives and falling buildings had been banished by the truce and, with a sigh of relief, the man recognised the thunder for what it was.

A slight ping from the clock broke across his thoughts. At long last it was six and chair legs scraped back as the five other inmates of the room relaxed. From behind the wooden partition in the far corner the major's voice was raised in dismissal. At once possessions were shovelled into desk drawers and, despite the heat, all six were running for the door and the outside world. The corridors and staircases rang to the clatter of clogs and the man from the sixth floor found himself a mere unit in a tide of humanity which swept him down stairs and along passages towards the doorway which gave onto the fresher air of Whitehall.

The roadway itself was a sea of men and women, moving inexorably towards the communal gathering-place of Trafalgar Square. As each individual emerged from the buildings which lined the route he or she was swept into the mass and half-carried towards the Square.

As they debauched from the mouth of Whitehall the man felt himself released from the press. The crowd spread out here and relaxed into the perpetual and near-ritual patterns of the evening promenade. He halted for a moment but it was no real hesitation. Halfway through the afternoon he had decided that at the first opportunity

he would seek out one of the defunct fountains; in the hopes that the coolness rising from the green-scummed water might afford some relief from the heat. Many others had had the same idea it seemed and the stone parapets were solidly crowded. With one exception however. At one point the crowd drew aside, leaving a clear gap on either side of a girl who thus sat alone and segregated. What taboo surrounded her he neither knew nor cared, her isolation struck a warning bell in his mind and yet there was something fascinating about her.

Her black skirt and blouse, so luxuriously different from the mere coverings issued by the government to its pensioners, marked her out as not being of the Civil Service. Her hair, clipped close to the scalp, was like the bloom on a peach and her skin glowed with the opaque luminosity of a brown hen's egg. For a moment the man hesitated. Then he made his decision and moved to sit beside her.

"Good evening," he said. "Do you mind if I sit here?"

She looked up at him with eyes that looked but did not see and she said "No" in a voice which suggested that she had hardly heard his question.

The man sat down a few feet away from her and it was as if they drew a zone of silence around themselves to cut out the sounds of evening—the shuffle of feet, the murmur of voices, the flutter of pigeon wings, the distant rattle of gunfire. He stared at the cracked pavement between his feet and the girl gazed, unseeing, down towards the river. Neither spoke but in their mutual withdrawal from the world around them seemed to each draw some satisfaction from the presence of the other. And as they sat the air grew charged with static electricity and the sky darkened from blue, through purple, to an ominous black.

At what point the man became aware of her gaze he did not know but he suddenly looked up and found her eyes on him. As their eyes met she smiled timidly and asked him, "Who are you?"

"My name's Alexander Davis—they call me Alec."

"Thank you for telling me your name but what I meant was—What do you do? What's your job? Why are you here?"

"I'm in the Civil Service," he said, fingering the skirt hem of his dress as if to prove the truth of what he said. "My

family holds the post of tax inspector for the south-east provinces and I took over from my father when he died of the plague last year. As to why I'm here. Well, there doesn't seem to be any room anywhere else. Besides which, I rather liked the looks of you."

She laughed then. "Well I never thought it would be a tax-man who made the first friendly overtures. Do you know, Alec Davis, that you're the first person to speak to me or acknowledge my presence in over a week? You don't appear to be bothered by the opinions of your colleagues." A vaguely waved hand indicated the others who sat on the rim of the fountain, carefully avoiding any contact with her. "Don't you know who I am?"

"No," said Alec, half-questioningly.

"My name is Anna—Anna . . . No! Perhaps it's best that you don't know. I'm afraid you'll find out soon enough and I only hope it isn't through being in trouble because of me."

From the riverside the dusty tones of cracked Big Ben counted out seven hours. Conscious of the time, or of having said too much, or maybe of embarrassment, the girl stood up abruptly. She gave Alec a strange look compounded of pity, affection and puzzled appraisal. Then she turned and was as quickly gone, her body swallowed up and hidden by the press of people making their way towards the refectory of the National Gallery and their evening dole of food. His meeting with her was sufficiently out-of-key in Alec's very ordinary existence as to have disturbed him yet he was also conscious of regret in having lost contact with her so soon.

Still, one must return to everyday life at some time and Alec rose to follow the crowd. The girl had delayed him and he was at the tail-end of the queue. As a result, before his turn came to mount the steps, the rain began to fall in massive droplets, so large that they seemed to explode on impact with the ground. Alec flinched inwardly at the discomfort to come, sitting down to dinner in wet clothing amid the steam from his own and his neighbours' bodies.

three

AND THE MEAL was as uncomfortable as he had anticipated. His dress hung heavy and clammy about him and

the air was pervaded by the scent of steam and dirty wool and unwashed flesh. Nor did the food remedy the situation. For the sixth time that week there was no meat and dinner consisted of leek and potato soup, a hard cube of bread and a beaker of water. Worst of all, they had to eat in the sickening knowledge that, after the meal, they must attend a public execution in the square outside.

This was the latest government move to instil loyalty into its subjects and fear into its enemies. Of the thirteen renegade governors, five, together with eleven of their deputies, had been seized at the outbreak of hostilities and the government had announced its intention of hanging one captive on each evening that the rebels remained in arms. Six men—Pilbeam, Dobson, Smith, Walker, Cavanagh and Smee—had already died. Tonight it was the turn of Basil Romney, ex-governor of North Bedfordshire. And for the government's action to be fully effective he must die in the presence of the assembled Civil Service—who were expected to approve heartily. In fact very few felt anything save nagging apathy and dull disgust. They had all seen governments come and go, violently or non-violently. Each on its accession had promised peace, prosperity and re-established unity. Each had turned out to be no better and no worse than the one it had replaced. If the rebels succeeded tomorrow the entire Service would change its loyalty with neither compunction nor pleasure.

Nevertheless, the present administration controlled the food supplies and held the power of life and death over its subjects. As long as it did so they would remain loyal and now, at its behest, the assembly began to file out of the refectory into a square awash with water. The senile drainage system had long since failed to cope with the rain which, now the storm centre had moved away to the south, fell with renewed fury. It was sufficient for a man to step into the open for him to be soaked to the skin.

Alec struggled against the feeling of being drowned by the flood and followed the wet, grey backs of his fellows to the eastern side of the square where twelve scaffolds stood in line. Six still bore their morbid fruit while on a ladder below the seventh, trying hard not to look at the six to his right, stood the condemned man. The rope was already fixed around his neck and he was surrounded by

a circle of armed guards, prepared for the unlikely event of an attempted rescue. The man's naked body shivered under the impact of fear and driving rain and he looked as much a threat to the administration as stone Nelson far above him.

Brigadier Thornton, nominally in charge of the execution, was supposed to harangue the crowd on their loyal duties. But, unlike his audience, he was under no obligation to stand in the pouring rain any longer than necessary. Therefore, before the crowd was properly assembled, he barked out an order, the ladder was snatched from under Romney's feet and the doomed man's legs kicked for a foothold in the empty air. The knot of the noose was supposed to lie beneath the man's ear where it would have snapped his head sideways in a sudden, neck-breaking jerk. As it was, the knot had slipped to the nape of his neck and was strangling him, very slowly. There was a groan from the crowd and Alec felt his stomach protest as if it would vomit up what meagre nourishment it had received.

Thornton paused uncertainly as if he sought some means of terminating the man's agony. Then he shrugged as if to point out that this way would act as the greater deterrent and, with a word, he dismissed his men and hurried away. And with his going the crowd began to drift away, driven to their homes by rain and their shame.

As if to signify the end, the thunder had now faded and the rain slackened to a mere drizzle. Soaked and dispirited Alec had been one of the first to turn away but, for some reason, he looked back just before he left the square. As he did so he saw a movement in the shadow of St. Martin's and, like a black ghost, the girl Anna ran across the deserted square to stand beneath the dying man. She looked up at him, the rain and tears falling from her upturned face and cascading over the prominence of her cheekbones, the droplets of water shining like a crown of jewels in her short fuzz of hair. She lifted one hand to touch one no-more-than-twitching foot and, at that moment, the figure stiffened in death and it was all over. Then Alec turned his back on the pitiful tableau and resolutely pointed his face towards home. Behind him the girl glimpsed his figure and, her face still ravaged by emotion, she half-ran, half-walked to follow him.

four

ALEC DAVIS LIVED to the north of Oxford Street, sharing an old ten-storey block with two hundred other government servants. In nominal charge was a janitor-caretaker who was, without doubt, a government spy; and probably in the pay of the Charlotte Street Boss into the bargain. He was an inveterate gossip by trade and inclination, forever trying to get his tenants to betray either themselves to the government, or the government to the local boss. Alec avoided him as much as possible but this evening, despite the deliberate softness of his footsteps, the man came bustling out of his cubicle, eager to hear details of the execution. Alec swallowed his revulsion and managed to satisfy the man's morbid curiosity while conveying to him the impression of Alec's personal delight in a traitor's death. It was half an hour before he could escape from the stench of the caretaker's hutch and climb the eight flights of stairs to his room.

The closing of the door on the outside world marked the end of a more than usually wearisome day. Only that fact made his living-accommodation bearable. Without hope he tried the light-switch but, as on nine evenings out of ten, the electricity supply was not working and he had to move forward into the moonlit patch by the window. For, miraculously enough, the storm clouds had all blown away and a full moon, riding in a starlit sky, bathed the decaying roofs of London in a deceptive glow of peace. Above the tumbled rooftops, clear against the horizon, rose the heights of Hampstead and Highgate, stark black against the whitewashed purple of the sky. At their summits showed the speckles of light which were the watch-fires of the rebel army, waiting to make their final descent upon the city centre.

His eyes on the view, Alec peeled off the still-damp official dress, the heavy folds of coarse wool slapping wetly against his back and face as he pulled it over his head. The rain had penetrated to the threadbare vest and trunks he wore underneath and, as he pulled them off in their turn, the slick of moisture on his body turned into a refrigerating layer in the cool night air. He turned to hurry to

the comfort of his bed, only to be brought up short by the sight of the girl who lay there watching him. Her eyes shone black in the moonlight and from their corners two tear-streams made silver rivers across her face.

For a moment the social structure which had dominated his life, left Alec at a loss as to how he could comfort the girl. He was convinced now that she was connected with Basil Romney who had been hanged that evening—she was either his wife, sister or lover. Which meant, of course, that, even though a rebel, she was a member of the administrative class and men of Alec's standing just did not mix with the administration. But he saw how she looked and remembered her friendly words in the Square, and how she had seemed to lean on him for comfort. So he did the only thing possible. He moved to join her and their mutual dismay was swept away by their emotion.

Even so, at the climactic point it seemed to Alec that he heard her cry out "Basil" over again. But in his frenzy it was easy to be mistaken for, when the first heat had passed into satiated calm, the girl began to weep again, each convulsive sob racking her body. She clung to Alec with the grim determination of a limpet and he tasted her salt tears on his lips where they brushed her cheek. "I needed you so much," she said between sobs, "God knows what I would have done if I hadn't seen you in the Square and followed you here. I think I might have killed myself. Don't leave me whatever you do. Promise me you'll never leave me."

five

YET IN THE end it was she who left him. When he woke, to a day of bright sunshine and clear air, he was alone in his room and the girl had disappeared. Gone so utterly that if it wasn't for the pleasant feeling of satiated emotion he might have dreamt the whole episode. He was frantic at his loss. Originally drawn to her by the fascination of her looks and her air of mystery, he was now emotionally tied to her by strings composed of pity, lust and romantic love in roughly equal parts. And he was not too far gone

in love to see a more practical implication. If Anna, as a member of the would-be administration could freely mix with himself as a civil servant, could this mean that when the rebels won, as they inevitably must, there might be an end to the growing enslavement of the civil servant classes. It was as if he had lost a precious stone which had both an aesthetic and intrinsic value. In the emotional pain of his loss he forgot food, work and the impossibility of his task and with no other thought but of finding her again, rushed from the building.

Stalls lined Rathbone Place where the market gardeners from south of the river came to sell their produce at highly inflated prices. Alec's mouth gushed with saliva at the sight and smell of eggs, tomatoes and cheese—food rarely seen on government tables ; and not at all since the rebel blockade began. But the guards, sent by the Bosses of Putney and Wandsworth to safeguard the taxes which would be levied on the takings, moved Alec on. They knew as well as he that Government employees could not afford the prices asked. Only free citizens, their purses filled by the intermittent piracy of the Street Bosses, could afford to beat the laws of supply and demand with full stomachs.

The stallholders and their guards together with a few buyers were the only people to be seen until Alec reached Charing Cross Road. Here, however, people were congregating in small, excited groups and somewhere ahead could be heard the confused noise of a sizeable crowd. Alec asked a passer-by the reason for the excitement and was told that the king was being led through the streets for the people to see.

It was an indication of how seriously the government took the rebel threat. The drunken idiot who bore the title of King Edward IX was normally kept hidden in some prison or other. They only dared produce the ramshackle prince in whose name they governed when they felt so shaky as to need some symbol behind which they could rally the mob.

The procession wound its way up the sweep of roadway by the Portrait Gallery. A squad of government troops, in rather ragged order, preceded the wagon on which the drooling monarch flinched and winced at the glare of the sun and the noise of the crowd. In an attempt at majesty

someone had unearthed the old crown, minus its long-since-pawned gems, and had propped it on his head. But the weak neck lolled under the weight of the crown and the red cloak he wore could not conceal the scrawny neck, the dribbling mouth and the vacant eyes. Nevertheless, the wagon was followed by a group of cheering citizens who were either lost to cynicism or genuinely sorry for the befuddled old man. For a second even Alec felt the emotional tug and unity of purpose represented by the monarch. But a stronger tug of a stronger emotion claimed him and as soon as the crowd had passed he resumed his hopeless search.

six

IN THE WHITEHALL area, the centre of the enclave that was totally government-controlled, the crowds were quite numerous and Alec was hard pressed to scan each face for a sight of Anna. In time, also, he became aware of other people doing as he did. Grey figures in police uniform slipped through the crowds like fish through water. Every now and then they would halt a passer-by and occasionally a protesting citizen would be led away. At once Alec's mission became imbued with a sense of urgency. He had no doubt that the government was rounding up those suspected of sympathising with the rebels. He had seen it happen during previous insurrections but only from the viewpoint of a disinterested observer. On this occasion he was personally involved; not only for the girl's sake but, with his name already on the major's list of absentees, for his own.

During the long morning and the even longer afternoon he quartered the city from Euston Road to the river, from Hyde Park to Aldwych. He had given no rational thought to what he did but was driven on by a kind of instinct. But the enormity of the task defeated him. There were too many streets and too many buildings, too many places where the girl could be hidden from the police and himself. For that matter there was no reason why she should have stayed in the centre of the city. Why had she ever left him?

At the onset of evening, weary and wondering if he dared go to his meal after a day absent from his desk, he came upon a notice-board which bore a new and staring sheet of paper. It was a proscription list with names, photographs and descriptions of those people wanted by the police. The girl was there right enough and third on the list—Anna Romney, wife of the late traitor Basil Romney—with a good photograph and an accurate description. As Alec turned miserably away his eye caught a glimpse of another familiar face. There on the board he looked out at himself—Alexander Davies, civil servant, wanted . . . Panic turned him cold and for the moment the instinct of self-preservation replaced his new-found love. He walked blindly away, every nerve waiting for the shout of recognition. But no shout came and without thought he headed by chance into the one safe area—east into the desolation of Fleet Street and the shattered areas deserted since the East End Rising of ten years before.

That was where he spent the night, huddled in a ruined basement near to St. Paul's. It was a sleepless night, his mind gnawed by his conscience. He convinced himself that by his cowardice he had deserted Anna at a time when Anna was in desperate need of him. Reason interposed the fact that it was she who had deserted him but his mind found a reason for that as well. What must have happened, he told himself, was that, in the dawn the girl had gone back for a last farewell look at her dead husband. When he, Alec, had woken up and rushed out in pursuit of her she was already on her way back. Their paths had crossed and they had missed each other. All through the day, while he scoured the streets, she must have lain, alone and terrified, in his room.

By the time dawn made its chilly entrance into the ruined shelter he had convinced himself that this was what had happened. Cold and weary, stiff and remorseful, he began the trek back to Charlotte Street and his apartment.

seven

THEY WERE NOT the police. The thought suddenly hit him after his third narrow escape from patrolling militia. Or,

rather, they were the police but they wore the green and black of the men of Essex instead of the Whitehall grey. The rebels must have made their final attack during the night while he was in hiding. With a sigh of relief at his own safety and hoping that Anna had survived the purges of the day before, he stepped into the open and cheerfully made his way down the Strand. As he did so the words of an old song came into his head. Called "Shout for the new day is come" it had once cheered to victory the government before the one before the one which fell the previous night. To think of it, it was no good omen for that government had proved no better than any other and had lasted a bare five months. But the song fitted Alec's mood.

As he reached Trafalgar Square where it had all begun, he ran straight into a group of well-dressed members of the administrative class who were obviously revolutionary leaders. Cowed by a lifetime's servility Alec humbly backed away and would have circled round the group if he had not suddenly seen, at their centre, Anna.

Relief flooded through him and he shouted her name and started towards her. At once a soldier, hovering on the outskirts of the group, leaped forward and grabbed him. His shout of warning cut across Alec's greeting and faces turned towards them in shock and surprise. But what started a wedge of ice in Alec's inside was the same look of surprise on Anna's face and the vacant, half-frowning look which said, "I should know this person but I don't." "Anna," Alec said beseechingly and the look disappeared. "It's all right guard," she said, "I know this man." She turned to a grey-haired man at her side. "He's just a civil servant I ran into the day before yesterday. He was very good to me when I was so upset over poor Basil."

That "just" was a slap in Alec's face. A whole edifice he had built for himself tumbled worthlessly at his feet. So he was "just a civil servant", "just a plaything", "just a shoulder to cry on when any shoulder would do". Through the thunder of his collapsing dreams he became aware of the grey-haired man speaking to him.

"So you're a tax-collector are you?" he said. "That's very good. We are going to need men like you in the days to come. Someone was talking about a Board of Tax Assessment. Perhaps we could find you a position with that."

"Yes," said Anna. "That would be fine, wouldn't it Alec? We have to see that our friends are promoted." It was almost as if she was relieved to find such a painless way of getting rid of him.

"But Anna," protested Alec. "when will I see you again?"

"See me? Oh, I suppose we'll see one another from time to time. But I'm going to be very busy. Come and see me in a few weeks time when things have settled down."

He was effectively dismissed and the group closed up to exclude him. Ignored, he wandered into the sunshine where things were rapidly returning to normal. Already, free citizens and civil servants, holidaying by necessity, were wandering round the Square in the time-honoured patterns. There had been a change and already it was hard to see what had changed. The revolution, his affair with Anna and his spell as an outlaw had been for Alec a brief holiday from the routine reality. Tomorrow the reality would return. He would exchange the sacklike smock for a tailored suit of clothes; he would proudly wear a grandiose title. But his work would be the same; his life would be the same.

eight

HE MOVED TOWARD the stone rim of a fountain and sat down to wait for the next dole of food.

prisoners of paradise

david redd

SHAAMON WAS AN artist, and she herself was a work of art. Her towering body had the same indefinable appealing quality as a sparkling jewel. She resembled a misty veil wound around itself to form a vertical cylinder of milky light, over thirty feet tall. The luminous gauze curtains within her body were in constant rippling motion, matching the aurorae that shimmered in the dark evening sky. Under a strong light she would have looked no more a work of art than a dusty cobweb, but in the eternal twilight she was truly beautiful.

Other veils were all around her, standing on the slopes of the mountain range, forming a forest of light. They seemed motionless, but they were working hard, slowly grinding away the rock where they stood. A veil's sharp cutting edges could eat through anything, given time. So the glowing veils spent their lives, making their pilgrimages to the mountains and patiently engraving their patterns on the stone.

Withdrawing her mind from the golden thoughtweb of ceaseless telepathic conversation, Shaamon glided to the edge of her circular engraving and stood at its perimeter. Solemnly she examined her work for any imperfections. Inside the circle, a strange series of dots and twisting lines had been carved into the limestone. Each mark had a defin-

ite relationship to the others, and even the depth of the grooves had a special significance.

It was complete. The balance of the curves around the centre had taken far longer than the rest of the pattern, but the labour had been worthwhile. Everything was perfect.

A huge glowing column of milky light, staring at a weird design etched on to the rock—was that any different from a human artist studying his latest creation? Perhaps. Shaamon did not call her friends to admire her work, for art was a personal affair, and engravings were made for individual satisfaction, not for the pleasure of others. The carvings were simply an outlet for the creative impulses present in all worker females.

Shaamon let her thoughts spill into the open once more, altering the flavour of the telepathic mindpool. Every contributing veil was aware of her return.

Savouring the golden oneness for a moment, Shaamon informed the other veils that she had finished her engraving and was returning to her Nest. A great gust of farewell emotion from her friends flowed over her; she bowed before it in grateful acceptance. Rather reluctantly, she cut herself off from the golden mindpool and was alone in her own pale self. Then she tensed herself and leaped into the air, uncurling as she rose. Before she could fall she had spread out to her natural shape, a circular veil so thin as to be almost two-dimensional. She rippled her body and floated away from the hill, rising slowly. It was nice to fly again. She did not mind having to fold herself into a cylinder to work, but it had meant she could not fly while she was carving her pattern on the shadowy hillside.

Gaining speed, Shaamon soared through the air. Navigation was no problem, for the Nests were in direct line between the limestone hills and Elethe. She had just left the hills, and beyond the distant granite mountains was the dim blue radiance of Elethe, forever peering at her from behind the horizon.

Elethe was the sun, and if the veils had been astronomers they would have known it was dying.

Shaamon flew on towards her Nest at her customary speed. Above her the aurorae painted the dark sky with vivid fire, concealing all but the brightest stars. No clouds

formed to hide the aurorae, for clouds needed warmth to exist, and warmth was something the failing sun could no longer send. The last snows lay where they had fallen a million years ago. And somewhere in the sky was the pale ghost of an aged moon.

Below Shaamon the landscape was tinted blue by the feeble rays of Elethe. The fiery aurorae sent strangely coloured shadows racing over the snows. Shaamon saw hints of green and purple, haunting shades rarely seen except when some other light combined with that of Elethe. For the thousandth time she wished she could capture them and delight in them always, instead of having to see them flicker and vanish. But there was no way of engraving colours onto stone. Only her memory could preserve them.

Several luminous blue spires towered up from the ground below. Colonies of tiny communal animals lived in the spires, controlled by a race mind. By themselves the individual animals were completely unintelligent. Nearly all the world's surviving species had once been communal, and the veils themselves still lived in the routine of their forbears although they were no longer a single multi-creature—they had separated eventually, and now the voluntary mindpools were the last vestiges of the veil race minds. Shaamon wondered whether the creatures beneath her would evolve in the same way. She sent a thought of greeting lancing down to the shining spires, and the race mind replied with a brief mental wave of friendly emotion.

The distant mountains were appreciably closer. Shaamon had no sense of time, living in a timeless world, so she felt no desire to speed up and reach the Nest sooner. She had no fear of predators to spur her on : they had become extinct so long ago that even the memory of them had disappeared.

Other memories had disappeared too. As she passed over a sparkling crystal forest she saw huge shapes slowly circling round a clearing. The clumsy amoeboids were taking part in one of their meaningless rituals.

The amoeboids had once been the world's greatest people. Their ancestors had visited the moon, in the days when Elethe shone brightly, but now they could only

shamble through the gleaming crystals and ponderously dance beneath the blazing aurorae. They did not remember. They were no longer intelligent.

This was merely a part of the greater tragedy. Elethe was imperceptibly fading, century by century, and the planets were dying with their sun.

Shaamon and the other veils knew nothing of this. Only scientists could have read the signs and told them, and science was something their world no longer possessed.

She soared on over the snow, rippling gracefully, gliding silently through the thin air. The faint glow from her body was visible from the ground, but now there were none to see her. Shaamon was passing over a great empty desert of blue-white dunes, where the only forms of life were grotesque, stunted half-plants that could hardly be called alive. She did not like this part of the homeward journey, but it was the last stage before coming within range of the Nest mindpool. Joining that magnificent golden thought-web was a moment to look forward to . . .

Something was happening.

Strange little vibrations came tingling through the atmosphere, impinging on her upper surface. This was sound, of a degree she had never experienced before, and the intensity was increasing rapidly. In the sky above her, a glowing red dot had appeared in the aurorae. It too was growing, rushing down towards her. Shaamon had heard of meteorites, had even seen one fall, but this was something different.

Frightened, Shaamon curled up into cylindrical form, letting herself fall to the blue-shadowed dunes below. The vibrations were disrupting her external nervous system, making it difficult to think. And what was that red dot flaming in the sky?

Approaching the ground, she opened out to break her fall, curled up again and dropped lightly on to the pearly-hued mixture of dust and snow. The vibrations were very powerful now, pounding into her helpless body. She instinctively retreated into a mindless state, waiting for the sound to cease. If it continued, she might even have to destroy her personality and encyst.

The noise suddenly boomed twice as loud and stopped altogether. She was grasped and hurled across the dunes,

battered by the most terrible shock she had ever received. Somehow she survived, and found herself falling in a shower of sand and snow. Half the desert was in the air with her.

Unthinkingly she opened out to slow her fall, and was pelted by flying debris. Pain seared through her. Rippling frantically, she fought her way up into clear air and hovered there, grateful to be alive. She had received several painful gashes and bruises, but no serious injuries—

And the alien thoughts poured into her mind. In that instant Shaamon learned that the red falling star had been a *ship*, a tough shell which protected the soft thick body of its mis-shapen occupant. But the shell was broken, and the helpless creature inside was dying.

Where had this deformed monster come from? There was nothing like it in her experience. Quickly Shaamon inserted herself into the rushing thought-stream of the dying monster. Her aching wounds were forgotten as she struggled to absorb the kaleidoscope of thought and emotion flowing over her. But the ideas were incomprehensible, and the bright colour-filled pictures were too strange for her to understand. Watching the mental chaos was no good. She would have to enter mindpool with the monster, and pray that she could break the contact before it died.

Shaamon hesitantly began merging personalities, forcing herself to open out to the alien mind. However, the creature did not despond; it made no effort to complete the linkage. This was terrible! She could not let it die without finding out anything more—she did not even know its name! Hurriedly, for the monster's thoughts were appreciably weaker, she projected an image of herself into its mind.

"Christ, a bloody beer mat!" The response was in a stylised sound-based framework, although the previous thoughts had been mainly visual and emotional.

Shaamon sensed that she had been compared with some object or animal known to the creature; a faint mental image was visible for a moment among the rapidly fading thoughts. She concentrated on that picture, setting off fiery little association-chains in the alien memory. Instinctively she sampled each chain.

There were peculiar designs on the "beer-mat" objects,

and they had not been engraved. Permanent colours had been fixed to their surfaces!

The monster's thoughts had the dull red flavour of a creature very near death. Shaamon desperately searched through the flickering alien memories, sending up flurries of association-chains and pouncing on each one as it appeared. She followed the idea of reproduced pictures into the dead-end of microfilm, then discovered the art-form of painting. She almost lost it again before she realised what she had found. *Coloured substances could be used to form pictures!*

Suddenly Total Awareness of Death cascaded out from the alien brain, blotting out the monster's remaining thoughts and almost engulfing her. Clutching her new knowledge, Shaamon tore away, fleeing lest her own mind be destroyed as well.

And then Shaamon was alone once more, a shimmering veil hovering silently above the pearly dunes in the familiar dim blue light of Elethe, with the swirling aurorae blazing above her. She gazed out over the desert. Far away, half buried in an immense crater, was the dark bulk of the shell that had become a tomb.

Rippling gently, without the energy to fly faster, Shaamon slowly resumed the journey to her Nest. She was limp after her mental exertions, but very satisfied. Although she had not learned the creature's origin, she had gained something far more important. *Painting . . .*

She happily wondered what new forms art would take, with colour as an added medium. It would seem very difficult at first, but artists of the future would use colour and think nothing of it. Why, it would add a whole new dimension to engraving! Shaamon could imagine patterns where grooves of the same depth would contain different colours. She was dazzled by the enormous possibilities opening before her.

And even the problem of finding colours was no problem at all. The mining veils had often found coloured minerals in their quest for salt. She had seen some yellow metal herself, and surely there must be other colours in the ground somewhere, judging by the thoughts of the dead monster. Yes, it would be easy enough to find the materials

for painting. She wondered why nobody had ever thought of it before.

While she was still gliding over the desert, happy and excited with her new discovery, a brilliant golden mind touched hers. It was the Nest mindpool.

Her sisters began the usual recognition pattern—then stopped. Abruptly they withdrew, without giving her a chance to join. It was impossible—but it had happened!

Puzzled, dismayed, horribly frightened by the unthinkable rebuff, Shaamon sent a pleading thought into her sisters. "Why? What have I done?"

"You have changed," the mindpool answered. "You are normal." The veils had sensed her mental turmoil in that momentary contact, and retreated for fear of contamination. A single insane mind could infect hundreds of others —had done, in the past.

"I have not changed! Let me in!" Shaamon replied angrily.

"We dare not. There is something peculiar about you. You are not the Shaamon who departed for the mountains. There was a violent shock wave before you arrived, and you were nearer to its source than we. If you have been injured you must not join us. The safety of the Nest comes first."

"I am not injured!" They had been referring to mental wounds, not physical damage. "This is what happened. Listen!" And Shaamon told her sisters how she had discovered the dying monster and searched its mind.

". . . It contained so much knowledge I could never have learned it," Shaamon concluded. "I was lucky to find something we could understand, let alone something we need.

"And now that we know about painting, we can easily insert coloured materials into our engravings, and then our art will include relationships of colour as well as form . . ."

There was no detectable emotion from the mindpool, only the mere fact of its presence. It was apparently examining the possibilities of the situation, thinking on a level far above that of the individuals comprising it. Knowing this, Shaamon felt a ripple of fear. Through sheer instinct, the mindpool sometimes acted like the race mind it had once been, especially in times of stress, and she had an un-

comfortable feeling she was responsible for a sudden tension in the thoughtweb. If her sisters were sufficiently worried about the effects of her discovery, they might revert to the habits of their ancestors—

Suddenly a burst of blinding energy flashed out from the mindpool. Caught by the terrible power from ten thousand veils, Shaamon was sucked into what had been the mindpool. Conscientiously, the race mind made her body continue gliding towards the Nest, just as She controlled all the other workers. The latent guardian of the veils had come into being once more.

"No difficulty about this affair," She mused. There had been similar cases in the past, when individual veils had stumbled on odd discoveries or thought up crazy ideas. "It's the old story all over again. This painting is innocent in itself, but it will lead to implements. And if the workers had tools they'd go soft and useless."

Quickly She went through Her memories of Shaamon's encounter, removing all ideas of painting and substituting a suitably edited version of events. At the same time She renewed the mental block against bringing metals out of the ground—the conditioning had grown weak with age.

A brief mental effort, and the task was done. All thoughts of painting had vanished forever. The race mind instantly separated into Her component entities. The veils returned to normal.

Shaamon and her sisters were in golden mindpool, discussing her adventures.

"You had a lucky escape, Shaamon," thought one. "The shock wave could have killed you as well as the monster."

"I felt sorry for that creature," Shaamon thought sadly. "I never learned what it was called, nor where it came from.

"We'll have to find out," her sisters told her. "We'll send out an expedition."

"That's a good idea," Shaamon replied, gliding down towards the friendly towers of the Nest. "A very good idea. I wonder what we'll find."

Reader interest in J. G. Ballard's recent work has been high. We invited Mr. Ballard to produce these notes explaining some of his current ideas. They take the form of a dialogue with himself—the answers explaining the unstated questions.

NOTES FROM NOWHERE

Comments on work in progress

by J. G. Ballard

1. Science fiction, above all a prospective form of fiction, concerned with the immediate present in terms of the future rather than the past, requires narrative techniques that reflect its subject matter. To date almost all its writers, including myself, fall to the ground because they fail to realise that the principal narrative technique of retrospective fiction, the sequential and consequential narrative, based as it is on an already established set of events and relationships, is wholly unsuited to create the images of a future that has as yet made no concessions to us. In *The Drowned World*, *The Drought* and *The Crystal World* I

tried to construct linear systems that made no use of the sequential elements of time—basically, a handful of ontological "myths". However, in spite of my efforts, the landscapes of these novels more and more began to quantify themselves. Images and events became isolated, defining their own boundaries. Crocodiles enthroned themselves in the armour of their own tissues.

2. In *The Terminal Beach* the elements of sequential narrative had been almost completely eliminated. It occurred to me that one could carry this to its logical conclusion, and a recent group of stories—*You and Me and the Continuum, The Assassination Weapon, You: Coma: Marilyn Monroe* and *The Atrocity Exhibition*—show some of the results. Apart from anything else, this new narrative technique seems to show a tremendous gain in the density of ideas and images. In fact, I regard each of them as a complete novel.

3. Who else is trying? Here and there, one or two. More power to their elbows. But for all the talk, most of the established writers seem stuck in a rut.

4. Few of them had much of a chance, anyway. Not enough wild genes.

5. Of those I have read, Platt's *Lone Zone* (in particular, the first three or four paragraphs, brilliant writing) and Colvin's *The Pleasure Garden . . .* and *The Ruins* are wholly original attempts, successful I feel, to enlarge the scope and subject matter of science fiction.

6. Defend Dali.

7. In fact, the revival of interest in surrealism—after the recent flurry over Dada, there is now a full-scale retrospective of Duchamp at the Tate Gallery—bodes well for science fiction, turning its writers away from so-called realism to a more open and imaginative manner. One hopes that its real aims will be followed. One trouble with Dali is that no one has ever really looked at his paintings. "Goddess leaning on her elbow," for example, or "Young Virgin auto-sodomised by her own chastity," seem to me to be among the most important paintings of the 20th century.

8. The social novel is dead. Like all retrospective fiction, it is obsessed with the past, with the roots of behaviour and background, with sins of omission and commission

long-past, with all the distant antecedents of the present. Most people, thank God, have declared a moratorium on the past, and are more concerned with the present and future, with all the possibilities of their lives. To begin with: the possibilities of musculature and posture, the time and space of our immediate physical environments.

9. Fiction is a branch of neurology.

10. Planes intersect: on one level, the world of public events, Cape Kennedy and Viet Nam mimetised on billboards. On another level, the immediate personal environment, the volumes of space enclosed by my opposed hands, the geometry of my own postures, the time-values contained in this room, the motion-space of highways, staircases, the angles between these walls. On a third level, the inner world of the psyche. Where these planes intersect, images are born. With these co-ordinates, some kind of valid reality begins to clarify itself.

11. Quantify.

12. Some of these ideas can be seen in my four recent "novels". The linear elements have been eliminated, the reality of the narrative is relativistic. Therefore place on the events only the perspective of a given instant, a given set of images and relationships.

13. Dali: "After Freud's explorations within the psyche it is now the outer world of reality which will have to be quantified and eroticised." Query: at what point does the plane of intersection of two cones become sexually more stimulating than Elizabeth Taylor's cleavage?

14. Neurology is a branch of fiction: the scenarios of nerve and blood-vessel are the written mythologies of brain and body. Does the angle between two walls have a happy ending?

15. Query: does the plane of intersection of the body of this woman in my room with the cleavage of Elizabeth Taylor generate a valid image of the glazed eyes of Chiang Kai Shek, an invasion plan of the offshore islands?

16. Of course these four published "novels", and those that I am working on now, contain a number of other ideas. However, one can distinguish between the manifest content, i.e., the attempt to produce a new "mythology" out of the intersecting identities of J. F. Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe, smashed automobiles and dead apartments, and

the latent content, the shift in geometric formula from one chapter to the next. Each section is a symbol in some kind of spinal mathematics. In fact I believe that one may be able one day to represent a novel or short story, with all its images and relationships, simply as a three-dimensional geometric model. In *The Atrocity Exhibition* one of the characters remarks of a set of Enneper's models: ". . . operating formulae, for a doomsday weapon." Cubism, for example, had a greater destructive power than all the explosives discharged during World War I—and killed no one.

17. The analytic function of this new fiction should not be overlooked. Most fiction is synthetic in method—as Freud remarked, rightly I feel, a sure sign of immaturity.

18. *Au revoir*, jewelled alligators and white hotels, hallucinatory forests, farewell.

19. For the moment it's difficult to tell where this thing will go. One problem that worries me is that a short story, or even, ultimately, a novel, may become nothing more than a three-dimensional geometric model. Nevertheless, it seems to me that so much of what is going on, on both sides of the retina, makes nonsense unless viewed in these terms. A huge portion of our lives is ignored, merely because it plays no direct part in conscious experience.

20. No one in science fiction has ever written about outer space. *You and Me and the Continuum*: "What is space?" the lecturer concluded, "what does it mean to our sense of time and the images we carry of our finite lives . . . ?" At present I am working on a story about a disaster in space which, however badly, makes a first attempt to describe what space means. So far, science fiction's idea of outer space has resembled a fish's image of life on land as a goldfish bowl.

21. The surrealist painter, Matta: "Why must we await, and fear, a disaster in space in order to understand our own times?"

22. In my own story a disaster in space is translated into the terms of our own inner and outer environments. It may be that certain interesting ideas will emerge.

23. So far, science fiction has demonstrated conclusively that it has no idea of what space means, and is completely unequipped to describe what will no doubt be the

greatest transformation of the life of this planet—the exploration of outer space.

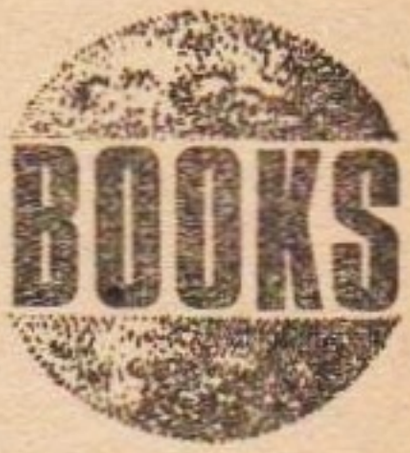
24. Meanwhile: the prospect of a journey to Spain, a return to the drained basin of the Rio Seco. At the mouth a delta of shingle forms an ocean bar, pools of warm water filled with sea-urchins. Then the great deck of the drained river running inland, crossed by the white span of a modern motor bridge. Beyond this, secret basins of cracked mud the size of ballrooms, models of a state of mind, a curvilinear labyrinth. The limitless neural geometry of the landscape. The apartment houses on the beach are the operating formulae for our passage through consciousness. To the north a shoulder of Pre-Cambrian rock rises from the sea after its crossing from Africa. The juke-boxes play in the bars of Benidorm. The molten sea swallows the shadow of the Guardia Civil helicopter.

Editorial

(*Concluded from page 3*)

fulfilling that need themselves. Their object is to write for an audience, to sell in the market place, to produce prose that, given a sympathetic reading, will be explicit, precise, directed, and operating on the levels of emotion, intellect and myth, as all good prose has done. Their object, if you like, is to tell stories—but to tell them in a form that is *not necessarily* conventional in construction or use of language. These writers are not all British. As well as J. G. Ballard, James Colvin, Langdon Jones, Michael Butterworth and several others, supporters of this movement include the Americans Judith Merril, Thomas M. Disch and more, as well as editors and writers in France, Italy, Spain, and the Argentine who have written to this magazine or published comments about it in their own countries. The need has been with us for fifty years. It could take another ten to produce a large body of work which can meet this need. But we are now at last marshalling our forces. Watch this space.

Michael Moorcock



THREE ACES, JACK, BUT BALLANTINES ARE TRUMPS

AS A GLANCE at the credits of *The Many Worlds of Magnus Ridolph* (Ace Double, 45 cents) will show, Jack Vance has been on the sf scene for some time. And suddenly it's Vance Week, with three titles from Ace and one from Ballantine. The first-mentioned is a collection of six stories featuring Magnus Ridolph, the thinking man's James Retief. Small, elderly, bearded, rather like a miniature Compton Mackenzie, Ridolph roves the Galaxy to the discomfiture of evildoers, human and otherwise. The light, dry style of writing fits the character well without wholly compensating for thin plots and the too rapid discarding of some intriguing settings. At the weaker spots, as in *The Unspeakable McInch*, Ridolph triumphs by just happening to know everything; he is so perceptive, indeed, that it is difficult to understand why he is frequently swindled. In total, the collection makes fair entertainment, with the central figure remaining in the memory long after his exploits have faded. The reverse half, *The Brains of Earth*, is a variation on the "We are property" theme which achieves considerable tension in the beginning, only to lapse into near-absurdity with a multiplicity of alien menaces seeking to dominate humanity.

On a more ambitious level, *The Languages of Pao* (Ace Books, 40 cents) plays with the notion that language makes the man. Taking two contrasting cultures, that of populous, uncomplicated Pao (a little too simple to be convincing) and the craggy planet Breakness, dominated by slightly dotty scientist-aristocrats whose surgically altered bodies are walking arsenals, the story follows the attempt by Lord Palafox of Breakness to reconstruct Pao to his own design by introducing a new language system. Beran Panasper, heir to the throne of Pao, is meanwhile removed to Breakness for re-education. Finding himself to be merely one card in Palafox's pack, Beran eventually rebels and turns his new knowledge to the purpose of undoing his mentor's machinations. The struggle is not without excitement, but the process of conversion by language is never deeply explored. Agatha Christie fans may spot an item to tickle their little grey cells.

The Blue World (Ballantine, 50 cents) is a book length expansion—not inflation—of *King Kragen*, a short story originally published in FANTASTIC. It was an excellent short story and is no less satisfying as a novel. Descended from the survivors of a spaceship crash, eleven generations have lived out their placid lives upon a nameless world of water. In villages built among giant clumps of sea-plants they ply their hereditary trades as hoodwinks, larceners, incendiaries, swindlers and bezzlers, well-integrated members of a smoothly functioning society. Until the twelfth generation is confronted by King Kragen, black, monstrous, tentacled and hungry. Propitiate him with food and he grows, and so does his appetite. Fight him . . . with what? The sea bars access to orthodox sources of stone and metal; the plants produce no hardwood. Solemn but quirky, easy-going yet industrious, these Polynesian Victorians finally have to face the fact that whichever course they choose, their world will never be the same again. Vance's humour goes slightly astray in picturing a military élite arising from such a society almost overnight. His talent for extracting exotic flavours from commonplace terms, however, has seldom been better used.

Samuel R. Delany takes the concept touched upon in *The Languages of Pao*, illuminates it with characteristic literary pyrotechnics, whirls it through a sequence of

grotesque and bizarre situations and returns it with the inner workings made just a little clearer. *Babel-17* (Ace Books, 40 cents) is the language of the Invaders, a razor-edged linguistic weapon that can impose upon the unwary any mode of thought that the Invader desires. To unriddle the enigma of Babel-17, the Alliance enlist sensitive, beautiful, copper-eyed Rydra Wong, qualified space-captain and most famous poet in five explored galaxies. And her only twenty-six! Through a world of flesh made fantasy, where plastic surgery is applied as casually as cosmetics and the body may be sculptured, stored or discarded, she journeys to recruit a crew. Delany reins in the adjectives with a firmer hand than in earlier novels and the result is a swift, exotic tale of adventure and self-discovery that only occasionally trips over its own hyperbole. Journeys also figure prominently in two Frank Herbert novels, *Destination: Void* (Berkley, 50 cents) and *The Green Brain* (Ace Books, 40 cents), as do giant brains, highly-sexed heroines, religion and characters who endlessly analyse each other's motives. Around these elements he weaves two stories with highly dissimilar backgrounds, the first a spaceship bound for Tau Ceti on a 200-year colonization flight, the second a poison-drenched Brazilian jungle aswarm with insects. The Green Brain is in some respects the least plausible of the dangers threatening Herbert's characters, based as it is upon an improbable mutation of the type favoured by the makers of third-rate sf films. It is the strength and clarity of the writing that makes this insect supermind acceptable, tying it in with an all too possible future where agriculture has become synonymous with total war and humanity retreats into an increasingly artificial environment. The message, loud and clear, is: Co-operate with nature . . . or else. Nature is a dirty word in the world of *Destination: Void*. Three men, one woman, the guardians of 3000 dormant colonists sealed in a metal egg controlled by cybernetically-linked human brains, proceed from an Earth they have never known directly, to a planet that is as yet only an image on a screen. Grown under laboratory conditions, they are expendable duplicates of hand-picked originals; the process which produced them can, if they fail, replace them *ad infinitum*. Six ships, six identical sets of colonists, have been lost. Why? When the

controlling brains of the seventh ship collapse into insanity it becomes imperative that the crew discover the answer. What they do find is at once a solution and a new order of problem.

Incidentally, watch the psychiatrist, Flattery—he carries a pun. Maybe two.

At 26, the son of exiled Solar System President Ralph Wireman was immature and ineffectual. At 80, when he died, he had been for decades one of the most remarkable and respected rulers the world had ever known. What had reshaped him? What lesson had he learned? Algis Budrys' sober account of Michael Wireman's rise to power, *The Falling Torch* (Pyramid Books, 40 cents) does not entirely answer these questions. Extraordinary men are by their very nature difficult to portray satisfactorily, in fact or fiction. He does, however, dig deeper than is customary in sf, catching the mood of a government gone stale in exile, their growing acceptance of the permanence of defeat. Twenty-five years after the conquest of the Solar System by humanoid aliens, Earth's powerful ex-colony on Alpha Centaurus Four finds it expedient to back an undercover movement against the invaders. For the exiled politicians who have settled on Centaurus the opportunity comes too late; Ralph Wireman is old, physically spent. But if Michael could be landed secretly on Earth, might he not serve as a rallying point for those still loyal to his father's reputation?

The situation is common to history and perhaps by way of emphasizing this, Budrys pares down the futuristic trappings almost to vanishing point. As a result the atmosphere is often oddly reminiscent of pre-war Europe, rarely suggestive of the 25th Century. The half-familiarity helps, rather than hinders, is picture of a unique man's unpredictable reaction to alien values.

Half-hearted melodrama is a poor thing, as Sax Rohmer was very much aware, and the dashing hero must tilt at a really formidable opponent if he is to retain his following. Who was hero and who villain in the Fu Manchu series is a matter of personal taste. *The Trail of Fu Manchu* (Pyramid Books, 50 cents) finds that green-eyed yellow idol of the 'thirties in desperate straits, hounded out of every desirable cellar in Limehouse by pipe-smoking Nayland

Smith. The plot is an opium-tinged affair involving the spiriting away of a beautiful girl in the guise of an indelicate porcelain Venus, an immensely wealthy habitué of the power-circles of Europe enmeshed with a whip-scarred Chinese adventuress, the manufacturing of gold in a subterranean Thames-side laboratory by methods unpleasantly anticipatory of Auschwitz, and murderous doings in a House of Joy. Disguises abound and fog seeps in through every chink. Rohmer switches from the Asiatic to the Egyptian with *Brood of the Witch-Queen* (Pyramid Books, 50 cents) adding a strong dose of the supernatural to the brew. What were the true origins of the sinister Antony, effeminate stepson of the late Sir Michael Ferrara? What did he do in his overheated study in Oxford? Robert Cairn, clean-limbed young Scot, pokes his nose into the mystery and is soon out of his depth in very murky waters. For Antony is an Adept, wielding strange powers against which Robert and his Egyptologist father must fight as best they can. Logic presses upon the narrative like thistledown and the Cairns appear to survive largely by virtue of Antony's negligence. Yet it would be sheer greed to ask commonsense of a novel in which a titled family with a vampiric ancestor buried under the moat occupies a mere sub-plot.

"If I had cared to live, I would have died." With this brief opening sentence John Myers Myers establishes the mood of his hero, Shandon, in *Silverlock* (Ace SF Classic, 75 cents). Shandon Silverlock is a large man and muscular, and his energies are chiefly directed to supporting an outsize chip upon his shoulder. When shipwrecked upon the shores of a mysterious Commonwealth he favours it with the sour suspicion formerly accorded to the world from which he sailed. Rescued by the resourceful Golias, apparently a survivor of another sinking, his only concern is to see what this new land can give him. And if Golias isn't around to get a share, that's tough. For Golias. Piece by piece, experience whittles away the chip that Shandon carries up hill, down dale, through forest and field, in battle and love and heroic drinking. Readers who have at some time ventured into the outer darkness beyond the boundaries of sf will see here a well-known face, catch a familiar name, relive a favourite incident, recognize landmarks along the way and grasp the nature of the Common-

wealth. Picaresque adventure, pilgrim's progress, performing flea turned loose upon that famous Five-Foot Shelf—*Silverlock* is all of these. Myers links characters and scenes from the works of a host of authors into an episodic tale that slumps in places under the weight of three hundred pages, but is undeniably a literary *tour de force*. Funny, too.

What can be said of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (Pyramid Adventure Classic, 60 cents)? That Jules Verne has become so universal a figure that the majority of his readers cannot read his books in the author's native tongue? That Verne did *not* invent the submarine? That Captain Nemo and his electrically-powered *Nautilus* were the progenitors of a line of hellbent antisocial inventors and their superships that has not yet petered out? Or simply that Cousteau and Polaris can no more affect the sense of wonder to be found in this story, than a Moon-probe can destroy Wells' vision of a Lunar sunrise? Read it, for a taste of the days before The Good Old Days of SF, when a novel was an event and not a Happening.

J. Cawthorn

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Published on the last Wednesday of every month by Roberts & Vinter Ltd., 42-44 Dock Street, London, E.1. Subscriptions 48/- per year ($7.00). No responsibility accepted for loss or damage of MSS or artwork. All characters fictitious. © October 1966 by NEW WORLDS SF.

Printed by Richmond Hill Printing Works, 23/25 Abbott Road, Winton, Bournemouth

INSIDE NEW WORLDS

CHARLES PLATT'S
THE GARBAGE WORLD

was the system's waste dump. Everything nasty went there. The inhabitants didn't mind too much—they were used to it. But then an official party arrived with instructions to "clean up" the world—and that was when the trouble started. This is an entertaining piece of sf satire not to be missed . . .

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